

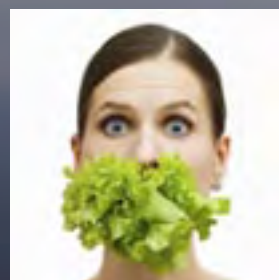
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# vegetables australia



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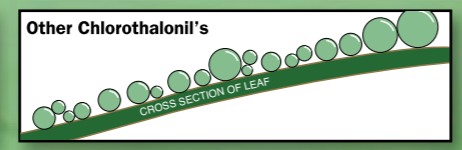
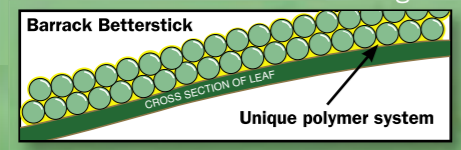
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# vegetables australia



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## Return to sender

While China is rightly considered a competitive threat to the Australian vegetable industry, international trade is a two-way street. Potential export markets in China are being determined.

The Australian vegetable industry is seeking to gain a better understanding of the Chinese vegetable industry. The Chinese domestic market for vegetables is huge, as is the potential competitive threat. However, the Chinese market is far from homogeneous. This diversity opens up potential for the development of niche markets in China that may be small in terms of overall consumption but a significant for Australian growers.

The Australian Vegetable Industry Development Group (AVIDG) has commissioned Ross Ciaravolo to undertake an analysis of the Chinese market. Ross has had extensive commercial experience and a record of success in business development, and international sales and marketing of food products in Asia. He is being guided by some of the Australian vegetable industry's leading exporters and the report will focus on commercial principles. AUSVEG will assist Ross by providing a range of data and advice. The rationale for the report is twofold. First, to gain an understanding of the Chinese market and assess what market potential there is for Australian vegetables. Second, to understand the competitive threat to Australian markets.

As part of this exercise the vegetable industry also participated in a China-Australia Forum on Horticultural Cooperation sponsored by Horticulture Australia Limited and the China Entry-Exit Inspection



Ian James (right), Chief Economist AUSVEG, chairs a round-table discussion with participants at the China-Australia Forum.

and Quarantine in Beijing on 17 September. The forum was designed to establish direct industry to industry contacts between the two countries.

For vegetables, the issue was to gain an understanding of the bio-security controls, or lack thereof, and entry requirements for vegetable trade with China. Each horticulture industry conducted a round-table discussion on vegetable discussion where most of the Chinese participants were involved in distribution and retail. Their prime markets were supermarkets in major cities catering for higher-income Chinese consumers. Some useful contacts were made and useful insights gained on the industry. One contact is about to visit Australia to assess the potential for importing certain lines of vegetables and the insights will be put to good use in enhancing our understanding of the Chinese vegetable industry.

## Horticulture Code of Conduct Committee announced

Members of the Horticulture Code Committee were appointed in September by Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Peter McGauran.

The committee, a group of growers, wholesalers and market operators, will advise the Australian Government on the operation of the Horticulture Code of Conduct, including:

1. the impact of the code, including the extent to which it is improving transparency and clarity of trade
2. how growers and wholesalers perceive the code
3. options and practical actions that will support the effective operation of the code
4. options to increase awareness of the code and its requirements
5. general issues relating to the code including the provision of an annual report on the committee's activities.

"This is an important step forward in ensuring the code not only meets its objectives of clarity and transparency in fresh fruit and vegetable wholesale transactions but also that the implementation is as smooth as possible," said Horticulture Australia Council Chair, Stuart Swaddling.

## Former IDO moves to EMS pathways project

The creation of achievable environmental targets for growers is under way.



Alison Anderson, previously the NSW Vegetable Industry Development Officer, has been appointed as the Project Officer for the EMS (Environmental Management Systems) pathways project, in an effort to negotiate better, more practical environmental targets for growers.

The EMS pathways project, funded by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, has been created to develop a better understanding of the requirements of the Natural Resource Management (NRM) Boards and Catchment Management Authorities (CMA) regarding what they consider to be achievable environmental targets for growers.

Helena Whitman, AUSVEG Environmental Manager, said that NRM Boards and CMA were setting targets that may or may not have been practical for growers to implement.

"The aim of this project is to identify those targets, benchmark them across production practices and then to negotiate appropriate targets," she said.

### Improve representation

Alison's role will involve liaising with growers, NRM Boards and CMA throughout the length of the project.

"CMA have expressed a keen interest in being involved with the project," said Alison. "A key role for me will be to facilitate partnerships between the vegetable industry and regional NRM bodies. I am hoping that by the end of this project we will have improved representation of vegetable growers on regional NRM committees."

Five vegetable growing areas will be targeted for the project, where a network of growers and NRM personnel will be encouraged to work together to foster a better understanding of what is achiev-

able, carry out an environmental self assessment of vegetable farms and through the EnviroVeg program identify and implement environmental changes where required.

The regional NRM bodies that are being targeted include Lachlan CMA (NSW), Port Phillip and Western Port CMA (Vic), Northern Territory NRM, South West Region (WA) and Hawkesbury Nepean CMA (NSW). Growers in those regions will be contacted by the Project Officer and invited to participate in the networks to be developed under this project.

## Phaseout Team receive international award

The Australian agricultural industry's significant reduction in the consumption of the ozone depleting substance Methyl Bromide has been applauded internationally with an award presented by the United States of America Environment Protection Agency.

The 2007 Montreal Protocol Stratospheric Ozone Protection Award was accepted by AUSVEG board member David Anderson in Canada in September. The presentation coincides with the 20th anniversary of the Montreal Protocol, arguably the most successful international environmental agreement.

