

vegetables australia



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A word from the AUSVEG Chairman

Welcome to the International Year of the Potato. The United Nations made its declaration on the basis that potatoes can play a key role in addressing world hunger.

In Australia, potato consumption is on the slow decline, with consumer tastes changing to more ethnic-style foods and misconceptions that potatoes are fattening. Potatoes, however, have less fat and fewer calories than pasta or rice, are nutrient-rich for health and well-being, and are an important part of a well balanced, healthy diet.

This year, AUSVEG will aim to build awareness of potatoes as an affordable, healthy and delicious meal component perfect for a wide range of quick and easy contemporary Australian and ethnic dishes.

Nominations for the Vegetable Industry Awards 2008 are now open. I am sure there are many

deserving recipients so please put their names forward. The awards presentations will be held at the vegetablesWA 60th Anniversary dinner on 31 May 2008—an industry night not to be missed.

AUSVEG is also planning some major changes in 2008 to ensure that the organisation is positioned to become the most dynamic agricultural industry in Australia. After extensive member consultation during 2007, these changes will be put to a member vote shortly. Stay tuned for more information.

Finally, a heartfelt welcome to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Tony Burke.



Michael Badcock
Chairman
AUSVEG Ltd

From the editor



After more than a decade with the Howard Government, Australia has decided it's time for a change. Exactly what this means for the vegetable industry will play out over the coming months, though an emphasis on climate change, the environment and IR laws will be at the forefront of legislative reform. See page 14 for an overview of plans and funding initiatives by the new Australian Government.

AUSVEG Economist Ian James looks at the business of climate change on page 20—no longer a marginal concern, climate change has entered the public consciousness in a big way and the vegetable industry needs to make the most of opportunities offered by the government to meet the demands of consumers.

A study has been completed about consumer knowledge of Asian vegetables, and the best ways

to broaden the consumption base. See page 16 for details about what drives consumer purchases and how to sway them in your direction.

This year promises to be another big year for the industry as R&D projects align with VegVision 2020 strategic imperatives to encourage the industry to focus beyond the farm gate.

Have a happy, productive and profitable 2008.

Jim Thomson
Editor, *Vegetables Australia*

Correction: The 2008 Vegetable & Potato Growers' Planner, distributed with issue 3.3 of *Vegetables Australia*, included an incorrect phone number for TFGA in the contact details. The correct number is 03 6332 1800. AUSVEG apologies for any confusion this error may have caused.



**Matilda
Fresh:**
New ideas
for consumer
loyalty

26

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january/february

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Pollination protection plan in the works

Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) has joined forces with the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to devise a strategy for managing the threat of Varroa mite incursion.

Australia is yet to be affected by the Varroa mite, which has devastated the European Honeybee population in most other countries in the world. European Honeybees are worth more than \$2 billion to Australia in wild pollination services, and horticulture would be one of the major industries affected by an incursion of Varroa mite. Some industries are 100 per cent reliant on the wild honeybee population

for pollination, said Kim James, Biosecurity and Market Access R&D Manager for HAL.

"Some of the vegetable industries that rely heavily on the European Honeybee for pollination include cucumber, broccoli, carrot, cauliflower, celery, onion and zucchini," he said.

Grower workshops

At a workshop in April 2007, pollination stakeholders evaluated opportunities and threats to the pollination industry and set initial directions to develop paid pollination services as a self-sustaining industry. It was agreed that the development of a business plan was necessary. The plan, known as Pollination Australia, is expected to be finalised by June 2008.



Steps are being taken to protect Australia's wild pollination services from an overseas pest.

As part of this developmental process, grower information workshops were scheduled to take place in December last year and further workshops are to be held in Canberra from 18 to 20 March 2008. For information about these workshops, email Margie Thomson, General Manager Established Rural Industries, RIRDC Canberra, at <margie.thomson@rirdc.gov.au>.



For more information contact:
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Tasmanian processing study targets consumers

The Tasmanian vegetable processing industry is being studied to determine how the entire value chain can become more innovative, improve efficiency and deliver value for consumers.

In the wake of increased globalisation, the project will help find a more effective way of competing and delivering sustainable returns to all stakeholders in the processed vegetable value chain. The focus will be the use of collaborative innovation to improve existing processes with a view to developing products and services that add value for consumers.

The project involves the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research (TIAR), the Australian Vegetable Industry Development Group (AVIDG), Horticulture Australia Limited, and chain partners in the Tasmanian vegetable processing industry.

Lead researcher on the project, Professor Andy Fearn from the University of Kent in the UK, said the project aims to determine where and how the value chain creates what consumers value.

"If you don't know what customers value, then there is likely to be waste and inefficiency in the chain. There are always improvements

“Improvements can always be made, and they aren't necessarily about lowering costs or selling at the cheapest price.”

that can be made, and they aren't always about lowering costs or selling at the cheapest price," he said.

AVIDG Deputy Chair, Wendy Erhart, said even though the project is focused on Tasmania, it will be invaluable for the other primary industry value chains in Australia.

"It is anticipated that the project will develop a transferable framework, methodology and new capacity to undertake a value chain analysis for other primary industry value chains in Australia," she said.

Irrigators urged to seek drought advice

Business consultants are available to help some drought-affected growers.

A funding program, launched November last year, is available to help irrigated horticulturalists on the Murray and Goulburn irrigation systems access professional advice and support about aspects of their farm business.

The Department of Primary Industries' (DPI) Decision Support for Goulburn and Murray Irrigated Horticulture program aims to provide individual support via professional consultants to help growers make long-term business decisions.

DPI Drought Operations Manager Banjo Patterson said the new funding program had come at a

and financial planning; reviews of business structure; succession planning; improving access to current state and Australian Government assistance programs; and managing with low water allocations.

The only eligibility criterion for the program is that horticultural growers must rely on the Goulburn and Murray irrigation systems.

Grants for MDB irrigators

In connected news, Australian Government grants are being made available to Murray-Darling Basin irrigators to help them respond to significantly reduced

including computer software, piping and pumps

- costs associated with implementing water efficient crop options, and
- laser levelling.

Eligible irrigators must meet the Exceptional Circumstances Interest Rate Subsidy off-farm assets test of \$750,000.



For more information about the Decision Support for Goulburn and Murray Irrigated Horticulture program contact Angie Grills at DPI Cobram on 03 5871 0600 or email <angie.grills@dpi.vic.gov.au>

For more information about the new assistance measures for irrigators in the Murray-Darling Basin contact the Murray-Darling Basin Assistance and Referral Line on 1800 050 015.

“Many growers find it difficult to set aside funds needed to obtain professional advice, particularly when financial imperatives lay elsewhere.”

time when many growers' financial resources were being consumed in the battle against drought.

“Many growers find it extremely difficult in these conditions to set aside funds needed to obtain professional advice, particularly when their immediate financial imperatives lay elsewhere. This program provides those in the Goulburn and Murray irrigation systems with an opportunity to get help in that area, without compromising their efforts to cope with drought,” he said.

As part of the program, DPI will cover costs up to \$1,000 for approved consultants to work with growers in developing plans for their business.

Consultants will focus on areas such as business management

water allocations.

The grants will be payable for activities undertaken between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2009 and will be paid directly to irrigators. Activities eligible for assistance include:

- payment of fixed water charges
- installation or upgrading of piping, troughs and associated activities for stock and domestic water
- sinking/extending/refurbishment of bores and pumps
- pruning activities to minimise the impact of low water allocations
- reconfiguring irrigation systems
- equipment replacement to maintain irrigation systems,



Exceptional Circumstances support

Horticulture Australia Council (HAC) has announced the outposting of a Centrelink officer to HAC to assist industry with advice about drought and Exceptional Circumstances (EC) support.

“The recent changes announced by the previous government to Exceptional Circumstances mean that for the first time, growers in difficulty may be eligible for some assistance in this worst-ever drought,” said HAC Chair, Stuart Swaddling.

“The current situation in the lower Murray Darling Basin is grim, our people aren't used to taking hand-outs from the government; nor are they familiar with all the criteria and the plethora of forms. Of course, not everyone will be eligible for assistance, but the recent changes to EC are a significant step forward.

“Centrelink's Murray Darling Basin Unit has kindly offered to outpost its new Canberra-based Rural Service Officer, David Green, to HAC for two days a week for the next few months.”

David joined HAC from mid-December last year to provide advice to Peak Industry Bodies and growers directly, which should be of major assistance to those unfamiliar with the EC and drought support system. He is available on Tuesdays and Thursdays until the middle of February, when the situation will be reviewed.



For more information contact David Green at HAC on 02 6273 8115.

Lettuce symposium sets the scene

Research findings delivered face to face help lettuce growers learn more about pest and disease management, writes Sylvia Jelinek, Vegetable IPM Officer NSW DPI.

Sixty growers, industry and Department of Primary Industries (DPI) staff attended a symposium and workshop for pest and disease management for field and hydroponic lettuce on Wednesday 28 November in Sydney. Most of the 16 growers who attended were local hydro-growers. The day was organised by New South Wales DPI.

The morning symposium set the scene for the afternoon interactive workshops by presenting background information about current issues faced by lettuce growers. Len Tesoriero discussed hydroponic lettuce root diseases as well as chemical residue issues from the Cleanfresh project. Dr Grant Herron presented on Western flower thrips (WFT) resistance status and potential chemical control options in lettuce. Dr Leigh Pilkington spoke about integrated pest management (IPM) alternatives for WFT and reducing tomato spotted wilt virus (TSWV) incidence on farms. Dr Sandra McDougall facilitated a discussion about maintaining Nas (Currant Lettuce Aphid) resistant

varieties in light of the discovery of the CLA bio-type in Europe this year, which feeds on Nas-resistant varieties. This highlighted the need to monitor all lettuce, including Nas-resistant varieties for aphid activity.


Concept training works a treat

The five afternoon workshops each illustrated a basic concept relating to pests and diseases in lettuce. These workshops were rated highly by the participating growers and industry. The sessions included: crop health and the IPM spiral, a resistance development exercise, a lettuce disease recognition game, identifying thrips on sticky traps and looking at common weeds that host lettuce diseases, and an aphid quiz.

Growers had the opportunity to look at a new spray system from Croplands and Tornado that recently demonstrated improved spray coverage when compared with blower or cannon sprayers used by hydroponic lettuce growers. A short talk by Dave Farmer



Dr Leigh Pilkington (right) conducts his TSWV/WFT workshop. Image supplied by Sylvia Jelinek.

highlighted the importance of spray application, calibrating sprayers regularly and using water-sensitive paper to evaluate spray efficiency. 



For more information contact Sylvia Jelinek, Vegetable IPM Officer, NSW Department of Primary Industries.

Email: <sylvia.jelinek@dpi.nsw.gov.au>



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Women keen to increase family vegetable consumption

Wives and mothers are emerging as the key figures within families who can have a major impact on increasing vegetable consumption in Australia.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Consumer research carried out as part of the Domestic Marketing Survey, commissioned by AVIDG, has found that women are looking for ways to increase their families' vegetable consumption.
- They are particularly interested in receiving information about new varieties of vegetables and different ways of preparing them.
- The survey aims to increase consumer demand for vegetables and the value of vegetables in the Australian domestic market.

Initial results from consumer research carried out by the industry shows that wives and mothers have often tried everything they know to increase vegetable consumption in the family, and would welcome help to achieve this, particularly when it

“Many women have grown up in the ‘meat and three veg’ era and are keen to learn about new varieties.”

comes to their children.

Many have grown up in the “meat and three veg” era and are keen to learn about new varieties and discover more interesting ways to prepare vegetables.

The qualitative research and face to face interviews with key target audience groups are being carried out to help inform the development of an overarching domestic marketing strategy and

implementation framework for the Australian vegetable industry.

The strategy is a critical part of the industry’s strategic plan, VegVision 2020, and represents the largest investment to date by the Australian Vegetable Industry Development Group (AVIDG).

Expansive strategy will strengthen industry

The Domestic Marketing Strategy will have the dual objective of increasing consumer demand for vegetables, as well as increasing their value in the Australian domestic market.

The project combines face to face interviews and qualitative research to supplement existing information. Already 60 stakeholder interviews and more than 100 in-depth interviews with consumers have taken place. The

next steps include further consultative meetings with retailers and wholesalers, stakeholders in the food service industry, processors, packers, marketers and government.

The first major milestone will be a situation report that will cover the analysis of the entire vegetable industry. From here a strategic SWOT analysis will be developed that will prioritise the



plan’s key initiatives.

The consumer and domestic marketing industry advisory groups that have been set up to inform the vegetable Industry Advisory Committee have been presented with the project plan and will continue to be engaged throughout the course of the project.