Scientists at the Victoria Department of Primary Industries Australian Methyl Bromide Phaseout Team, led by Dr Ian Porter, have been implementing changes to reduce the use of Methyl Bromide by Australian vegetable growers since the signing of the Montreal Protocol in 1987, helping achieve a 97 per cent reduction in Methyl Bromide use.

"Australia's commitment to the reduction of ozone depleting substances by the vegetable industry has received global acclaim. It was a very proud moment to stand on the international stage to accept the award on behalf of the Australian vegetable industry," said David.

"The USA has applied to the UN Environment Programme to use more than 4,000 tons of Methyl Bromide, while Australia has applied to use only 30 tons, specifically for strawberry runner production and rice growing."

“Australia's commitment to the reduction of ozone depleting substances by the vegetable industry has received global acclaim.”

## Nuffield Scholarship for Amiens grower

A global education awaits scholarship winner Tim Harslett, writes Ross Ord, Industry Development Manager AUSVEG.

Vegetable grower Timothy Harslett from Amiens, Queensland, has been awarded Australia's leading farming scholarship, a Nuffield Australia Farming Scholarship. Tim's scholarship has been funded by the National Vegetable Levy and sponsored by Horticulture Australia Limited in partnership with AUSVEG.

Tim is one of only 16 Australians to receive a 2007 Nuffield Scholarship. He was presented with his award at a special awards dinner held on 7 October in Fremantle, WA.

Nuffield Farming Scholarships, each worth \$25,000, give young Australian farmers the opportunity to travel internationally and explore agricultural issues and opportunities in a global context. There are about 1,300 Nuffield scholars worldwide.

Tim will use his scholarship to investigate integrated crop management and mechanical harvesting. He believes integrated crop management is underused in the Australian horticulture industry, particularly in relation to disease and weed management.

"Mechanical harvesting also presents opportunities for efficiency improvements; labour costs constitute one-third of our total expenses and that figure has climbed steadily for years," he said.

### Improve industry understanding

Tim part-owns and manages a commercial vegetable operation at Amiens; major crops include celery, Chinese cabbage, cos lettuce and broccolini. He is confident that an industry-wide focus on integrated crop management would help producers to grow better crops with lower input costs and positive environmental outcomes.

"Disease and weed management, and its relationship to soil health, is not fully understood in this industry. By engaging with experts internationally, I hope to gain a better insight that will enable me and other vegetable producers to implement smarter, more sustainable practices," Tim says.



Nuffield Scholarship winner Tim Harslett (left) receives his award from AUSVEG board member David Anderson. Image supplied by Travis King.

"Europe is a world leader in environmentally friendly crop management and mechanical harvesting. We have started to use automatic transplanters and weeding machines to reduce labour costs, but exposure to technology advancements overseas will help to identify machines applicable to Australian circumstances or the obstacles that

must be overcome to adapt machines to these conditions."

Nuffield Australia CEO Mr Jim Geltsch says many Nuffield Scholars go on to become active leaders in agriculture and the community.

"For many, the scholarship experience changes their lives by opening their eyes to the wider world and giving them the confidence to pursue their goals," Jim said.

The 16 Australian Nuffield Scholars will leave Australia in either February or June 2008 for a compulsory Global Focus Program. This will involve travel to China, North America, South America and Europe to investigate agricultural marketing and trade issues, environmental issues and experience the different social and cultural aspects of each region.

“By engaging with experts internationally, I hope to gain insight that will enable vegetable producers to implement smarter, more sustainable practices.”

Following the initial six-week program, the scholars will go their individual ways to pursue specific study programs in the country or countries of their choice. Tim hopes to travel to Europe, the United States, South America and New Zealand.

## Australian Grown logo a 'Fair Dinkum' success

Tasmanian growers who drove their tractors to Canberra to campaign for clearer labelling of Australian produce in 2005 welcomed the launch of the new Australian Grown brand.

The Australian Made, Australian Grown logo was everywhere in September when Tasmanian growers celebrated the extension of the famous green and gold logo to include fresh and packaged produce. Sixty growers, who in 2005 drove their tractors to Canberra to campaign for clearer labelling of Australian produce as part of the Fair Dinkum Food Campaign, were once again on their tractors, but this time they were in a far more celebratory mood.

They arrived at Devonport Showgrounds just after dawn and were greeted by some 200 people, including AUSVEG Chairman Michael Badcock, the Federal Member for Braddon, Mark Baker, representing Minister Peter McGauran, and Tasmanian Premier Paul Lennon.

"When we drove to Canberra, one of the things we wanted to achieve was to better identify where the produce came from. The Australian Made, Australian Grown logo gives us a chance to do that. Now is the time to celebrate it and embrace it," said Richard Bovill, Tasmanian grower and one of the key organisers of the Fair Dinkum Food Campaign.

He was supported by Michael Badcock, who agreed that the industry's future looks brighter thanks to the efforts of the growers and the launch of the trusted food-labelling scheme.

"This campaign has lifted the profile of the industry. Before it was very much a situation of them and us, now we're seeing much more communication and negotiations between growers, processors and the retail sector," said Michael.



Australian Made, Australian Grown Chief Executive Ian Harrison is interviewed at the Devonport showgrounds in Tasmania.

### Interest surges for campaign logo

During two hectic days in Tasmania some 300 stakeholders learned more about Australian Grown through meetings in Devonport and Hobart. Thousands of consumers watched the event on TV or listened to the radio coverage.