In addition to these groups, a dedicated reference group consisting of key industry stakeholders across the supply chain will act as a sounding board for the project team to ensure the

outcomes are both commercially viable and can be implemented.

The final marketing strategy developed will need to complement and leverage the marketing and communications activities undertaken by commercial players in the industry, as well as government and non-government organisations.

It will produce a detailed implementation plan that will demonstrate what resources are needed and which organisations will invest time and money to ensure it is implemented.

Support mounts for national collaboration

The vegetable industry is set for increased success after AUSVEG and the Northern Territory Horticultural Association (NTHA) formalised their commitment to working together by signing an historic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

AUSVEG Chairman Michael Badcock and the NTHA CEO Tracey Leo conducted the signing ceremony in front of the AUSVEG Board in Sydney in December last year.

This agreement will allow both organisations to enhance their relationship, and increase com-

munication and participation in national workshops.

Committed partnership

As RIRDC Rural Woman of the Year 2007 for the Northern Territory, Tracey is committed to developing a commercially viable vegetable industry in the Top


End as well as for the whole of Australia.

“The Northern Territory is a new frontier for horticulture: an area of vast, still-to-be-seen potential that is witnessing a growth in vegetable production. Our growers supply product to the southern states during the

winter months, NT’s peak season, and are carving a reputation for reliability,” Tracey said.

The partnership between AUSVEG and the NTHA will enable both organisations to work more closely together to deliver improved benefits for growers.

“This is a major step forward for the industry in improving collaboration and increasing the positive profile for the vegetable industry and the business environment for growers,” Michael said.

Working together is one of the key objectives of the vegetable industry strategic plan VegVision 2020. 

“The NT is a new frontier for horticulture: an area of vast potential that is witnessing a growth in vegetable production.”

Cabbage crop at Rocky Hill, May 2007. Image supplied by Dave Maynard, NT DPIFM.



Workforce solutions for Bundaberg area

Labour shortages in Queensland are being targeted by a new workforce plan.

The Bundaberg Horticulture Workforce Development Plan, launched 5 December last year and facilitated by the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F) in partnership with industry and the Department of Education, Training and the Arts, aims to further develop the Bundaberg region as a significant horticulture producer.


“In Queensland, horticulture products are valued at \$1.865 billion, with agribusinesses around Bundaberg contributing an estimated \$300 million each year. This workforce plan for Bundaberg forms part of the Queensland Government’s long-term aim to grow the agricultural sector statewide by \$1.4 billion by 2011,” said DPI&F Deputy Director-General Rob Setter.

He said that the lessons learned developing the plan’s framework will be transferable to strategies for other regions and primary industry sectors throughout Australia.

Matt Dagan, Chair of the Bundaberg Skills Formation Strategy Steering Committee and Executive Officer of Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers, said the plan will be rolled out from early 2008 to target long-term solutions over the next five years.

“Over the past 10 years horticulture production has significantly expanded in the Bundaberg region, however, to remain globally competitive we must secure a sustainable, skilled workforce,” said Matt.

“By working together we’ve already introduced new workforce opportunities such as a cadetship program for 25 employees, a stronger schools-to-industry program, as well as reviewing and promoting career pathways in conjunction with Rural Skills Australia.”

 For more information contact the Department of Primary Industries & Fisheries Queensland
Phone: 13 25 23
Email: <callweb@dpi.qld.gov.au>

New herbicide now available

Australian vegetable growers have access to a new weapon in their fight against weeds.

A new herbicide, Frontier-P (dimethenamid-P), has been developed by research organisation Peracto, and is now registered for weed management in green bean, navy bean, pea, pumpkin, kabocha and sweet corn crops, as well as maize and poppies.

Peracto's senior researcher Phillip Frost believes that the registration of Frontier-P is a significant event for the vegetable industry, with many growers set to reap benefits from the weed management product.

"The availability of crop protection products for Australian vegetable growers has been an ongoing issue. Unfortunately the registration of a new herbicide in vegetable crops is extremely rare. For example, the only other selective broadleaf herbicide, based on a new active ingredient, to be registered in green bean and pumpkin crops in the past 27 years is Command," said Phillip.

Manufactured by BASF and distributed by Serve-Ag,

Frontier-P has been registered for the management of a variety of weeds, including Crowsfoot Grass (*Eleusine indica*), Barnyard Grass (*Echinochloa crus galli*), Summer Grass (*Digitaria ciliaris*), Amaranthus (*Amaranthus spp.*), Sow or Milk Thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*) and Wild Hops (*Nicandra physaloides*).

and industry in bringing new products to market. Industry participation, like that seen with Frontier-P, is vital to our business in getting projects across the line," Gavin said.

Tasmanian bean grower Ian Young is delighted to see the herbicide available to growers. As a long-term supporter of Frontier-P's development, he was involved

“This is a leading example of collaborations between research and industry in bringing new products to market.”

Industry involvement

Gavin Heard, BASF's Technical & Regulatory Officer – Agricultural Products, believes that the development of Frontier-P was made possible through the strong support provided by the vegetable industry.

"This is a leading example of collaborations between research

in a number of commercial trials for the herbicide during the research stages of development.

"I've been waiting a long time for this product to become commercially available, and I'm just happy that it's finally here," Ian said.

Recent minor use permits

Permit number	Permit description (pesticide / crop / pest)	Date issued	Expiry date	States covered
ALLIUM VEGETABLES				
PER10111*	Linuron / Leeks / Grass and broadleaf weeds	5-Jul-07	30-Jun-09	All states except Vic
BRASSICAS				
PER8819	Filan Fungicide (boscalid) / Brassicas & Brassica leafy vegetables, Lettuce & Beans / Sclerotinia rot	10-Oct-07	31-Oct-09	All states except Vic
CURCUBITS				
PER10267	Lancer or Orthene (acephate) / Peppers, Tomatoes, Ornamentals (non-bearing) / Western flower thrips	1-Nov-07	30-Sep-10	All states except Vic
PER10345	Bupirimate / Curcubits, Peppers / Powdery mildew	4-Oct-07	31-Dec-08	All states except Vic
STEM & STALK VEGETABLES				
PER10270*	Select (clethodim) / Rhubarb / Grass weeds	15-Nov-07	31-Dec-08	All states

* Additional residue data is required.

MEDIA MATTERS

Genetically modified food has been the flavour *de Jour* for major newspapers, as Victoria and New South Wales take steps to lift the ban on commercial GM crops. Here are five headlines from the past two months.

“Don’t sell out call on GE”

Hobart Mercury, Hobart
Thursday 29 November, page 9

If Tasmania dropped its ban on genetically engineered (GE) food, the state’s key markets would be jeopardised, said Food Industry Council of Tasmania member and vegetable grower Richard Bovill.

“GE foods had no proven benefits to consumers. We can become GE any day of the week, but the day we are, we can never become GE-free,” he said, adding that the state’s quarantine barriers could help stop incursions from interstate.

The call to continue to enforce a GE ban in Tasmania has come as lobbying to allow GE crops intensified. To keep growers informed, there is increased pressure to plan state-wide forums for farmers.

“This story is far from over, it will be a long-running saga,” said TFGA president Roger Swain.

“Push to sell health benefits of fruit and vegetables makes everyone a winner”

West Australian, Perth
Friday 30 November, page 7

VegetablesWA in conjunction with Western Potatoes Ltd and Edith Cowan University has secured \$130,000 in federal funding for the first stages of the Vegetables, Fruit, Health and Healing project.

The project aims to teach Western Australians about the specific values of fruit and vegetables in preventing and fighting chronic diseases. The project is planned in a bid to reduce the state’s health bill and boost returns to growers.

VegetablesWA chief executive Jim Turley said the “the benefits for growers are obvious—the more fruit and vegetables sold the more stable their returns”.

“Fresh food carbon project”

Hobart Mercury, Hobart
Monday 10 December, page 6

Houston’s Farm in Cambridge TAS has been awarded a \$100,000 bursary to help measure the carbon footprints of fresh-food producers across Australia. The bursary was awarded as part of Woolworths’ million-dollar program to encourage innovation and sustainability in the fresh-food industry.

Farm co-owner Colin Houston said the research funded by the bursary could be used as a blueprint for other businesses. “Nationally and around the world all businesses are going to have to confront the issue and move forward with it,” he said.

“Farms destroy vegie crops”

Herald Sun, Melbourne
Wednesday 21 November, page 34

Farmers have been forced to destroy an oversupply of beetroot, broccoli, baby carrots and radish in key Victorian production areas.

Victorian Farmers Federation horticulture group president Peter Cochrane said he “had ploughed carrots and radish into his paddocks, slashed parsley and left beautiful beetroot on the ground. It’s cruel, but that’s the way farming is”.

The oversupply was caused by high-yield crops grown in south and east Gippsland, which has resulted in prices paid for broccoli plummeting by more than 75 per cent. In many cases, this puts production costs above the revenue received from sales.

“More grief for Brumby over canola GM”

The Age, Melbourne
Thursday 29 November, page 5

Victorian Premier John Brumby has been heavily criticised by Labor MPs over the controversial issue of Genetically Modified (GM) food. It comes after the state cabinet decided to remove the ban on growing GM canola in Victoria, a decision proposed by a panel headed by the state’s chief scientist, Sir Gustav Nossal.

Mr Brumby has faced criticism from his own MPs over the handling of the issue. Gembrook MP Tammy Lobato said the effects of GM on people would be worse than the “disasters of thalidomide” while likening GM food to asbestos, in terms of the damage it could do to consumers.

New government focuses on industry adaptation

A reform of Exceptional Circumstances policy and investment in climate change research spearhead the Australian Government's plans for the rural sector.

The newly elected Australian Government will introduce a number of reforms to the nation's \$38 billion agriculture sector, including:

- Helping primary industries prepare for climate change
- Investing in the quarantine system to prevent the introduction of exotic diseases
- Strengthening the role of growers in the delivery of environmental services
- Improving the profitability and productivity of the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors
- Improving farm productivity through continued investment in research, development and extension
- Fixing the regulatory framework to reduce red tape and costs, and improve profitability.

Climate change reform

Australia's Farming Future, a four-year \$130 million plan, aims to prepare primary industries for the impact of climate change.

The plan includes:

- \$60 million for a Climate Change Adaptation Partnerships Program, to improve awareness about climate change in the agriculture sector, develop better climate modeling and increase growers' use of climate data, and offer climate change workshops and training programs to growers.
- \$15 million for a Climate Change and Productivity

Research Program, to fund research conducted on climate change by R&D service providers.

- \$55 million in a Climate Change Adjustment program, including a \$10 million boost for the Rural Financial Counselling service. This program will provide growers with the funds to obtain professional advice, training and re-establishment grants.

This considered investment in climate change is reflected in the reform of Exceptional Circumstances (EC) policy, including re-considering the meaning of EC in the face of seven years of drought and the established scientific link between the drought and human-induced climate change.

The government has stated a desire to increase the number of drought-ready growers, preparing them for long periods with reduced rainfall. It believes that EC arrangements should not support growers who are not viable in the longer-term.

Pest watch

An independent review will be held of current quarantine arrangements, covering the functions of Biosecurity Australia and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Services (AQIS).

There will be an investment of \$5.4 million to develop and implement a National Fruit Fly Strategy and \$15 million will be invested in a National Weeds and Productivity Research Program.

The program aims to reduce the impact of weeds on farm productivity, with better coordination and information exchange between researchers, land managers and regulatory agencies.

some implementation issues that are being gradually resolved. This is to be expected, considering the cultural change that is being expected by the sector. The main aim of industry is to achieve the

“The government wants to increase the number of drought-ready growers, preparing them for long periods with reduced rainfall.”

Training and fair prices

The government has made a commitment to fund 450,000 skilled training places but the \$26.3 million FarmBis training scheme will be scrapped.

In a bid to protect the interests of growers by ensuring they get a fair deal from major buyers, the role of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) will be strengthened, allowing it to conduct a national grocery pricing survey. The survey will involve taking submissions from individuals, supply chain businesses, consumer groups and other interested parties.

The effectiveness of the Horticulture Code of Conduct will also be evaluated by the ACCC. Prior to the election, the Horticulture Australia Council (HAC) welcomed this announcement.

“The code is still in its infancy, and has understandably had

code's objectives of clear and transparent trading relationships between growers and wholesalers,” said HAC Chair, Stuart Swaddling.

Water initiatives

There will be a move to bring forward funding in the \$10 billion National Plan for Water Security to tackle urgent water problems in the Murray-Darling Basin. Mirroring this, funding to buy licences from willing irrigators to speed up the reform process has also been brought forward.