Interest in Australian Grown has been strong. Before the official launch by the Hon Peter McGauran, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, major retailers such as Coles and Woolworths had already registered to use the logo on their in-house product ranges as had pro-



Tasmanian Premier Paul Lennon is interviewed at the Devonport showgrounds in Tasmania to celebrate the launch of the Australian Grown logo.

cessors such as Simplot. Since then, ALDI and businesses ranging from nurseries to growers have joined. AUSVEG is a Campaign Partner.

Research conducted on behalf of the campaign in July 2007 provides some insight into the reasons behind the strong interest. Roy Morgan Research interviewed more than 1,000 Australian consumers, and the findings were spectacular: 89 per cent of Australians believe it to be 'important' or 'very important' that the fresh food they buy is Australian, and 82 per cent said the same for processed foods.

"Consumers very clearly want to buy Australian Grown and using the stylised kangaroo, Australia's most trusted and recognised country of origin brand, to identify those products makes sense," said Australian Made, Australian Grown Chief Executive Ian Harrison.

“Coles, Woolworth and ALDI have registered to use the Australian Grown logo.”

To use the Australian Grown descriptor, products must meet the strict criteria determined by the government's working party last year and incorporated into the revised Australian Made, Australian Grown Code of Practice, available from the Australian Grown website.

For more information visit:

[www.australiangrown.com.au](http://www.australiangrown.com.au)

Email: <ausmade@australianmade.com.au>

Phone: 03 8662 5390

Fax: 03 8662 5398

Ian Harrison is interviewed at the Devonport showgrounds in Tasmania to celebrate the launch of the Australian Grown logo.

## Vegetarian Week a celebrated event

The inaugural National Vegetarian Week, organised by the Australian Vegetarian Society, was held from 1 to 7 October to increase consumer awareness about the nutritional benefits of a vegetarian diet.

Co-sponsored by AUSVEG and Sanitarium Veggie Delights, the week was launched on 26 September at an event hosted by celebrity vegetarian and National Vegetarian Week ambassador, Jackie O.

Co-launching the event, AUSVEG chairman Michael Badcock took the opportunity to highlight the nutritional value of vegetables.

"In this country, adults eat an average of two to three serves of vegetables a day—that's half the recommended five serves necessary for good health. Nutritionists recommend most people increase their consumption of vegetables to include five different types of vegetables every day," he said.

"Australia's vegetable industry is the third largest cropping industry in the nation, we produce more than 3 million tonnes of vegetables annually—that's worth more than \$3.2 billion to our economy every year and employs an estimated 100,000 people on farms."

National Vegetarian Week educated Australians about the benefits of plant-based diets and encouraged them to lower their meat intake through a series of promotional activities, including the launch of a celebrity vegetarian cookbook, which can be downloaded for free at [www.vegetarianweek.com.au](http://www.vegetarianweek.com.au).

“Australia's vegetable industry is the nation's third largest cropping industry, worth more than \$3.2 billion to our economy every year.”



Jackie O, National Vegetarian week ambassador, and Michael Badcock, AUSVEG Chairman, launch National Vegetarian Week in Sydney.

## Winners are grinners

Thank you to everyone who responded to the Reader Survey included with the September issue of Vegetables Australia. It's a great way to let us know what you enjoy about the magazine and what you'd like to see more of in the future. We're busy collating the data to ensure the magazine continues to deliver relevant, topical and useful information.

The winners have been drawn for the Reader Survey prizes. Congratulations to Anne Cresswell from Deloraine, TAS (winner of the Apple iPod) and John D'Anastasi from Canowindra, NSW (winner of the Harvey Norman Gift Voucher).

## Plan of attack for marketing strategy

The development of a domestic marketing

The Domestic Marketing Strategy represents the largest single investment by the Australian Vegetable Industry Development Group (AVIDG) and forms part of the Market Development Foundation Project. The strategy is expected to stimulate demand for vegetables and increase their value.

Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) is responsible for managing the project, which will be undertaken by APIS Business Services.

AVIDG has identified seven Foundation Projects, the first of which was the development of a strategic plan for the Australian vegetable industry, Vegvision 2020, which underpins the Domestic Marketing Strategy project.

"This project is one of the most important that AVIDG has commissioned. We're looking at how the industry can best engage with consumers and mobilise its resources to stimulate demand for Australian vegetables. Higher demand should lead to an increase in their value," said AVIDG Deputy Chair, Wendy Erhart.

"The result will be a detailed implementation plan that will guide the industry's possible investment in marketing activities."

In developing the Domestic Marketing Strategy, qualitative and quantitative consumer and market research will be used. This research



“The result will be an implementation plan to guide the industry's possible investment in marketing activities”

will influence, complement and leverage existing marketing and communications activities being undertaken by commercial, government and non-government organisations within the industry.

The project will move through a number of phases before it concludes next year, with the progress of each phase updated on the AVIDG website and publicised throughout the industry.

For more information visit: [www.avidgroup.net.au](http://www.avidgroup.net.au) and follow the links, 'Development Program', 'Market Development', 'Domestic Marketing Strategy'

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## Media MATTERS



## Good practice makes good sense

A road trip was the perfect way to launch the Good Practice Guide and demonstrate new water efficiency techniques to growers, writes AUSVEG's Lucy Jarman.

**B**est Management Practice, Current Recommended Practice, Good Agricultural Practice—call it what you will—any practice that helps achieve high yields of good quality produce with minimal impact on the environment is a good practice.

“Any practice that helps achieve high yields of quality produce with minimal impact on the environment is a good practice.”

VegetablesWA launched its Good Practice Guide with a road trip on 5 September; the focus of the day was improving water efficiency in the vegetable industry. The Good Practice Guide is largely devoted to the need for irrigation and nutrient management in vegetable production and to improve efficient water usage.