Other water initiatives include spending up to \$400 million to fix evaporation at Menindee Lakes and a further \$124 million on the Wimmera Mallee pipeline. The government has promised to streamline the federal water bureaucracy and reduce the number of bodies involved in managing the basin.

Burke appointed as Agriculture Minister

Tony Burke MP has been appointed Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. He previously held the Shadow Immigration portfolio. Tony has a background in small business; he entered Federal Parliament in 2004.

"Tony will have a wide and extensive brief in dealing with the needs of the bush, dealing with the needs of rural Australia, dealing with the needs of rural industry," said Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.

As the representative for the inner-Sydney electorate of Watson, Tony said he will be familiarising himself with the issues faced by those in rural Australia and primary industries.

"I will be traveling widely across rural and regional Australia to hear from as many people as possible. I intend to consult with Australia's farmers, their industry representatives and representatives from the fishing and forestry industries, along with the many small businesses in rural and regional Australia who make an extraordinarily valuable contribution to Australia's economy," he said.



Tony Burke MP, the newly appointed Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

"It is a privilege to be appointed to such an important portfolio and I look forward to working with regional and rural communities to promote the continued development of Australia's primary industries."

Other appointments of interest include:

- Peter Garrett as Minister for the Environment
- Penny Wong as Minister for Climate Change and Water
- Anthony Albanese as Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
- Nicola Roxon as Minister for Health.

Responses to Labor's election win

"Post drought, the future of Australian agriculture is bright. Farmers need strong leadership to continue to advance our industry. Whilst Mr Rudd has said that he will present new leadership, whether or not he can present Australian agriculture with a strong plan for our future will be telling in whether his leadership is right."

—Simon Ramsay, President VFF

"I congratulate Mr Tony Burke on his appointment as Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and look forward to fostering a productive working relationship with him. WAFarmers looks forward to working with the new Federal Government to achieve the best outcomes for our primary producers and the Australian economy."

—Trevor De Landgraft, President WAFarmers

"Key parts of the new Labor Government's plan for primary industries include a focus on climate change, quarantine arrangements, research and development and red tape reduction. A review of the Horticulture Code of Conduct has also been promised. This review is welcomed given the Coalition's ongoing refusal to commit to a cost effective, workable and commercial outcome of this issue."

—Andrew Young, CEO Brisbane Markets Limited

"The Association will be working most closely with the new Minister for Agriculture, Tony Burke, and we are eager to have the opportunity to meet with him and discuss those issues on the rural and regional agenda. Ministers Burke, (Penny) Wong, (Anthony) Albanese and (Peter) Garrett all bring to the table their own experience and knowledge, and the Association is keen to open its doors to each of them in an effort to continue the flow of information between rural and regional communities and government."

—Jock Laurie, President NSW Farmers' Association

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Charm consumers with interaction and information

A study about Asian vegetables in the marketplace has discovered how to entice consumers to trial new products, write researchers Jenny Ekman, Richard deVos and Jonathan Eccles.

Various studies of the Asian vegetable industry by the Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation (RIRDC) have shown that, despite increasing production, consumption remained largely within the communities already familiar with these products. The two main barriers to widening the consumption of Asian vegetables were:

- people were confused by differences in names
- people did not know what to do with them.

A project was developed to standardise the names of Asian vegetables and devise a marketing strategy to promote them to the wider community. Standardised names were launched in November 2005; since then, research has been conducted into devising a marketing strategy.



Ayam staff cooked up a storm at Harris Farm Markets in Penrith, NSW. Consumers responded well to the in-store recipe demonstrations and tastings.

Encourage authentic dishes at home

After surveying retail stores and store managers from Sydney to Wollongong, it was found that many retail store managers did not know much about Asian vegetables or how consumers might use them. In many cases only a very limited range was available and the quality of these products had no relationship to the price being charged.

Store managers were asked what they thought could be done to increase sales of Asian vegetables; nearly half (43 per cent) suggested providing recipes with another 20 per cent nominating in-store demonstrations.

Based on this, four recipe cards were developed, deliberately making the recipes easy to cook, with only a few ingredients. The cost was reduced by working with the Ayam range of Asian sauces. Ayam also assisted by organising cooking demonstrations in Harris Farm Market stores around Sydney. Shoppers were able to see, smell and taste the vegetables then take away the instructions to make the dishes themselves. These demonstrations were extremely popular and comments by consumers gave some great insights:

“I always wondered what to do with that...”

“I never knew they were so easy to cook!”

“That’s really tasty!”

People seemed to really enjoy learning about the ‘exotic’ new vegetables from the Asian female demonstrators—noticeably more than demonstrations by European females. Combining the Asian style sauces and vegetables in a wok added an authenticity that attracted many shoppers.

Consumers loved discovering that the products were locally grown. Even Ayam staff commented that they had a much

more positive reaction at these demonstrations than when they were promoting Ayam products alone. Consumers clearly want to feel a connection with the farm and the grower, especially when it is a local product. Helping them find that connection could also help increase sales.

Mum’s the word

The next stage of the project was to conduct focus groups. These were divided into:

- Lower middle-class / upper middle-class
- Women with school-age children / women aged less than 30 without children / women aged more than 30 without children.

To check whether the results from these could be applied to the wider population, a national online survey of 1,015 ‘main shoppers’ was also conducted.

The focus groups and surveys found that shopping for food is still very much the responsibility of women in the household. Overall, it is an activity most do

“ Consumers want to feel a connection with the farm and the grower, especially when it is a local product. ”

not enjoy. However, for fruit and vegetables there is some appeal and pleasure based around the sensory experience.

While the majority purchase the bulk of their fruit and vegetables, weekly, from supermarkets, there appears (from the qualitative component of the research) to be an underlying discontent with the quality of produce available through chains. Nevertheless, supermarkets offer the strong appeal of one-stop convenience—particularly for those pressed for time.



While there remains some confusion among consumers about the names of Asian vegetables, bok choy was remembered and readily mentioned by all participants in the focus groups.

Many participants said they top-up their purchases, or look for special and different produce, at the local fruit and vegetable store. Rightly or wrongly, these outlets

young, upper and upper/middle socio-economic groups, the role of meal-decider and food preparer usually fell to women in the household. While this is often perceived to be a burden, there are strong emotional positives around nurturing and caring, creativity, and pride (such as when cooking something special or entertaining).

Where there are children in the household, the meal decision is very much determined by “what they will eat” as there is a strong aversion to the disputes around food refusal and to throwing-out (“wasting”) uneaten food. In these households, the likelihood of trying a new dish in the normal menu pattern is limited.

The time available to cook is a significant issue and when deciding what to cook, meat is still a very strong driver. That is, a decision is made about what meat will be served, then decisions are

were perceived to have fresher, better quality produce, a wider range, and expertise and advice.

More than 85 per cent of shoppers have some sort of list or plan for their fruit and vegetable purchases. Yet most can be tempted to buy something unplanned by stimuli such as specials, new-season produce, stand-out presentation or visual appeal, in-store tastings, and recipe cards.

Decisions, decisions

As with shopping, in all but the

made about vegetable selection and preparation.

Many consumers are unsure which products are classified as Asian vegetables. Almost all in the focus groups nominated buk choy, which they invariably named correctly, with some mentioning baby corn, Chinese cabbage, ginger and sugar snap peas.

While the quantitative survey suggests around one third of households have purchased Asian vegetables and of those around 65 per cent purchase them at least monthly, these results may have been influenced by different ideas about what an Asian vegetable is. The qualitative group's awareness of and experience with the Asian vegetables was very low. This probably reflects the total market situation more accurately.

There are clear reasons for the low number of consumers trialling Asian vegetables:

- Not knowing what to do with them/how to cook them.
- Not knowing what they taste like.
- Concern that their children/partners will not like the dish (linked closely to the wastage issue).
- Fear of a culinary failure (linked to the pride issue).

On the positive side, Asian vegetables were perceived to be

THE BOTTOM LINE

- In many households, the responsibility of food shopping and meal preparation remains with women.
- Preparing meals for children and not having enough time to experiment with new ingredients or recipes are barriers against consumers trialling 'new' products, such as Asian vegetables.
- In-store demonstrations and easy recipes are both potential ways to widen the Asian vegetable consumption market.

i For more information contact Jenny Ekman, New South Wales Department of Primary Industries

Email: <jenny.ekman@dpi.nsw.gov.au>

Spell it out

From the RIRDC survey, it became clear that two main drivers will stimulate consumers to trial new products.

Recipes and recipe cards with:

- 1 • Quick, easy dishes requiring a small number of ingredients
- Information about the taste and nutrition of the vegetable
- Guidance about what the vegetable would be served with (or recipes that include the other components of the meal).
- 2 Outstanding in-store presentation of high-quality, fresh produce; and support at the retail level, which may include:
 - Recipe cards alongside the vegetables
 - Required sauces/ingredients located close to the vegetables
 - Staff involvement
 - In-store tasting of the featured dish(es).



healthy, fresh, local and cheap.

Specialty Asian produce stores were seen as the most appropriate place to purchase a range of good-quality Asian vegetables, though many in the groups said they had no easy access to such outlets. After that, fruit and vegetable stores were seen as the best option.

Once group members had the chance to examine the vegetables, look at recipe cards and discuss the benefits of freshness, nutrition, availability and ease of cooking, their openness to trial was much greater.

Pitch to consumers

A successful marketing program for Asian vegetables must:

- Have a strong, consistent and appealing theme or brand.
- Target consumers with the highest likelihood to trial.
- Have the active participation of the selected retail outlets.
- Have high-quality tools such as recipe cards, point-of-sale material, media releases and



Consumers loved discovering that the vegetables were locally grown and that by purchasing them they were helping growers. Above, Kwok Hing Choy, Harris Farm Markets head grower for Asian vegetables, holds a dong qua (winter melon) at his farm near Kemps Creek in Western Sydney.

- fact sheets.
- Ensure adequate, good-quality produce is available.
- Be a concentrated campaign, timed to capitalise on sales potential and avoid competition with other vegetable promotions.
- Utilise a mix of media to carry the message, at the same time as the in-store activity.
- Be actively 'sold' throughout the industry.



Asian Vegetable Profile

Kang kong (*Ipomoea aquatica*)

Also known as: water convolvulus, water spinach, swamp cabbage, ong choy, hung tsai, rau muong.



Background

Kang kong is closely related to sweet potato, as well as 'morning glory', the climbing plant with large purple flowers that grows as a weed in the warmer parts of Australia. Like its relative, kang kong can escape from cultivation and the plant is considered a weed in some places. However, it is a popular and common vegetable in many parts of south-east Asia.

Where and how does it grow?

Kang kong prefers damp conditions, flourishing along the banks of streams and boggy areas. The plant's long, hollow, pale-green stems float on the water or creep along damp ground. The leaves are darker green and are usually long to heart-shaped, depending on variety.

It is quick to grow—simply break off a piece and put it into damp soil. Yields of 10kg per square metre have been reported in Hong Kong. In a greenhouse it can grow up to 10cm per day when given plenty of water and

fertiliser, which is often how it is grown in Australia. This maximises yield, minimises water use, and helps keep the plant clean.

Preparation and cooking

Unlike some other green vegetables, kang kong is not bitter; it has a sweet, mild flavour. The young shoots and leaves are picked before the plant flowers to ensure good quality.

In Vietnam, kang kong is eaten raw as part of a salad or included in soup. Elsewhere it is usually lightly cooked, such as stir-fried with a savoury paste or chillies. The stems should be added first when cooking as the leaves take only a few seconds to wilt.

Kang kong is high in carotenoids, including lutein and provitamin A. It contains significant amounts of calcium and iron. Eaten in large quantities, kang kong can act as a mild laxative.



For more information contact:
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Climate change is big business



As the push for greener living gains momentum, businesses are wearing their environment credentials on their sleeve. AUSVEG Chief Economist Ian James says that the vegetable industry should lead the charge.

There has been much talk about the impact of climate change on Australian agriculture. Most of the talk has centred around changing weather patterns, the impact on the supply of irrigation water and the best location for different forms of agriculture. However, climate change will also potentially have a major impact on growers' incomes. Proving a commitment to tackling climate change will help growers access local and international markets.

Make no mistake; climate change is now a mainstream business issue. Professor Michael

Porter writing in the October 2007 issue of the Harvard Business Review made the following statement: "Periodically, major new forces dramatically reshape the business world—as globalisation and the information technology revolution have been doing for the past several decades. Climate change in its complexity and potential impact, may rival them both."