Produced by vegetablesWA with support from the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia (DAFWA), the guide is part of the 'Linking Best Manage-

ment Practices with Property Planning' project. Each of the 40 tour-participants received a copy of the guide. The tour visited growers and researchers who apply good practice in the field, including Bogdanich Farms at West Gingin, the Gravity Discovery Centre and Nanovich Farm.

Maureen Dobra, owner, of the Loose Leaf Lettuce Company, said that it was a good day to catch up with other growers and suppliers. "Everyone is so busy these days; it makes it hard to keep in contact with everybody."

Maureen attended the road trip to network with growers and suppliers, and learn more about the irrigation practice and fertiliser projects.

"I would definitely attend another road trip, we should do it more often," she said.

**The first stop was at Bogdanich Farms, where Rohan Prince, Development Officer from DAFWA, spoke about research project**

**'Improving water and nutrient use efficiency in vegetable production on sandy soils'.**

Working with growers and introducing them to soil-moisture probing technology, Rohan facilitated the adoption of technology for scheduling irrigation. His presentation included results from monitoring sites and an insight into a nutrition demonstration plot. The aim was to establish

### THE BOTTOM LINE

- To launch its Good Practice Guide, vegetablesWA organised a Good Practice Road Trip, attended by 40 growers.
- The growers visited three sites and met with a number of researchers to discuss a variety of R&D projects. The focus of the day was on improving water efficiency.
- The guide can be downloaded from the vegetablesWA website.

**i** For more information visit:  
[www.vegetableswa.com.au](http://www.vegetableswa.com.au)  
 Phone 08 9481 0834





Cameron McPhee (left) from the Swan Catchment Council talks with growers at Nanovich Farm.

“The road trip was a good day to catch up with other growers and suppliers. I'd definitely attend another one.”

benchmarks, measure change and plan for more effective projects in the future.

The next stop was the Gravity Discovery Centre (GDC), which was the highlight of the day for many growers, including Maureen. Dennis Phillips, Senior Research Officer at DAFWA, discussed how researchers are in the final stages of a project that aims to boost fertiliser efficiency while reducing environmental impacts.

With the irrigation and nutrition practices of growers under increasing scrutiny and pressure from environmental groups, Dennis suggested alternative fertiliser programs for vegetables, taking into account Australia's varying soil types, cropping history and water quality.

Chris Denby, Project Manager at DAFWA, spoke to growers about a website and short messaging service (SMS) for irrigation projects (see panel).

At the Nanovich site, Cameron



McPhee from the Swan Catchment Council spoke about his 'Waterwise on the Farm' project, including irrigation training and soil moisture monitoring.

To date, the Good Practice Guide includes a water and nutrient management section with comprehensive appendices and references that guide growers to good practice information.

The guide was designed for the sandy soils of the Swan Coastal Plain and can be downloaded from the vegetablesWA website, [www.vegetableswa.com.au](http://www.vegetableswa.com.au). A limited number of hardcopies are available to interstate growers, for a small fee.

## Hi-tech water management at your fingertips

As part of the Good Practice Road Trip, growers learned about an SMS web-based irrigation tool, launched by vegetables WA.

The innovative tool is designed to encourage water-use efficiency and better irrigation management of vegetable crops on sandy soils.

David Ellement, Western Australia Industry Development Officer, said that the system would allow growers to calculate how much to water their crops on a daily basis. This web-based information is used in conjunction with a mobile phone text-messaging service that automatically sends out daily evaporation and rainfall figures to guide growers as to the best methods for watering crops.

The system has been developed for vegetable growers on sandy soils, particularly those in the Perth metropolitan area, and is accessed via the vegetablesWA website at [www.vegetableswa.com.au](http://www.vegetableswa.com.au).

Chris Denby, Project Manager at DAFWA, spoke to growers during the road trip about fostering research and development, challenging boundaries and investigating innovative ways of managing water resources.

The aim of the project is to provide good practice information in the form of an SMS climate information service and an internet-based expert system capable of calculating real-time irrigation requirements to support commercial vegetable growers.

VegetablesWA calculated that, on average, growers could save around 4 megalitres of water per hectare annually, with potential to cut water use by up to 25 per cent through streamlined irrigation. The system uses daily evaporation data to calculate figures.

syngenta.

## KNOWN FAR AND WIDE FOR HER PERFECT SKIN

Emma Smith, Organisational Development Manager, SP Exports Pty Ltd, Childers QLD



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Emma is passionate about maintaining SP Exports' reputation for continual customer satisfaction. "It all comes down to producing a consistent top quality product." Not an easy task, but with the help of AMISTAR, this is something that Emma and SP Exports continue to do.

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# Young growers learn the alternatives

With a desire to learn more about cutting edge horticulture, ten growers are shaping up to be the next generation of industry leaders, writes AUSVEG's Matt Wickham.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

- Ten young growers toured New Zealand to experience farming techniques used across the Tasman.
- The Recognised Seasonal Labour scheme allows New Zealand growers to hire workers from overseas to work fixed periods and combat the labour shortages.
- Innovative recycled water practices were also demonstrated to tour participants.

For more information visit: [www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers](http://www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers)  
Project number: VG07103  
Keywords: New Zealand

In July and August, a group of ten young Australian vegetable growers participated in an educational tour of New Zealand to experience first-hand farming techniques employed across the Tasman.

The eight-day study tour included several days of farm visits in the Canterbury and Nelson regions of the South Island and attendance at the three-day annual Horticulture New Zealand conference in Christchurch.