AUSVEG was one of the first agricultural associations to understand the implications of this issue on the industry and prior to last year's federal election lobbied for a \$4 million grant to provide a national audit of the vegetable industry's

carbon footprint. The newly elected government has promised \$130 million over four years to assist Australian agriculture to adapt and respond to climate change. Of this, \$60 million will be for a "Climate Change Adaptation Partnerships Program." AUSVEG will seek to access this program on behalf of growers.

Climate change has spawned other buzz words, including carbon footprint and food miles. What relevance do these terms have to growers? First, it must be recognised that vegetable growing is a business, with the aim of making money, and that global factors seriously impact the rates of return derived from business activities. A major global concern is rising world temperatures due to carbon emissions, and the global community has committed to tackling the issue of climate change, as represented through



the Kyoto Protocol. In light of this, business has recognised the marketing advantage in having a visible commitment to play a positive role in reducing carbon emissions.

Climate change is a major political issue, especially for higher income earners and generation Y. This market has the greatest margins and it is where commitment to environmentally friendly practices is likely to return the biggest dividends. The corporate sector and, importantly for growers, the supermarket chains are very aware of the impact that climate change issues are having on consumer attitudes and profitability. There will need to be an industry commitment in partnership with supply line participants to establish a carbon footprint for the industry. However, if you expect that supermarkets in Australia will take up the full cost of the industry proving its environmental credentials, think again.

Food miles

The term food miles describes the distance that food travels from producer to consumer. This has been a big issue in the UK, Germany and to a lesser extent the other European Union members. It is now finding voice in Japan and the USA. Proponents

distance transport are less than the emissions from the transport of local product to market and that the carbon emissions associated with the intensive nature of agriculture in Europe were greater than those in agriculture exporting countries such as Australia.

Carbon footprint

The food miles issue is still having a powerful impact in the media and probably among some consumers, but supermarkets and government authorities have moved on to the concept of carbon footprinting. This requires an industry to demonstrate the impact on the environment from grower to consumer and to provide evidence of a commitment by the industry to reduce its carbon emissions.

UK supermarkets are taking the lead. For instance, Tesco is investing more than one billion dollars to ensure that all products in its supermarkets receive a carbon rating; Marks and Spencer is investing \$450 million to reduce its carbon footprint by 80 per cent over five years. Also, a carbon rating and labeling scheme is being trialed that will require labels to state the carbon dioxide emitted during the life cycle of the food item and the producer to commit to reducing its carbon footprint.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Climate change has moved into the mainstream, with media and consumers increasingly concerned about the effects business has on the environment.
- Europe is responding to the issue by investing funds into carbon ratings and carbon footprinting schemes.
- The Australian vegetable industry should act early in response to climate change issues to introduce systems that are transparent, and targeted at consumers both locally and overseas.

over a five-year transitional period. Climate change issues will be included as part of this payment. European growers will be required to audit their farms to measure the carbon footprint and access to the payment will depend on reducing this footprint. Once an audit has occurred it becomes a powerful tool to use against other nations, almost forcing competitors to undertake their own carbon footprint.

Climate change is rapidly becoming an integral part of doing business, and it's a business decision as to how seriously growers respond to the issue. There are obvious benefits for the Australian vegetable industry to lead the charge on carbon footprinting, rather than look back and moan the loss of markets.

“ If you expect that supermarkets will take up the full cost of the industry proving its environmental credentials, think again. ”

argue that to be environmentally responsible, consumers should buy local product and reject food from distance sources such as Australia because the further food travels, the more energy is consumed and the more environmentally damaging greenhouse gases are emitted.

Recently, a number of studies have shown that carbon emissions associated with long-

Common Agricultural Policy

There will be major changes to the way vegetables are treated under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the European Union from next year. Under the reform to the CAP announced in 2003, growers receive a single farm payment rather than a subsidy for production. The vegetable sector will be integrated into this framework

adaptive pest meets its match

A parasitoid wasp imported from Pakistan has reduced Silverleaf whitefly populations in test sites by up to 70 per cent, writes Brea Acton.

Silverleaf whitefly is one of the most destructive pests in Queensland, causing widespread damage to vegetable crops and seriously affecting yields. In 2001-2002, the vegetable industry spent more than \$5 million on insecticides to protect crops from Silverleaf whitefly, which at peak times has been responsible for crop losses of up to 40 per cent.

For the past five years, Dr Siva-Subramaniam, an entomologist with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, has been leading a project to research the ecology and

management of Silverleaf whitefly. With his team of researchers, he has devised an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) system to help control and eradicate this devastating pest.

“An IPM approach is the best long-term strategy for tackling the whitefly. We have developed a collaborative approach with growers, researchers, industry organisations and chemical companies to tackle this issue,” said Subra.

Silverleaf whitefly contaminates a plant by feeding on its nutrients, while simultaneously injecting it with toxic saliva that causes stunted growth, low-quality produce and lower yields.

“High populations cause damage to the crops by reducing fruit size, discolouring and reducing sweetness of fruits, and contaminating fruits with black sooty mould. The affected produce is not acceptable to the markets and has caused millions of dollars in crop losses for the industry,” said Subra.

One of the most challenging characteristics of this pest is its ability to adapt to chemical pesticides. “It has the capacity to develop resistance to insecticides, so it is difficult to control only with

chemicals,” said Subra. Adult whiteflies have also learned to breed on the underside of leaves, avoiding chemical sprays.

Successful new release

The primary focus of the project is to devise a complete IPM program to help protect growers from Silverleaf whitefly. This program supports the use of “soft” chemicals (safe for beneficial insects and humans), clever farm-management practices and the use of biological control, such as the introduction of a parasitic wasp.

Subra and his team have successfully mass-bred a tiny parasitoid *Eretmocerus* wasp, imported from Pakistan, at the DPI&F’s Bowen Research Station. “We released more than 500,000 parasitic wasps on to several vegetable farms in the Bowen and Burdekin districts during this season,” he said.

The release of these wasps has to be monitored carefully and in-line with the Silverleaf whitefly’s lifecycle, as the whitefly develops from egg to adult in between 18 and 28 days. “Wasps need to be released one or two times during the early part of the crops so that they can breed and arrest the



Silverleaf damage in zucchini caused by whitefly feeding.
Image supplied by Queensland DPI&F.



THE BOTTOM LINE

- Silverleaf whitefly has been responsible for crop losses of up to 40 per cent.
- The pest can adapt to chemical pesticides, so an Integrated Pest Management program is a recommended option for its control.
- Parasitoid wasps have been imported from Pakistan and released in test growing areas, with pest control figures of up to 70 per cent.



For more information visit:
www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers
Project number: VG05050
Keywords: Silverleaf whitefly
or contact Dr Siva-Subramaniam,
Entomologist, Queensland
DPI&F
Phone: 0417 784 686
Email: <Siva.Subramaniam@dpi.qld.gov.au>

Silverleaf whitefly populations,” said Subra.

So far, the introduction of the parasitic wasp on-farm has resulted in between a 30 per cent and 70 per cent control of the pest. However, this is only one element in the IPM strategy. “Other factors, such as the use of softer chemicals, good crop hygiene, and pre- and post-production techniques still need to be part of the regime,” he said.

What does this mean for growers in terms of on-farm practice?

“Controlling whitefly populations before they establish in crops is very important for successful whitefly management. If the adult flies are allowed to colonise and oviposit on the leaves, it becomes more difficult to do this,” said Subra.


As Silverleaf whitefly moves between different types of crops, it is essential that on-farm strategies be applied to all crops and not just those directly affected. Also important for growers is the selection and timing of chemical insecticide applications. “Insecticides should be selected according to the growth stage of the whitefly, the infestation level, their impact on beneficial insects and crop age,” said Subra.

Keep informed, stay vigilant

A reference guide is being developed for growers, which will provide detailed information about how and when to use insecticides most effectively. Subra intends to run information sessions for growers and consultants to deliver research findings and discuss issues such as whitefly ecology, drivers of outbreaks and further pest resistance strategies.

comprehensive IPM strategy it has already produced relevant findings that will help growers on-farm.

The ongoing challenges will be the implementation of programs to manage the pest and working with industry to effect change.

“The cooperation of vegetable growers, consultants, chemical companies and insecticide resellers is vital to preserve the long-term efficacy of IPM-friendly insecticides,” said Subra. 

“Introducing the parasitic wasp on-farm has resulted in between a 30 per cent and 70 per cent control of Silverleaf whitefly.”

Growers should also follow careful farm-sanitation practices. “To prevent later yield and quality losses, growers need to be vigilant about spraying out old crops and cleaning them up promptly. This will minimise the migration of Silverleaf whitefly adults from old blocks into younger crops,” said Subra.

The project has another year until completion, but through this

Crucial link helps worlds collide

Assisting growers to understand and adopt R&D findings is all in a day's work for extension officer Tony Burfield, writes David Jarwood.

Tony Burfield, an extension officer with the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI), has been a conduit between Integrated Pest Management (IPM) research work from around the country and greenhouse vegetable growers for the past seven years.

He is one of a handful of extension officers that provide a link between scientific information from research and development projects and growers' on-farm needs.

Tony said growers and scientists work in separate worlds. "Scientists are more concerned with technical issues while growers are concerned with the market price, weather, current farm techniques and the availability of chemicals for their pest issues," he said.

Growers are interested by the practicalities of applying new technology and how it can help their crops but they need someone who can gather technical information from scientists and relay it.

A successful extension officer must work with people from a

“Growers are interested by the practicalities of applying new technology and how it can help their crops.”

variety of backgrounds who have different approaches to farming and running their business, said Tony. He has had a host of experience working with people from different backgrounds, having previously worked for 15 years in labour market programs for the long-term unemployed.

Pest management in four steps

Tony started as an extension officer in 2000; his new lifestyle took him out from Adelaide to growers in Virginia. The main project he has been involved with has been management of Western Flower Thrips—a pest that has caused considerable damage to vegetable crops.

Western Flower Thrips are difficult to kill and can quickly build a resistance to pesticides used. "The conventional approach has been to spray more frequently but this was regularly failing to control this pest," said Tony.

Research findings from the late-1990s recommended an IPM approach, which is a four-step strategy:

- Watch the crop and monitor for insects on a weekly, if not daily, basis.
- Spray crops only when chemicals are required and likely to be effective, and rotate the chemical group used to avoid pests developing resistance.
- Encourage beneficial insects by using chemicals that are

less harmful to beneficials when additional control is needed.

- Ensure good farm hygiene by controlling weeds and not leaving infested crops in the ground.

When Western Flower Thrips arrived in the early 1990s, scientists



Fighting Pests with novel strategies—the Revegetation by Design Team: (from left) Dr Nancy Schellhorn, Glenys Wood, Dr Peter Taverner and Tony Burfield.


anticipated insecticide resistance would become a big issue. "This was a problem waiting to happen as we had been too reliant on insecticide sprays," said Tony.

The task was to explain to growers the reasons for altering their approach to controlling resistance-prone pests, and the steps with which they could achieve this.

"Growers need assistance to observe the crops in a more detailed way and evaluate the correct course of action, rather than saying, 'Today is Friday and I am going to spray chemical X'," he said.

Tony is now moving into different areas. He is completing extension work on a project that is looking at the role of compost

in suppressing root diseases and improving plant health. He is also helping growers develop economic business models using gross margins to make it possible to assess the value of making changes to their operations.

"This will help the working relationship between growers and researchers to become as focused and effective as possible." 



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sa.gov.au>



Tony Burfield Project Timeline

- 2000 Started on Western Flower Thrips (WFT) extension program, based at Virginia (HAL and SARDI).
- 2003 WFT project extended and refunded in July to build on early success with pest management practices (HAL and SARDI).
Supported establishment of Revegetation by Design to research replacing weeds and pests with native plants and beneficial insects.
- 2005 Assisted with National IPM Stocktake and strategic planning (HAL and NSW DPI).
- 2006 Assisted with Greenhouse Industry Strategic plan.
Began IPM web-page (HAL).
- 2007 Provided extension for "Compost for soils—disease suppression" R&D project (South Australian project only, through the compost industry and state government).
Provided South Australia extension for 'Greenhouse hygiene' project (HAL and NSW DPI).

Tony Burfield (right) with grower Le Phan, long-term supporter of IPM. Images supplied by Tony Burfield.

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 vegetablesWA

Fresh idea gives consistent rewards

Successfully introducing a new product takes time, money and a willingness to think outside the square. By Brea Acton. Photography by Yme Tulliners.

The Jauncey family has farmed the rich soil plains of the Queensland Darling Downs since the 1930s, originally harvesting wheat, corn and sorghum. Sonya McConville is the CEO and Marketing Manager of Matilda Fresh Foods, and a third-generation member of this successful family business.

“My grandfather bought the property at Wando in 1938 and started growing grains. In the mid-1980s, my father started trialling horticultural crops and brassicas appeared to be the crops best suited to our growing region,” said Sonya.

In 1992, Matilda Fresh was one of the first Australian exporters of broccoli to Japan. For the next decade, the company focused on export opportunities, before devising new ways to expand into the domestic market.

“We decided we needed to do something different if we were still going to be a family business for the next generation, that we had to think outside the square and set our sights a bit higher,” said Sonya.

In 2003, Matilda Fresh hired a Business Development Manager, Andrew Waddell, to help develop a new product—fresh, pre-cut and washed, broccoli and cauliflower florets. The company built a new facility in Toowoomba and moved its processing operations off-farm. Sonya and



Andrew Waddell (left), Business Development Manager Matilda Fresh, with CEO and Marketing Manager Sonya McConville at the company's processing facility in Toowoomba, Queensland.



her husband, Antony, now manage this facility while Sonya's brother, James Jauncey, is the Managing Director of Matilda Farms.

The idea for this ready-to-eat product came about after looking at packets of frozen florets and identifying the need for a fresh equivalent. Using a process of

to allow the product to become stabilised."

Realised potential

Prior to approaching Coles, Matilda Fresh spent more than one year conducting market research and running focus groups to ensure it had the right balance in terms of portion size and packaging. Then, in 2005, a visit was made to the Coles national office in Melbourne.

"We went with some samples, a PowerPoint presentation and our story, where we'd come from and the research and effort that had been put into developing the product. We spoke with the right people who saw the opportunity," she said.

Craig Charles, National Buyer for Brassicas at Coles, was one of those people who saw the potential in the product and company.

"The predominant reason we decided to move forward with them is the professionalism of the

“ We have targeted products we can sell at a fixed price, so we can pay our growers a fixed price. ”

intensive crop management to ensure quality and extended shelf life, Matilda Fresh has achieved a 12-day life cycle for the product.

"It all starts back in the paddock with the agronomical steps we're taking to make sure the product is picked at its prime," said Sonya.

"All product is hydrovacced after being picked to reduce the core temperature. This directly affects the shelf life. Even the tub itself is made from smart packaging, using a micro-perforated film,

continued page 28

The ready-to-eat florets timeline

- July 2003** Business Development Manager hired to develop "Matilda Tops" product
Feasibility study commenced
- July 2004** New processing facility in Toowoomba designed and built
Market research and focus groups conducted over a 12-month period
- July 2005** Processing operations moved to Toowoomba facility
Installation of new equipment and Quality Assurance laboratory
- Dec 2005** Matilda Fresh approaches Coles with samples of its product
Coles begins 12-week period of quality assurance test
- Feb 2006** "Matilda Tops" product launched in 20 Coles stores
- Feb 2007** Product shifted to the "You'll love Coles" label
Available in 80 per cent of Coles stores along the east coast
- Nov 2007** Product launched in South Australia

company. We knew that Matilda had an established export business based on quality and it was a natural progression to allow our customers to trade up from the traditional loose broccoli bought by the kilo into the Matilda ready-to-eat format," Craig said.

"Prior to and after launching,

Supply chain stability

The impact on the Matilda Fresh business in terms of growth has been substantial and it appears to be a very happy partnership for both companies.

"We have a fantastic relationship with Coles," said Sonya. "I believe we are offering solutions

“If we were going to be a family business for the next generation, we had to think outside the square.”

we conduct quality assurance and shelf-life testing, so it stands up to the cool chain process to allow delivery to all states. With a ready-to-eat product we have to ensure that the suppliers we deal with meet requirements. Matilda had invested in a state of the art processing facility and we were very satisfied with the way they conducted themselves and managed their properties," he said.

Coles introduced the floret packs gradually, under the company's own "Matilda Tops" label. After a period of 12 months, once it had proven to be a viable product, Coles shifted the product to the "You'll Love Coles" label.

"We hand-selected 20 stores in three states—Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria—based on demographics. We monitored sales and waste over a period of three to six months and then released it to 80 per cent of our stores across the east coast," said Craig.

One of the approaches Coles used to get customers on board with the product was via discounts and group-purchasing offers.

"Initially, we offered the customer 50 cents off per pack to trial the product. Over June and July (peak winter) we coordinated a dual promotion between Gourmet Garden (herbs in a tube) and Matilda. What we're looking at doing further down the track is complex promotional purchasing, such as buy one pack and get the second half-price," Craig said.

and opportunities for each other."

Although Matilda Farms is the primary supplier, producing in different growing regions and supplying 12 months of the year, Matilda Fresh also has relationships with growers in other regions to ensure consistent year-round delivery. One of the more impressive initiatives of this business is the company's commitment to offering a stable price to growers throughout the year. Coming from a farming background, Sonya understands the pressures growers face in terms of price variation and income security.

"Being very conscious of our background and linkages, we have targeted products we can sell at a fixed price with a margin that is acceptable, so that we can pay our growers a fixed price. We're trying to find consistency right through our supply chain," she said.

This long-term vision, evident within the company, means that Matilda Fresh is well placed to continue to expand its business.

"The growing pains in those early stages are fairly difficult to manage, but it's a matter of getting to a point where the product is viable and you've justified its existence. Once you've done, that the sky's the limit in terms of opportunity," said Sonya.



Matilda Fresh awards

- Premier of Queensland's award for Outstanding New Exporter for 1992
- Austrade's Innovative Agricultural Marketing Award for 1993
- Premier of Queensland's Export Award for Agricultural Products for 1994
- Finalist in the 1994 Australian Export Awards for Agricultural Products
- 2004 Southern Queensland State Development Award



"Matilda Tops" were trialed in 20 Coles stores before the labelling was changed to "You'll love Coles". Image supplied by Matilda Fresh.

Have your say on

R&D direction



Priority determination for R&D projects commencing next year is already underway, and growers are encouraged to participate, writes Ross Ord, Industry Development Manager AUSVEG.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- National Vegetable Levy payers and other industry stakeholder are invited to identify priority areas for levy-funded R&D projects scheduled to commence mid-2009.
- Priority suggestions are discussed by the Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee, its advisory groups and its working groups to help shape the HAL Industry Call.
- Those wanting to suggest a priority must return a completed template to AUSVEG by 18 May 2008.

i For more information visit: contact your state or territory industry organisation, IDO or visit the AUSVEG website at www.ausveg.com.au.

Each year, Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) invites applications for research and development (R&D) projects relating to a range of Australian vegetable industry activities.

R&D is funded by the National Vegetable Levy, matched dollar-for-dollar by the Australian Government. For 2007/08 this funding amounted to approximately \$11 million.

From January to May 2008, National Vegetable Levy payers and other vegetable industry stakeholders are invited to identify priority areas for R&D projects scheduled to commence mid-2009.

The vegetable industry's strategic plan, VegVision 2020, is used as the framework when determining the annual R&D expenditure. Priorities nominated by growers will be categorised in-line with the five strategic imperatives identified in VegVision 2020.

The imperatives are:

- market development

- information & technology development & dissemination
- production
- consumers
- leadership & people development.

Levy payers and other stakeholders are invited to identify priority areas for R&D by completing a template. The template is being distributed through vegetable industry organisations in all states and the

“For 2007/08 funding for vegetable industry R&D amounted to approximately \$11 million.”

Smart priorities, strong investment

The process for determining the expenditure of the National Vegetable Levy on R&D is detailed in the Investment Process Policy & Procedures Manual. Copies are available from HAL, AUSVEG, vegetable organisations in each state and vegetable Industry Development Officers (IDOs).

For key activities in the R&D timeline, see table 1.

From January to May 2008, National Vegetable Levy

payers in Northern Territory. It will also be available from vegetable IDOs and the AUSVEG website at www.ausveg.com.au.

As indicated in table 1, all suggestions for R&D will be reviewed by the Vegetable IAC and its advisory groups prior to the final recommendations being forwarded to HAL that will shape the 2009/10 Industry Call.


Completed templates are to be returned to AUSVEG by 18 May 2008. 

Table 1: Key activities for National Vegetable Levy R&D investment

Activity 1	January to mid-May 2008	Levy payers, vegetable organisations and other stakeholders invited to identify R&D priorities.
Activity 2	June 2008	Priorities are identified by the Integrated Pest Management, Biosecurity, Chemical, Environmental and Protected Cropping working groups. Reference is made to suggestions provided through Activity 1. Recommendations of the working groups are forwarded to the Production Advisory Group.
Activity 3	July 2008	The five Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) advisory groups (which mirror the VegVision 2020 strategic imperatives) identify priorities for their respective areas. Reference is made to suggestions provided by Activities 1 and 2.
Activity 4	July 2008	Vegetable IAC confirms priorities for R&D based on recommendations from Activity 3. Priorities forwarded to HAL.
Activity 5	October to November 2008	HAL Industry Call—Applications invited from R&D providers for projects based on industry-wide priorities including those identified in Activity 4.
Activity 6	March 2009	Vegetable IAC makes recommendations to HAL on projects to be approved to commence July 2009 onwards.

Tangled up in green

Environment legislation, or 'green tape', is well intentioned but it can harm growers' businesses if introduced inefficiently. AUSVEG's Melanie Ward reports.

Environmental regulation is stricter than ever, with green tape legislating how Australian businesses operate. The past 20 years have seen a significant increase in environmental legislation, which is expected to grow further due to drought and climate change. A study by the NSW Business Chamber predicts that green tape will become the most vital compliance issue faced by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the near future. Growers are likely to be caught by the escalating web of statutory environmental compliance and forced to respond to stricter environmental regulation.

Complex and costly

The study found that environmental legislation has become increasingly complex and there is a proliferation of environmental laws at all levels of government. Although regulators' focus has traditionally been on big businesses, smaller businesses will experience greater pressure for their activities and products to meet stricter environmental standards. These businesses will come under increased scrutiny from local governments and penalties for divergence will be more severe. This puts growers at risk of increased costs of compliance in a tighter regulatory environment.

The disparate nature of environmental law and the range of the issues considered to be of environmental significance make it difficult for growers to be aware of the changing regulations affecting their businesses. Already Australian businesses are experiencing regulatory intervention at five levels: international law, national law, state law, local councils, and judicial intervention such as through the Land and Environment Court. The study found that small to medium businesses should prepare for increased regulation in regards to their energy use so they are in a position to be competitive when an emissions trading scheme is introduced.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Environmental legislation, or 'green tape', is expected to increase in light of growing awareness and concern about environmental issues.
- Small to medium businesses will have to comply with more laws from all levels of government, from local to international.
- Environmental legislation needs to be introduced efficiently and effectively to protect natural assets without stifling Australian businesses.

i For more information visit: a list of environmental legislation can be accessed at: www.ausveg.com.au/assets/contentitems/public/5518/LegislationSite.pdf



In the red

In response to the 2007 Australian Federal Election, AUSVEG stated the Australian vegetable industry's policy needs and initiatives for the coming years. This included seeking a reduction of red tape in vegetable production.

As identified in the NSW Business Chamber study, red tape has produced significant obstacles to cost-efficient and effective industry production.

The vegetable industry's competitive position has been harmed by the continuing level of red tape and costs imposed by federal, state and local governments. In order to have a strong and viable vegetable industry, the situation must change. As part of the election platform, AUSVEG urged the Australian Government to set a target of 40 per cent reduction in red tape over the next two years.



Additionally, the vegetable industry has experienced both duplication and counter-efficiency barriers between federal and state laws and differing laws between states. Counter-efficient barriers are uneconomical and result in an uneven playing field for Australian producers. AUSVEG contended that the removal of duplicated laws and the implementation of consistency across the states will boost the prosperity of the vegetable industry.

According to AUSVEG Environmental Manager Helena Whitman, Catchment or Natural Resource Management targets further add to the confusion of environmental practices for growers. Additionally, growers with properties in more than one region or state must be aware of more than one set of laws.

"The regulations are well intentioned, however, some are not practical. For example, growers are encouraged to plant native trees and vegetation for windbreaks and wildlife corridors, but once planted, native trees cannot be moved or removed without consequences," Helena

said. This creates problems for growers who follow environmentally sound practices but are caught up in legislation.

Many small to medium businesses have a major advantage over larger enterprises when addressing environmental issues. The study indicated that, "due to their size, SMEs are more flexible and responsive to changes in the business environment and customer needs, including demands for improved environmental performance". This flexibility means that smaller businesses can respond efficiently and benefit from emerging opportunities.

Learn from red tape mistakes

Australia needs to maintain the highest standards of practice to ensure its waterways, air and natural environment are protected. However, the main concern for business is that green tape will follow the rigour of red tape and create a tangle of laws that are ad hoc, inconsistent, complex and costly.