One highlight was the visit to Jornas Nursery in the Canterbury area. Jornas is a family business that grows a variety of plants for clients ranging from home gardeners to professional farmers. This innovative and automated glasshouse nursery has a growing area of 20,000 square metres, with a self-flooding floor that allows Jornas to recycle almost all its water. Water rises through holes in the floor to water the plant roots; after sufficient water has surfaced the water drains down the same holes and is recycled without wasting a drop. Considering Australia's ongoing water scarcity, the young growers observed this feature with great interest.

### Labour scheme a success

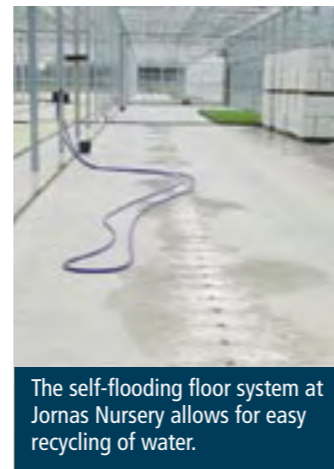
The young growers learned that, as in Australia, New Zealand Horticulture has major workforce deficiencies—an estimated labour shortage of around 5,000 workers. In response to this, the New Zealand government has developed the Recognised Seasonal Labour (RSE) scheme. This program assists horticultural businesses to fill shortages by importing workers from overseas. It allows employers to draw labour from selected countries who may work for up to seven months in an 11-month period, with the option to return the following year. The result is expected to be a sustainable reliable labour supply.



However, employers must contribute significantly to the costs of this arrangement, which limits the capacity for smaller operators to take advantage. It was noted that Australia may implement a similar policy within a few years so it was great to hear the thoughts of those who already have access to the scheme.

“The Recognised Seasonal Labour scheme assists horticultural businesses to fill shortages by importing workers from overseas.”

The tour was a fantastic opportunity for growers to learn about alternative on- and off-farm business practice and observe the latest technological innovations/techniques. The growers discussed



The self-flooding floor system at Jornas Nursery allows for easy recycling of water.

important issues with their New Zealand counterparts and successfully explored international and domestic networking opportunities. The young growers took home a wealth of new ideas and innovations from New Zealand to implement on their farms.

It is highly recommended that the industry continues to support similar tours for young growers as they will be future leaders and have huge potential to adapt, expand and promote Australian horticulture.



## Renewed commitment to industry

Brent Story is already investigating business development options after returning from

If 22-year-old Brent Story ever had any doubts about his future in the vegetable industry, they have been swept away by his experiences on the 2007 Young Growers Tour to New Zealand.

Brent said the tour provided him with a new perspective on the industry and helped develop a valuable network of friends among other young growers. “It also sparked plenty of fresh ideas for helping to develop the family business,” he said.

“It helps to know there are other young growers who face similar challenges to the ones I face every day.”

Brent works for Story Fresh, a Queensland lettuce growing and processing business run by his parents, Anne and Geoffrey. The business operates three farms and a processing plant in the Darling Downs area, supplying shredded lettuce mainly to fast food outlets throughout Queensland.

The tour had many highlights for Brent but one that stood out was a visit to the Jornas Nursery in Christchurch. Jornas is a leading grower of bedding plants and seedlings in New Zealand.

“The technology and growing techniques used there are incredible,” Brent said. “Our business nursery at home is not as sophisticated but the visit gave me some great ideas for its improvement and development. The systems Jornas use to control airflow and temperature were particularly interesting. They could help seedling growers in Australia deal with some of the climate extremes we experience.”

### Gain perspective and ideas

The ability of the New Zealand industry to meet challenges and the Recognised Seasonal Labour scheme also impressed Brent. He found produce markets in New Zealand more relaxed than the Brisbane markets and said a potato storage facility the tour party visited just outside Christchurch was the biggest he had seen.

Brent said the knowledge and ideas he picked up during the tour have given him the confidence to take a more hands-on role in the family business. He worked part-time for the business for many years before recently taking on a full-time role after completing a Bachelor of Business degree at the University of Southern Queensland.

His responsibilities include assisting with business development, managing irrigation and fertigation, and assisting with soil preparations.

“We are investigating the use of a water and fertiliser calculating system similar to one I saw on the tour when we visited the New Zealand Institute for Crop and Food Research,” he said. “Some of the other developments I looked at also reinforced an earlier decision by our business not to pursue hydroponic lettuce production.”

Brent said the establishment of a network involving lasting friendships with other young growers was among the most important long-term benefits he gained from the tour. He plans to maintain and develop those contacts in years to come.

“The tour certainly changed my industry perspective,” he said. “It made me realise just how many other young people there are starting out in the industry. It helps to know there are others just like me throughout Australia and New Zealand who face similar challenges to the ones I face every day.”



# Stop the rot

Controlling parsley root rot with fungicides can help increase profits threefold, writes David Jarwood.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

- Parsley root rot can destroy entire crops. It usually occurs in Queensland in summer and Victoria in winter.
- The Shamrock cultivar has up to 70 per cent less root rot than other cultivars.
- Controlling the disease with fungicides can result in a threefold increase in profits.

**i** For more information visit: [www.veg.com.au/levy-payers](http://www.veg.com.au/levy-payers)  
Project number: VG06046  
Keywords: Parsley root rot

“An economic analysis of a previous trial indicated that controlling parsley root rot disease with fungicides produced a 2.5 to threefold increase in profits.”

Desmond said the project identified the pathogen potential of various species of fungi, which were isolated from root rots under laboratory conditions.

“The screening of flat-leaf cultivars in Victoria identified that the cultivar Shamrock had up to 70 per cent less root rot than

Victorian and Queensland scientists are working to control parsley root rot—a disease that can cause crop losses of 100 per cent. The research was led by scientists at the Department of Primary Industries Victoria Knoxfield in collaboration with Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries.

Parsley crop losses usually occur in Queensland in summer and Victoria in winter. Project leader Dr Liz Minchinton and project scientist Desmond Auer, both from DPI Vic, said the research investigated integrated pest management (IPM) control methods.

other cultivars. It could be a useful cultivar to grow in areas where both summer and winter root rot is an issue,” he said.

“In Victoria, root rot causes damping off in young plants—the wilt and collapse of seedlings after emergence. It appears as loss of lateral roots and is associated with the fungus *Pythium*. In more mature plants, root rot appears as wilt and collapse of foliage and loss of tap root, and is predominantly associated with the fungus *Phytophthora*,” said Liz.

“In Queensland, root rot appears to be predominantly associated with the fungi *Fusarium* as well as *Pythium*. Symptoms of *Fusarium* are a collar rot, yellowing of older foliage and browning and death of the fine roots.”

## Increase profits with fungicides

Liz said that parsley root rot was a serious problem that could have a severe impact on the annual \$8.3m national industry.

“This disease is a major threat to the herb and spice industry in Queensland. An economic analysis of a previous trial indicated that controlling the disease with fungicides produced a 2.5 to threefold increase in profits,” she said.

“During the testing, biological control was ineffective in Victoria due to soil temperatures below optimum (15°C). This type of control may be more effective in hydroponics or in ground where soil temperatures are around 15°C.”

Liz said that subsequent chemical trials in Victoria had been inconclusive due to the lack of root rot disease because of the drought. This was in stark contrast to Queensland, where trials were abandoned due to being washed away.

Liz said the team’s research showed that chemical controls in Victoria were not needed during spring and summer.

“The disease in Victoria appears with heavy autumn rains. Growers do not need to use chemical controls for root rot during spring and summer, which reduces exposure of consumers, staff, crops and the environment to pesticides,” she said.

Desmond said that a number of research avenues were still to be explored, including developing another fungicide to control damping off in parsley. He added that there was a suite of biological products coming onto the market that may be effective for control of root rot in parsley.

# Survey says: growers want more

Leadership and business management skills are sought by growers around the country.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

- A business skills and leadership development survey has found that growers want to expand their skill set.
- Growers are keen to acquire skills relating to business, financial and people management, and marketing.
- Practical sessions, including visits to businesses and other industries, are the preferred method of learning.

**i** For more information contact: Dianne Fullelove, People Development Manager AUSVEG  
E: <dianne.fullelove@ausveg.com.au> Phone: 0400 960 695

The Australian vegetable industry strategic plan, VegVision 2020, identified the importance of developing skills, knowledge, and people resources in the industry. Dianne Fullelove, People Development Manager AUSVEG, has conducted a series of grower consultations to determine these needs at a grassroots level.

A training needs analysis in business skills and leadership development has been completed. As part of this, a survey was sent to all vegetable growers asking for their input. Additionally, growers in each state were interviewed to determine the training they required and how they would like to receive this training.

Dianne travelled to each state to meet with growers of different vegetable commodities, industry organisations, service providers and Industry Development Officers.

“There is a consensus that vegetable growers require more skills in leadership and business management. Growers felt that these skills should be linked to businesses’ profitability,” said

Dianne.

“Leadership skills are needed by a wider range of people in the industry, and strong business skills were identified as central to fostering good industry leadership. There is a lack of development for younger growers and little encouragement for them to participate in industry organisations.”

## Tricks of the trade

Growers expressed interest in a wide range of topics relating to business management and leadership. The skills identified in the study as very important were:

- business management—building and planning a business
- financial management—cost analysis, budgeting, investment
- people management—staff management, networking, negotiation and conflict resolution
- marketing—supply chain, niche markets.

Growers felt that practical sessions where they could visit other businesses and industries, not only horticultural, were a good way to acquire new skills. As a result, Di-

“Vegetable growers require more skills in leadership and business management. Growers felt that these skills should be linked to businesses’ profitability.”

anne said that tours and group visits could develop grower networks that were likely to be interested in training.

The Vegetable Industry People Development Plan will investigate suitable training programs that meet grower requirements and the need to create specific programs for the vegetable industry.

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# Cater to demand

The consumer pillar identified by VegVision 2020 contains exciting opportunities for the Vegetable R&D program. Youna Angevin-Castro speaks to four members of the newly-formed Consumer Advisory Group about how industry can make consumers its top priority.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

- Shifting from production-focused R&D to consumer-focused R&D is crucial for sustaining and improving industry profits.
- Work with supply chain to understand what consumers want to eat, how they want it packaged and how much they're prepared to pay.
- Change the eating behaviours of children so they regularly consume more vegetables.



To download the VegVision 2020 industry plan, visit [www.avidgroup.net.au](http://www.avidgroup.net.au)

When VegVision 2020 was released, a number of strategic priorities were identified. One of these was the need for industry to turn its attention to consumers as a means of securing its long-term sustainability. During the past 12 months, industry has restructured its research and development program to reflect these new priorities, including the formation of a Consumer Advisory Group. The Consumer Advisory Group is charged with ensuring that funding is allocated to initiatives that address the needs of consumers.

As Chair of the Consumer Advisory Group, John Said of Fresh Select in Melbourne is excited by this new direction, but understands it may be difficult for growers to alter their thinking after years of focussing on production issues.

"In the past, the focus has been traditional—industry has concentrated on on-farm production issues—but it has become apparent that we need to move away from this approach," John said.

### Work with supply chain

John believes that growers should use their existing relationships with the supply chain to assist their shift towards a consumer-driven approach, and sees it as a great opportunity for growers to learn from their market partners.

"It's a case of really understanding what the consumer wants—from the product, through to packaging, through to pricing: the whole thing—and working backwards," he said.