NSW Business Chamber CEO Kevin MacDonald said that the study acted as a warning to learn from the lessons of red tape and "ensure that environmental legislation is based on evidence and administered

in a streamlined manner that achieves sustainable outcomes".

It is imperative that environmental legislation does not follow the path of red tape and become unnecessary and restrictive. "The danger is that this uncoordinated and ill-considered approach across all levels of regulation will create major costs for Australian businesses and consumers with little real idea of the benefits provided by such regulation," Kevin said.

The future can be green for both the environment and growers by incorporating robust legislation without strangling Australian businesses.



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As the Australian industry grapples with the realities of operating in a global economy, the newly-formed Market Development Advisory Group aims to help growers develop their businesses and move beyond best practice. Youna Angevin-Castro speaks to three members of the group.

“Selling is not marketing,” said David De Paoli of AustChilli, “but if growers are prepared to control their destiny and take the lead, there is no reason why they cannot succeed in a growing, globalised environment.”

As the Chair of the vegetable industry’s Market Development Advisory Group, David is optimistic about the market development opportunities available to growers and urges them to become proactive in their approach to business.

“There are a number of strategies for success, and if growers apply some or all of these strategies, they will go a long way towards improving the outlook of their businesses,” he said.

At the top of David’s list is self-promotion. “No-one has the same passion for your produce, so why depend on others who are there for profit alone?

Take every opportunity to promote yourself, your company and your produce, and learn from experience.”

David believes that the farming community needs to be more business-focused, and that all decision-making should be undertaken with a good understanding of the surrounding commercial environment.

“We are commercial operators and we need to understand the commercial arena in which we operate. This means understanding the risks, as well as recognising the opportunities. For example, if a grower is seeking to export, he needs to ask himself, ‘What are the commercial risks?’ Things to consider could include issues of currency, market access, duties, parochialism, corruption and political stability,” he said.

“On the domestic front there are

other competitors. As a business person, you need to understand your competitors and your position in relation to them.”

Opportunity knocks

The greatest opportunities exist when growers understand their customer’s needs and target their market with confidence, said David.

“As businesses, we need to understand the end-user’s needs and what will make them buy our produce again. We need to know our consumer and which sector to target to achieve the best commercial outcomes.”

David also encourages growers to devise innovative value-adding concepts, saying that it helps to distinguish a business from its competitors.

“We now know that consumers don’t just buy on the basis of price, but on perceived value. You should provide your target customers with the experience that they are expecting—this might be pre-cut, pre-packaged, kid-friendly—whatever it is that increases the perceived value of your product.”

As former Business Development Manager for the now defunct National Food Industry Strategy (NFIS), Jocelyn Midgley comes to the Market Development Advisory Group with a diverse knowledge of the Australian food sector. Like David, Jocelyn sees innovation as the key to the vegetable industry’s future success, and encourages growers to develop long-term objectives.

“The vegetable industry is definitely moving in the right direction but individuals also need to work towards the big picture,” Jocelyn said.

Jocelyn considers the industry’s research and development program as an important contributor to the market development process, and urges research providers to consider how their research impacts the marketplace.

“There exists a huge gap between R&D and the marketplace that needs to be bridged. Ideally, there should be a commercial focus as a result of research.

This will take time; however, by understanding what drives a business, R&D providers can ensure that their research remains relevant and useful.”

Here or abroad?

While Jocelyn understands the desire for some growers to look overseas for growing market prospects, she believes that the local market offers many opportunities.

“There are tremendous opportunities for local companies to work together in a non-competitive space. Businesses are facing similar issues created by water shortages and limited energy resources, and these challenges can be overcome if people pull together and engage in collaborative forward-thinking,” she said.

Maureen Dobra of the Loose Leaf Lettuce Company in Gingin, WA, agrees.

“Water and environmental issues will definitely challenge our industry over the next decade. However, if industry is proactive, growers will be able to work through these issues,” she said.

According to Maureen, the key to local market development growth is a thriving and accessible industry network.

“Once upon a time, growers did not share information about their businesses or their ideas,

but these days, that approach is no longer relevant. Information needs to be readily accessible and growers need to be able to draw on their resources to achieve growth—both individually and as an industry.”

Maureen believes that state and national industry associations have a role to play in assisting growers by providing opportunities to network with industry partners, but that growers need to take some responsibility for their own success.

“Creating a sense of community is important. By promoting your area and community, as well as yourself and your business, you can improve the market opportunities in your local region, as well as building your reputation and opportunities further afield.”

The Market Development Advisory Group is one of five groups established under the VegVision 2020 strategic pillars to support the deliberations of the Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee about the National Vegetable Levy investment in R&D. The members of this group are: Glenn Abbott, David De Paoli, Maureen Dobra, Rob Henry, Andreas Klieber (non-voting), Jocelyn Midgley (non-voting), and Nick Rodd (non-voting).

“No-one has the same passion for your produce, so take every opportunity to promote yourself, your company.”



Beat the **skills** shortage

Apprenticeships can be win-win situations for employers and trainees, writes Roger Tyshing from Rural Skills Australia.

A kilometre inland from the beautiful coastline of north-west Tasmania is one of three family-owned farms that supplies vegetables to two stand-alone retail fruit and vegetable stores in the state's north. Youngs Vegie Shed Pty Ltd is a vertically integrated, family-owned operation that has been involved in farming, wholesaling and retailing vegetables for the past 29 years. The Young family has been farming for five generations.

Grower John Young started the wholesaling and retail operation in the late 1970s after realising the business needed more control over its supply chain. John recognised that with supermarkets starting to sell fruit and vegetables, it would be difficult to supply produce in the huge quantities required, and that there were three options: get bigger, do

something different or get out. John did something different; he expanded his operations to encompass retailing. He opened his first store on the Bass Highway at Cooee 26 years ago and opened a second in Launceston two years later.

The three farms total 520 acres and supply potatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, pumpkin and lettuce to the company's Launceston and Cooee stores. Other fruits and vegetables are outsourced. The company has more than 40 full-time, part-time and casual employees. Seven of them work on the farms, planting, growing, harvesting and packing the vegetables that supply the stores.

To help with staff shortages, John organised for apprentice Kane Evans to join him on-farm.

Employer John Young

“Going off-farm and bringing back new ideas helps both the young person and the business.”



Kane has been with me for about 22 months and he gets on well with the other workers. We saw him at the Circular Head Show in Tasmania and he impressed us with his work ethic. We found out he was about to finish his job of two years. After making a few enquiries, we employed him on the basis that he'd mostly be involved in vegetable production but when there were shows coming up he'd spend time preparing cattle for the shows.

We liked the characteristics we saw in Kane so we agreed to help him gain formal qualifications. We signed him up through an apprenticeship centre, which provides some incentive payments along the way. We knew what was involved in taking on an apprentice and there have been no great difficulties. It might be different at a smaller operation because the apprentice may get thrown in the deep end but here Kane is part of a team.

The training system is pretty good down here. Kane's attendance at TAFE is flexible, so sometimes when we're busy we negotiate another time for him to go. Much of the training is now done on-farm. I preferred it when apprentices completed their theory at TAFE because they could learn so much mixing with others but that's not how it's done now.



Apprentice Kane Evans (left) receives on-the-job training with Tasmanian grower John Young.

“It’s been easy to fit in with the team; they’ve taken me under their wing.”

Apprentice Kane Evans

I met John a couple of years ago, when I was showing cattle with Brooks High School at the Circular Head Show. At the time I was completing my Certificate II in Agriculture as part of my part-time two-year traineeship, which was coming to an end. I was also doing a VET course at Brooks. I started showing cattle at Brooks when I was in grade seven and knew then that I wanted to go into farming.

I was considering what my next step would be when John telephoned me to ask if I was looking for work, so here I am. I really enjoy it here. It’s been easy to fit in with the team; they’ve taken me under their wing.

The work is varied—I’m involved with harvesting and packing, irrigation in the summer and looking after the livestock to break them in and prepare them for shows. I’m doing my Certificate III in Agriculture now and really enjoy it. When I started Certificate II, I didn’t like going to TAFE but as I’m a bit older I appreciate it more. I’ve spent only one

month off-farm over my two years doing Certificate III and sometimes it’s nice to get away.

Until I moved up here, I lived in Launceston. Moving away from home wasn’t too hard. Probably the hardest thing was getting my licence. Both John and I knew I had to have my licence before I came down here to work and I failed it the first time, which delayed my start by a few weeks.

I want to make my career in farming but when I finish my apprenticeship I’ll probably take a break from study before starting Certificate IV. For anyone considering moving away from home to take an apprenticeship, I say go for it! You gain independence and it’s good to try something different. There are many opportunities out there and you have to have a go at something you like.

Apprenticeships backed by incentives



An initiative launched last year by the Federal Government offers substantial incentives for apprentices in agriculture and horticulture.

The initiative is designed to encourage trainees and workers back into the agricultural and horticultural industries. The package of assistance for apprentices, costed at \$57.5 million, was announced in August 2007 by the then Minister for Vocational and Further Education, Andrew Robb.

Apprentices will benefit from this initiative if they are completing an apprenticeship in agriculture, horticulture or meat. Apprenticeships are available for farm management, crop production, landscaping, irrigation, plant and tree cultivation, and live-stock production. It applies to apprentices in any Certificate level II, III or IV qualification in agriculture across Australia.

Horticulture apprentices must be undertaking training in any Certificate level II, III or IV qualification in horticulture (such as the Amenity Horticulture national Training Package or the Production Horticulture stream of the Rural Production Training Package) in rural and regional areas of Australia.

Certified qualification

A Certificate level qualification is a level of study/on-the-job experience and training. Certificate II provides skills to enter the workforce (work-ready for horticulture)

Certificate III qualifies the graduate to work as a tradesperson, and is considered the entry-level qualification for skilled workers in horticulture. Certificate IV is a post-trade qualification that provides graduates with additional skills to complete their job (for example, farm management, supervision, risk management).

This initiative provides apprentices with an \$800 tool kit and up to \$1,000 to help with course fees.

The tool kit is provided to apprentices in their first year of training. Apprentices are eligible to receive the kit after the first three months of their apprenticeship. The contents of the tool kit are decided by the employer and the apprentice.

The \$1,000 Apprenticeship Training (Fee) Voucher, which was announced in last year's Federal Budget, enables the apprentice or employer to seek reimbursement of course fees of up to \$500 per year for each of the first and second years of an eligible Australian apprenticeship.

 For further information visit www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au or phone the Australian Apprenticeships referral line on 13 38 73.

R&D project preview

Driving better vegetable irrigation through profitable practice change

Project number: VG07023

Start date: 1 December 2007

End date: 30 November 2010

Project leader: Craig Henderson, Principal Horticulturist, DPI&F Gatton, Queensland

Email: craig.henderson@dpi.qld.gov.au

Phone: 07 5466 2222


This project aims to help growers assess which irrigation systems and strategies will help them achieve their goals. Growing vegetables is a complex business; external influences such as weather, and changing markets or regulations can mean that obvious decisions turn out to be much more complicated.

The project aims to assist agri-business and other agencies (including catchment groups and water authorities) in targeting good results from their investments and making sound decisions about irrigation issues.

The whole-farm analytical tools developed during the course of the project will help growers answer critical questions such as:

- How do I cope with my reduced irrigation allocation and still make a profit?
- What irrigation-technology investment is best for my business?
- I have only so many hours in the day; what are the most important irrigation decisions?
- How do I best arrange the new drip system to ensure it pays for itself? What other technology is available to make irrigation easier?

The team comprises scientists from Primary Industries Departments in QLD and NSW, along with CSIRO and the University of Southern Queensland. Growers from the Lockyer Valley and Riverina districts will also be involved to help develop, adapt and ground-truth the analytical tools. New irrigation gear and techniques will be tested to assess which ones make a difference on-farm.

In tough times, growers must direct their funds and efforts to activities most likely to help their business. This project will help them do this, as well as assist other agencies (including governments) to allocate their resources, by providing information about strategies likely to improve irrigation outcomes for growers. 

Chemical groups set to change

Plans are underway for Australia's herbicide Mode of Action groups to be revised.

To help growers minimise the instances of weeds developing chemical resistance, all herbicides sold in Australia are grouped according to their mode of action, which is indicated by a letter code on product labels. This system allows growers to identify herbicides that work by similar means and therefore share a common resistance risk.

CropLife Australia, the peak industry body for the Australian plant science industry, maintains and updates the Herbicide Mode of Action Table, and the Herbicide Resistance Management Strategies, which are based on the mode of action groups. CropLife's member companies invent, develop, manufacture and market 85 per cent of crop protection products used in Australia.

Since its inception, the Mode of Action letters-based system has not received a major revision. Originally, many products were grouped based on limited knowledge about mode of action. For example, Group K covers a large number of products titled

"Herbicides with diverse modes of action". Also, some groups were categorised by one mode of action, while Group F represented three modes of action.

The CropLife Australia Herbicide Resistance Management Review Group decided that, while the current grouping system is still relevant and useful, some revisions could be made to improve the accuracy and completeness of the system. The intention is to maintain the basics of the letters representing modes of action, with some groups having a higher resistance risk. The key outcome is that people will be able to appreciate resistance risk via an easily understood, technically sound system.

The proposed changes are being supported by the APVMA (Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority). They are:

- Many products were missing or were not correctly grouped by their mode of action. These will be added or corrected.
- There will be six new herbicide

groups: Group H, Group O, Group P, Group Q, Group R and Group Z. Groups Z and P have been chosen as they correspond with the international Herbicide Resistance Action Committee (HRAC) groups.

- Other current groups will remain.
- The current general intent of groups based on their risk will not change.
- Major changes will be made to current groups K and E due to discrepancies in mode of action.
- Group F will be split to reflect the sub-groups and differing modes of action, but retain the letter F so there is no confusion about herbicide rotation.
- Three newly registered products will be added.
- Twenty-five other products that were missing will be added to the list.



For more information visit www.croplifeaustralia.com.au and click on "Resistance Management"

It pays to let customers speak their mind

A sensory approach to meeting consumer needs can help growers increase sales. By Graham Gosper.

THE BOTTOM LINE

-An Across Industry project has collated consumer satisfaction data in relation to fresh produce, with a focus on sensory appreciation, such as taste, texture and odour.

-This data can help industry effectively target products to meet consumer needs, with the aim of increasing sales.

-The study found that reliable in-field sampling and testing methods could help reduce product variability and assist in meeting consumer expectations.



For more information visit www.horticulture.com.au/industry/acrossindustry.asp
Project number: AH05018

Research scientist Dr Jenny Jobling believes the vegetable industry is among many horticultural industries in Australia that miss out on lucrative sales opportunities by not learning what consumers really want.

“Many of today’s fresh produce consumers are tired of marketing strategies that are used year after year; they want something new,” she said. “Industries need to be innovative marketers. To create an effective marketing plan they first need to ask their customers what they buy and why, what do they like and dislike about a product—that is where consumer and sensory science research can help.”

Those views have been reinforced by Jenny’s involvement in an across-industry review of consumer satisfaction projects from the past several years. The review brought together findings from projects aimed at determining what consumers want from fresh produce by using sensory evaluation to measure factors such as taste, texture and odour. It included a range of projects from the fruit and nut industries and one involving sensory research to assist the marketing of a mild form of onion for salads. The review found that very few industries had invested in this type of research.

Take advantage of opportunities

Jenny is a postharvest research scientist working for Applied Horticultural Research who is based at Sydney University. As the consultant for the study, she reviewed the sensory science

projects and had input into a report on its findings.

“The study identified a need for horticultural industries to develop and adopt clear methodologies to discover more about what their customers want, and to take advantage of effectively targeted marketing opportunities,” Jenny said.

“It confirmed that supply chain factors including variety selection, soil type, season, growing methods and post-harvest treatment can all have a significant role in consumer satisfaction. It found that development of reliable in-field sampling and testing methods could help reduce product variability and assist industries in meeting consumer expectations.”

“Supply chain factors including variety selection, soil type, season, growing methods and post-harvest treatment can all affect consumer satisfaction.”

Though the onion project was the only one in the review involving the vegetable industry, Jenny said the lessons learned from the study were relevant to all horticultural industries.

“Many horticultural industries have been slow to recognise the huge sales benefits that can result from targeting consumers in precise and innovative ways and have been reluctant to change. This is because industries don’t have large marketing budgets

and they assume that the relative cost/benefit is not there for sensory research when in fact the costs are not that great and the benefit can be a dramatic increase in sales,” she said.

An example Jenny gives is where kiwi-fruit sales were dramatically increased by introducing spoons with the fruit in response to identifying consumers’ difficulty eating the fruit as a quick snack.

“This is just one way success can be achieved with well targeted, innovative marketing,” she said.

“All horticultural industries can share in such successes by discovering what their customers want through sensory and consumer science research. Industries must have the courage to use such research to

identify market segments, target marketing campaigns, discover drivers for purchase and ensure consistent enjoyment of their fresh produce. They need to learn how to use the valuable information that consumer panels, expert sensory panels and food choice questionnaires can offer. Industries need to consider when the last time was that they asked consumers what they thought about their product. You don’t know if you don’t ask.”

Profile: Victorian Celery Growers' Association

Strength in numbers

A state action for celery growers quickly led to a national initiative.
By David Jarwood.

In order to improve their marketing position and grow a better product, Victoria's pioneering celery growers banded together about 50 years ago and formed the Victorian Celery Growers' Association. Their main competition at the time came from South Australia and it was thought that a united front would better position them to counter this.

The group was initially just a handful of growers, but within a decade it had joined the South Australian growers to become affiliate members of the Australian Celery Growers' Association. The national association meets twice a year and now includes growers from Queensland and New South Wales.

Therese Schreurs is the secretary of the association and, with her husband Tom, one of Australia's largest producers of celery.

She said Victorian association aimed to bring together growers of the same commodity to deal with issues such as research into crop diseases, packaging options, product promotion, chemical use, Integrated Pest Management modelling, and the outcomes of product trials on crops.

"There is a lot more to gain by doing group research on problems if you work together. It also makes sense for the Department of Primary Industries or other government departments to call on a group to run a trial program

rather than an individual grower," she said.

The association is currently working on a program for Tomcast Disease Predictive modelling. This method is used to indicate when conditions are conducive for Late Blight. Crops are sprayed with fungicide only when conditions are conducive.

“It makes sense for government departments to call on a group to run a trial program rather than individual growers.”

Members of the Victorian Celery Growers' Association pay a fee that is used to promote the product. Some initiatives have been to develop recipe sheets for fruit and vegetable shops, exhibit at the food and wine expo in Melbourne, and support healthy-eating programs in schools.

Further afield

Ex-grower Keith Allen was chairman of the association for many years; but his connection stems further back than that—his father, Les, was one of the group's founders. Keith said the association had been very important for sharing information and the experiences of the sometimes difficult task of growing celery.

He formed strong friendships

in the group, and these have continued despite him opting out of celery growing in 1998. His farm was in the Cranbourne area, one of Melbourne's major growth corridors. Keith's children did not want to be celery growers, so, like many other growers, he sold the farm to real estate.

"Our last crop was terracotta,"

he said, referring to the housing estate that is now in its place.

Therese said this was a scenario that faced many growers—commercial pressure pushing the farms further out of town. It is a topic that is discussed often by the growers' group.

"When this occurs it gives opportunity for the vegetable growers affected to relocate to a larger parcel of land enabling them to continue growing vegetables utilising the latest technology, such as computerised watering and crop-monitoring systems," she said.



For more information contact:
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Growers' Association
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Plan for increased soil health gains momentum

Growers have had vital early input into the development of a national program for soil health, writes Graham Gosper.

THE BOTTOM LINE

-As one of three projects to help develop a National Vegetable Soil Health Program, a 12-month scoping study reviewed soil health issues faced by Australia's temperate vegetable growing regions.

-The study's literature review found that the vegetable industry has been slow to implement strategies for improving soil health and had only recently recognised its importance.

-However, workshops indicated that the industry is eager to adopt cost-effective and sustainable solutions to soil problems. Further funding has been approved to continue the program.

For more information visit: www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers
Project number: VG06090
Keywords: Soil health

The development of a national vegetable industry program for soil health management has passed an important milestone with the completion of a 12-month scoping study led by senior Victorian research scientist, Dr Ian Porter.

The project reviewed soil health issues faced by Australia's temperate vegetable growing regions. It incorporated workshops in Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, a comprehensive literature review and on-farm demonstration trials.

"The findings confirmed the need for urgent action on soil health, identified industry priorities for R&D to address these issues, and tested the effectiveness of a range of soil health indicators," Ian said.

The project was conducted by the Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI). It is among three preliminary studies commissioned to assist Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) devise strategies for the development of a National Vegetable Soil Health Program over the next five years. Another of the studies involved Queensland DPI research, led by nematologist Tony Pattison, into soil health issues in sub-tropical horticulture. The third study, led by Arris Managing Director Jim Kelly and AUSVEG Environmental Manager Helena Whitman,

involved production of the practical *Ute Guide* for soil health management, and the development of an accredited soil health course for growers. More than 9,000 copies of the *Ute Guide* have so far been delivered to growers and industry representatives.

inputs, crop rotations) on soil health and how this impact affects crop yields and grower profitability.

- Increase industry understanding of the impact of crop rotations and tillage on soil structure, erosion and natural



Metham sodium fumigation is one of the practices being evaluated in the soil health program. Images supplied by Dr Ian Porter.

Slow beginning means more to do

The workshops organised as part of the Victorian DPI project identified the need to measure and benchmark good farm practice for improving soil health. Participants agreed that future research should:

- Benchmark the impact of common crop management practices (such as pesticides, fertilisers, organic matter

mechanisms of disease suppression.

- Establish methods for better management of organic inputs for improved soil organic carbon levels and more efficient use of water.
 - Extend information to drive that adoption of "best practice" soil health management.
- A literature review, conducted as part of the project, found that the vegetable industry has been slow



Researchers and agriculture industry representatives attended the Soil Health Forum in Brisbane, December 2006, where the project began.

to implement strategies for improving soil health and had only recently recognised its importance. This contrasted with the efforts in Australia's dryland agriculture and the cotton and other field crop industries.

"The review found there is much vegetable growers could learn from these industries. Some have operated programs to improve soil management for more than a decade and have identified research into biological indicators of soil health as a key priority," said Ian.

"The review found that the vegetable industry, with its high inputs and high levels of plant pathogens, would derive enormous benefit from further evaluating and understanding biological soil health indicators. It concluded that there is a real opportunity for research to enhance the health of vegetable soils and to provide growers with an understanding of the factors that positively impact on crop productivity and the economic and environmental sustainability of the industry."

Encouraging outlook

In the final stage of the temperate region project, demonstration trials were conducted on the properties of two key vegetable growers in the Cranbourne, Victoria, area during 2007. The trials tested the rigour of more than 35 potential soil health indicators.

"A selection of chemical, biological and physical indicators proved to be useful for measuring changes in crop production practices and will be used in future trials for benchmarking crop productivity, crop quality and soil health," Ian said.


Throughout the project, Ian and the research team have worked with HAL Natural Resources and Climate Manager, Alison Turnbull, to ensure that the findings assist the development of the National Vegetable Soil Health Program. Ian said the findings have already had significant impact on the program's direction. Funding has been approved to continue the project so that further replicated studies can be used on more farms in temperate Australia to link the program with ongoing projects

conducted by Queensland DPI and Arris in South Australia.

Ian is confident that the successful early development of the soil health program will lead to a larger, well coordinated national program that provides real value for the vegetable industry and the wider community. He said the three studies ensured that all sections of the industry, and growers in particular, have had vital early input into the direction of the program.

“Well directed research can deliver cost-effective and sustainable solutions to soil problems.”

"In addition to the findings, state workshops provided a clear indication that the industry is eager to adopt cost-effective and sustainable solutions to soil problems," Ian said. "Well directed research can deliver on both those fronts. Good soil management can reduce the need for costly inputs and this can provide benefits to the environment and farm sustainability."

Despite the encouraging outlook Ian believes there is no easy solution to the soil management challenges the industry faces. "Soil health affects most of the important functions related to vegetable growing and the problems can only be addressed through detailed planning, effective research and cooperation by all sections of the industry." 

Diversify to create a

Investment beyond the farm-gate can help growers protect their businesses from drought and crop damage.

As the vegetable industry looks beyond the farm-gate to invest in areas other than production, so too can growers invest outside the borders of their own acreage. While many people prefer to keep their money where they can see it, an investment portfolio can enhance a person's wealth and create a financial safety net to be utilised at short notice, should the need arise.

"It is advisable for growers in their early years to establish a debt outside the farm, such as bricks and mortar, and start to pay it off," said ex-grower Clive Stevens from Wanneroo in Western Australia. "If the business gets into financial difficulty, the grower has the ability to pull on an asset to recover and get back on track."

Previously a cauliflower, celery and potato grower, Clive finished commercial crop growing just over a year ago. For the decade leading up to this, he invested in shares, property and superannuation.