"As producers, we don't profess to know everything about consumers, so we need experts to advise us about consumers and consumer habits. We're privileged to have representatives from both Coles and Harris Farms on our advisory group. Consumers are



their bread and butter, and this will be invaluable as they become our bread and butter too."

Far from being a one-sided relationship, John predicts that supply-chain partners will also benefit from industry's investment in consumer research.

"They are looking for answers as well, so if we can work collectively to get results, the better the results will be."

### Meet consumer needs

Tristan Kitchener, National Merchant Salads and Vegetables for Coles Supermarkets, agrees.

"As a retailer, we aim to meet customer needs by providing customers with a broad range of competitively priced products that satisfy the price-conscious customer as well as the more quality-focused customer. Customers' needs are always changing and we need to react to and meet these changes," he said.

"As an industry, this means as we must adapt from a situation

where growers speculatively produce a product with the hope that consumers may purchase it, to a needs-based system whereby a customer need is recognised and a product is grown to satisfy that need.

"In the past, industry has concentrated on on-farm production issues but we need to move away from this approach."

"The Australian market suffers from huge pricing volatility caused by erratic supply quantities. If retailers, growers and suppliers can work more closely to flatten these peaks and troughs it will create more stable retail pricing and help build product trust and loyalty,

"It's very hard to change the habits of adults, so target the eating behaviours of children to increase overall consumption."

increase overall consumption, and do so in a way that is profitable for all parties."

Tristan said that to gain a better understanding of what consumers want, industry could benefit from undertaking a gap analysis of the current landscape.

"If we can harness the expertise of the whole supply chain and associated industry bodies, we will be better able to make the right decisions. We need to understand the current situation and identify where the industry needs to go next."

### Target the next generation

CSIRO researcher Dr David Cox has spent many years investigating the psychology of food choices and the processes consumers use in making decisions about food purchases. He admits that there is a lack of conclusive research into what consumers want, but feels strongly that any future research should place an emphasis

on creating practical outputs for growers.

"Growers need to be aware of the issues and attributes that consumers are looking for in their products, such as convenience, taste and safety. Not much research has been conducted on what consumers want, so the industry needs to talk to consumers and measure what they are looking for in a product," David said.

"However, it isn't enough to just conduct research. Researchers and industry need to convert this information into practical outputs that have the potential to alter consumer behaviours."

David feels that there are many opportunities for the vegetable industry to partner with other industries and public health institutions, and that doing so would produce benefits for all involved.

"A good example is the need for more fundamental research on how to get children to eat more vegetables. We already know





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## “ A consumer focus can transform a R&D program to deliver real results and real profitability for vegetable growers. ”

that it is very hard to change the habits of adults, but if industry supports cross-institutional research initiatives that target the eating behaviours of children, and by providing practical advice based on science, rather than depending on so called 'common sense', then there is a good chance of being able to increase overall consumption.”

### Shift priorities to increase profit

Sarah Pennell, General Manager Professional Services for Horticulture Australia, believes that the move towards consumer-driven research is an exciting time for the vegetable industry. Having worked with other horticultural industries, Sarah has witnessed how an industry can successfully shift its priorities and produce profitable, consumer-focused outcomes.

“A good case study is the apple and pear industry, which has successfully developed new varieties, such as Pink Lady and Jazz, in response to what consumers

want. The orange industry is also a great example of how a breeding program can move away from addressing issues of production efficiencies, resistance and climatic conditions, to focus on what the consumer wants to buy,” Sarah said.

Sarah acknowledges that it will be a challenge to turn around years of thinking but is optimistic that growers will reap the benefits.

“It will take a while for the new agenda to get through to the broader industry but a consumer focus can transform a research and development program to deliver real results and real profitability for vegetable growers,” she said.

# ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

## Industry financials laid BARE

The vegetable industry provides better rates of returns compared with other agricultural industries, but the news isn't all good, writes Ian James, Chief Economist AUSVEG.

The Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics (ABARE) has released the results of the Vegetable Farm Survey conducted in April/May of this year. The survey was promoted and funded by the Australian Vegetable Industry Development Group (AVIDG) and follows from a more limited survey conducted in 2004/2005 as part of the Ministerial Review of the industry.

The survey concentrated on financial performance for the financial year 2005/2006 but also questioned growers' about their views on the industry. Face to face interviews were held with growers in each state and the Northern Territory. The number of growers interviewed was of sufficient size to make the results statistically valid.

It is intended that this survey be conducted annually to enable

the industry to understand trends and more accurately assess factors impinging on growers' profitability. As a precautionary note, much of the financial data is averaged out to protect confidentiality. As such the data may not necessarily coincide with growers own experiences.

### Average returns aren't realised by all

On average, the vegetable industry provided better returns in 2005/2006 than other industries in the agricultural sector. The return on equity for vegetable growers was 3.2 per cent before taking into account capital appreciation. Many vegetable growers on the urban fringes experienced strong growth in land values leading to a 9.2 per cent return after allowing for capital appreciation.

Nationally, the average return to growers was \$153,000, and

after allowance for own and family labour, depreciation and stock changes, farms as business enterprises returned \$66,400. Nonetheless, the average hides the fact that some growers are in difficulty. Twenty-four per cent of vegetable growers reported a negative cash income. The industry needs to investigate ways of lifting returns to growers through revenue increases or cost reductions.

Table 1 shows the financial performance of vegetable growers by state.

Victorian growers were the most profitable but growers in the Northern Territory had the best rate of return on capital due to a lower equity base. However, the best place to be a vegetable grower was Western Australia where land-price increases enabled growers to achieve a 15 per cent rate of return.

TABLE 1: Vegetable growers selected financial performance by state 2005/2006

Average per farm	Receipts (\$)	Costs (\$)	Income (\$)	Business profit (\$)	Rate of return on operations (%)	Rate of return including capital appreciation (%)
Victoria	878270	641420	236850	137740	5	8.3
New South Wales	499030	359810	139210	53760	2.5	4.8
Queensland	843280	681260	162020	71140	3.2	9.8
South Australia	512630	396910	115720	44,670	4.2	6.7
Western Australia	495180	280880	214300	130970	4.3	15
Tasmania	289970	284620	5350	0	-1.7	2.3
Northern Territory	503330	342220	161110	105570	7.5	13.9
Australia	638170	485210	152960	66410	3.2	9.2

Source: Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics

**Table 2: Selected financial performance estimates for vegetable growers, by total area cropped, 2005/2006 (average per farm)**

	ha	5-20 ha	20-70ha	more than 70 ha
Farm cash income (\$)	48610	80,570	154,080	336,050
Farm business profit (\$)	-1,200	24,320	52,910	188,660
Rate of return* (%)	0.8	1.7	2.2	4.7

\*Excluding capital appreciation

Source: Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics

**Table 3: Farm equity ratio (%)**

NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	AUST
82	63	62	66	91	84	82	72

Source: Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics

More sobering were the figures for Tasmania. Tasmanian growers struggled to cover costs of production and, when enhanced property values were excluded, recorded business losses. More disturbing was the fact that 46 per cent of Tasmanian growers failed to cover their production costs. The prices Tasmanian growers receive for their vegetables are inadequate.

So why should Tasmania be any different to the rest of Australia? The survey found that 92 per cent of vegetables produced in Tasmania were sold to processors, compared with an Australia-wide 26 per cent. Potatoes in Tasmania accounted for 64 per cent of total vegetable receipts compared with 25 per cent Australia-wide. Based on the data for 2005/2006, either the price received for processed potatoes needs to rise or Tasmanian growers must look to other markets to improve their profitability.

**Bigger farms, more profits**

Table 2 shows income, profitability and rate of return based on size of area cropped. The larger the farm, the bigger the

likelihood that the farm was profitable and had an adequate rate of return on the capital invested. The rate of return on farms planting more than 70 hectares was more than six times that of farms planting less than five hectares, and more than double the return of farms planting between 20 and 70 hectares. The previous ABARE survey showed that larger farms have lower unit costs of production.

Table 3 shows that most vegetable farmers entered this financial year with high levels of equity. While rises in interest rates harm profitability through increased funding costs for farm inputs, vegetable growers may not be as sensitive to them as other sectors of the economy due to their low levels of debt. This may be because the average age of vegetable farmers is 51, at which age it could be expected that many growers have significant equity in their farms. However, the story may be different for younger growers.

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

- A national survey of growers found that the vegetable industry provided better returns than other agricultural industries.
- On average, after allowing for labour costs, depreciation and stock changes, farms as business enterprises returned \$66,400 in the 2005/2006. However, 24 per cent of growers reported a negative cash income.
- Larger farms were much more likely to have an adequate rate of return compared with smaller farms.

**i** For more information visit: [www.avidgroup.net.au](http://www.avidgroup.net.au) or [www.abareconomics.com](http://www.abareconomics.com)

# Survey provides valuable snapshot

A survey of vegetable growers across Australia has found that around 62 per cent of growers intend to be in the industry in the next five years and 32 per cent expect to expand the area of vegetable crops.

The economic survey was commissioned by the Australian Vegetable Industry Development Group (AVIDG) and undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE). Interviews were carried out with 266 vegetable growers across Australia.

AVIDG Deputy Chair, Wendy Erhart, said the survey results provide an important foundation for the Australian vegetable industry to assess its performance and identify potential indicators for the industry's future.

"It is a valuable opportunity to build a set of data trends and I strongly encourage the industry to consider funding the survey on a permanent basis," she said.

"The Australian vegetable industry will benefit enormously from having a long-term picture of the financial performance of growers as well as information

on the issues that directly impact on the sustainable growth of their farm business."

The information is crucial for the implementation of VegVision 2020, the industry's strategic plan for sustainable growth, and for determining the right mix of industry programs that will improve the long term-viability of the vegetable industry.

**More profitable than broadacre**

The survey looked at the economic performance of the vegetable sector in each state, as well as key priorities for farmers and their intentions for the next five years.

Despite the size of the sector, which accounts for about 6 per cent of the gross value of Australia's agricultural production, the survey found that the economic performance of vegetable growers in 2005/2006

was superior to that of broadacre farmers, with the average rate of return from capital at 3.2 per cent compared with 0.6 per cent for broadacre farms. However, the survey results indicated that financial performance was highly correlated to the scale of vegetable production.

In other survey results, growers rated pest and disease management as their highest priority. More than two thirds of growers had taken a chemical course and indicated they were making an effort to reduce chemical use.

About three quarters of growers rated their relationship with their main buyer as good or excellent, with more than half of growers selling the majority of their produce to the fresh vegetable market—usually the local wholesale market in their capital city.

The survey forms part of the Industry Information and Decision Support Framework

Foundation Project, which is one of seven key projects developed by AVIDG arising from the Taking Stock and Setting Directions report undertaken in 2005.

The full report on the Australian vegetable growing industry—2005/2006 can be accessed by visiting the AVIDG website, [www.avidgroup.net.au](http://www.avidgroup.net.au), or the ABARE website, [www.abareconomics.com](http://www.abareconomics.com).

“The industry will benefit enormously from having a long-term picture of the financial performance of growers.”