"As vegetable growers do not have annual crops, they tend to put money back into the farm and are never flushed with money. If a grains grower has a good year, he's flushed. He can work out how to balance it across losses



over the next few years; he could diversify, put a bit into house in Perth, a weekender on the local beach, units for children, for education," said Clive.

of options. Investments can be made in local and offshore property and shares, fixed-interest investments, cash, gold, and a host of other products.

super is locked away. Third-party superannuation funds can give good returns; they have a diversity of investments," said Clive. Third-party superannuation funds include all funds that are not self-managed.

Those who want the option of accessing their investment throughout their working life should invest outside super.

When entering the investment market, some people prefer to invest larger one-off sums, say from \$20,000, while others start with a smaller figure but agree to increase their investment by a pre-determined amount each month. This allows their investment to double as a savings plan while building their financial safety net against drought, and damage to crops by pests or weather.

Ongoing investment housekeeping requirements are also an important consideration. How

“While wise investments can bring sizable returns, should the unexpected happen, what level of loss are you able to sustain?”

"Vegetable growers rarely tend to do that; their flow of money is consistent. However, some diversify in their businesses, such as incorporating cattle or grains."

Spoiled for choice

For growers who have not yet diversified their investment beyond the farm-gate, there is a variety

Superannuation is an important savings vehicle for retirement (with tax benefits for investors) but it cannot be accessed until the investor nears retirement.

"Some people don't invest in superannuation because they don't see any immediate returns. Super is a good back up—if everything else fails, the

can investors keep abreast of their investment and what are the consequences, if any, of retrieving funds? While direct investments can be made and self-managed by investors, many people don't have the time, expertise or desire to keep an eagle eye on their portfolio. Managed funds therefore may be another option whereby



financial safety net

an individual's funds are bundled with other investors' funds and managed as a pool by investment experts.

Return to sender

A common question asked by those contemplating an investment is whether the potential return is worth the risk. It is important to remember that each investor has individual parameters that need to be considered, including available funds, timeframe, acceptable level of risk, and the type of investment (ie, a mixed portfolio comprising property, stock, cash, and gold, or a more tailored portfolio). The key is to understand what model best suits you. While a wise investment can bring a sizable return, be mindful that the payoff for the increased return is the increased risk—should the unexpected happen, what level of loss are you able to sustain?

A sound investment manager will determine these details up front so any advice provided is tailored to your needs.

“Be careful what you invest in. Some people invest in overnight high-risk investment; the money sounds good, but you need to go deeper than that. Good investment advice in the share market is essential; I speak from experience,” said Clive.

He stresses that the professional advice needs to be heeded. “Too many people get advice and say, ‘I think the advisor is wrong,’ ” he said.

The next thing one needs to

consider is the timeframe. Many investment portfolios are more appropriate for the long-term, so that returns can be maximised and unusual market activity can be ridden out. Conversely, short-term investment (focusing only on shares) would be a high-risk, high-return strategy. Smart decisions and continual attention need to be made to ensure maximum profit.

The information contained in this article is general in nature and may or may not apply to you depending on your circumstances. We recommend that you seek professional financial advice prior to undertaking any action(s) suggested, mentioned or implied by this article.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Investment of funds beyond the farm-gate can help create a financial safety net for your business.
- High-return investments are often higher-risk. Always get professional financial advice before making any investment decisions.
- Younger investors can ride out market fluctuations; therefore, they are in a better position to invest in higher-risk portfolios for higher returns.

Calculated risk

John McCarroll, Director Private Wealth Management at Goldman Sachs JBWere, said the ‘Stages of Life’ structure can help guide investment decisions. The theory of this structure is that younger investors should invest in higher-risk portfolios with the potential for higher returns, as they have time on their side to ride out any market fluctuation.

The Accumulation years:

Investors are usually aged in their 30s or early 40s. Frequently they are paying off a mortgage and/or other debts, and can sign up for longer-term growth portfolio. With a greater number of years left in the workforce, younger people can use their income to maintain their lifestyle in the face of investment losses.

The Consolidation years:

Investors are usually in their 40s or early 50s, they have less debt, but may be time-poor and less able to manage their financial matters. These investors are still looking for long-term growth, though they have less time to see out any market losses. They would look at decreasing the risk in their portfolio.

The Pre-Retirement years:

Investors are usually aged in their 50s or early 60s, and now have little debt. As retirement approaches, these people should reduce the risk of their portfolio as they may no longer have the income/salary to offload any losses. However, as retirement can last many years, growth is still advisable.

The Retirement years:

Investors are usually any age from 55 onwards, mostly concerned with an investment portfolio that is low-risk but can still generate lifestyle income needs. This is not the stage to invest in a get-rich quick scheme, as one would hope that the income requirements were adequately covered.

Strong representation for sustained growth

Vegetable IAC members are passionate about the industry having an increased presence in local and international markets, with greater returns for growers, writes AUSVEG's Lucy Jarman.

The new Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) receives suggestions and guidance from the five advisory groups, which each represent a VegVision 2020 strategic imperative. The restructured advisory system aims to maximise outcomes from National Vegetable Levy-funded research and development (R&D) and ensure projects address an-

nual priorities that are consistent with VegVision 2020.

The IAC comprises nine members, including representatives from each of the five advisory groups, representatives from each state, an AUSVEG board member and one independent chair (currently vacant). Several members act as representatives for both an advisory group and a

state. IAC members have been selected because of their industry experience, their capacity to innovate and lead, and their united desire to help the industry grow. The primary role of the IAC is to provide recommendations to HAL on priorities for investment of the National Vegetable Levy. It is an official subcommittee of the HAL Board.



Ian Young

AUSVEG Board representative

Ian has been involved in mixed farming for 40 years. Director of the AUSVEG board since 2003, Ian has been an IAC member since 2005, where he represents growers and their needs.

Ian's outlook for the industry's future is positive. "The industry's focus is changing with mother-nature, and the drought is playing a role," he said. With more than 25 years involvement in agricultural political issues and as a planning member of the 'Fair Dinkum Food Campaign', Ian has the proven track record of someone who is passionate about seeing the industry thrive.

David De Paoli

Market Development AG representative Queensland representative

Owner and manager of four properties in Bundaberg, Queensland, David processes and exports vegetables, fruit and herbs. He has 30 years experience in value-adding and farming, along with expertise in global marketing, and domestic and international trade missions.

David believes the industry needs to be sustainable, foresee overseas markets and be proactive in its response to globalisation. He said that investing in R&D will make the industry more competitive.

"The industry needs to move forward and look at exporters and other industry sectors, if it is to compete with overseas markets," he said.



Kim Vincent

Information & Technology Development and Dissemination AG representative New South Wales representative

With a Certificate IV in Horticulture, the proprietor of Vincent's Produce and a hydroponics operation specialising in Lebanese cucumbers, Kim's knowledge of technology, new farming practices, and the mechanisation of existing practices, is a boon to growers.

Kim believes that "Australia needs to feed its own by relying on domestic products, not imported produce". With the industry changing, she said it is important for the IAC to have new ideas and an understanding of future directions. As the IAC's only female member, Kim sees these qualities as vital, "especially from a women's perspective".





John Said

Victorian representative

Managing Director of Fresh Select since 1998, John is also Chairman of the Consumer Advisory Group. With many years of agriculture experience behind him, in Australia and abroad, John brings product development and technology experience to the IAC.

John strongly believes in changing how “the traditional IAC goes about its business”. His vision for the industry is to keep up with competition from overseas markets and understand the needs of the grower community. John said that the industry needs to focus on representing growers, rather than being distracted by politics.

Andrew Mathews

Leadership & People Development AG representative

South Australian representative

With a background in plant health breeding from the Victoria Department of Agriculture, Andrew has been involved in plant breeding for eight years. Currently a protected crop grower, Andrew is a past manager of a mixed wheat, rice and cattle farm, and brings “a broad knowledge-base and earth experience to the IAC”.

Andrew said that the role of the IAC was to bring better produce to consumers and better returns to the industry.

Robert Henry

Tasmanian representative

A past Nuffield Scholar with a Diploma in Farm Business Management and a graduate of the Executive Development Program for Primary Industries, Robert has more than 25 years experience in vegetables. His vision for the industry is “to get as much top quality food directly to consumers, in doing so, avoid supermarkets and hence maximise profits for producers”.

As owner and operator of Woodrising Farming, a mixed cropping and livestock business, Robert is experienced in the business side of farming and processing. He believes that “people put into the industry what they gain from experience”.



Kent
West

Production AG representative

General Manager of West Farms in Queensland, Kent specialises in growing and packaging carrots. Current director on the AUSVEG Board and a long-term participant in the industry's R&D committees, Kent has a deep passion for the vegetable industry and believes that experience is the best teacher.

“My vision is for a thriving vegetable industry where our young people are motivated to see it as a genuine career path and existing growers have a sustainable, rewarding future,” he said.



Dene
Lampard

Consumer AG representative Western Australian representative

As export marketing manager for Center West Exports and Sun City Farms, Dene's knowledge lies in overseas markets and production, with experience in the industry's export network. Dene is responsible for all global sales accounts and overseeing production and distribution to more than 20 export countries.

He believes domestic sales alone are not enough to achieve the objective of VegVision 2020—to double the value of Australian fresh produce. “Export of Australian-grown produce is an important vehicle to assist in meeting the requirements of VegVision 2020,” he said. 

Pave the way to greenhouse success

Training shortages for Australian protected cropping growers will soon be a concern of the past, reports Emma Reeves.



Greenhouse crop fertigation, irrigation and growing substrates specialist, Rene (left) demonstrates the practical side of using the technology to the Australian tour group, who were obliged to travel to the Practical Training Centre + in Ede, Holland, in October 2005 for specialist training in greenhouse subjects. Image supplied by Graeme Smith.

Working within a relatively young industry, Australian greenhouse growers have never enjoyed a formal, industry-specific training system. As access to specialised skills training is critical for industry growth, a national qualifications system is being created to meet the needs of the protected cropping community.

The Australian Hydroponics & Greenhouse Association (AHGA) is completing the second year of an ambitious program to write 63 course modules. "These modules will provide written resources that simply don't exist today; that is the challenge. Hydroponics is very different to traditional farming methods," said President of the AHGA, Graeme Smith.

The project, Pathways to Production, aims for modules to be completed as part of nationally

accredited courses for growers, ranging from Certificate to Diploma level.

Remain competitive

Growers have been attracted to the protected cropping industry because of improved water efficiency, faster plant growth, better controlled pest management systems and higher crop yields. With industry growth of around five per cent per annum, the AHGA boasts that it is the fastest growing food-producing sector in Australia. Over the past two decades the protected cropping industry has grown from a small, alternative industry to one that contributes about \$1 billion per annum to the Australian economy.

Graeme said the availability of a uniform national accreditation system would provide a range

of advantages for growers. Currently in Australia, industry-specific modules or subjects are offered only as part of horticulture courses. This formation of Pathways to Production would be the first time greenhouse growers can undertake a complete course dedicated to their specific needs and Australian conditions.

"In greenhouses you focus on individual plants rather than crop management, which is a subtle but important difference in farming methods," said Graeme.

As the industry is very technology-driven, training is particularly crucial. A national training scheme will also encourage the use of new technology and industry innovations. This is critical for the industry to remain competitive in the global market.

"We are still playing catch up with other countries. New

Zealanders, for example, are our direct competitors and the export to Australia. Their industry is ten years ahead in terms of their commercial environment," said Graeme.

Recognise skills

Previously, growers had to seek specialised training in the greenhouse and hydroponics area from overseas. When Sue Korevaar started in the industry 12 years ago, the only courses available to her were conducted in Holland.

recognise skill levels. "At the moment people learn on the job; rather than having a uniform background knowledge, they pick up different foibles from each greenhouse," said Sue.

"As the need for uniform knowledge becomes more prevalent in the farming community, people have said we can't train employees ... we need them to have a basic understanding before they start."

A planned "greenhouse passport" recording qualifications and training background will help growers prove their credentials to employers, said Graeme.

International experiences demonstrate the advantages for the industry to adopt specific training standards. For example, in Holland, 20 years ago a typical greenhouse would produce about 50 kilograms per hectare of tomatoes, compared with 25 kilograms in Australia. Now it is common for Australian greenhouses to produce about 50 kilograms per hectare but the Dutch industry, which enjoys a comprehensive training system, has increased its yield to 65 kilograms.

"I did not fully appreciate what was missing until I went on a study tour to Europe and saw a plant training institute in Ede, Holland," said Graeme. "In Australia, people can train employees but

it's a bit hit and miss. There really is a strong need for training to help the industry commercially."

Graeme's multiple visits to European training centres have inspired the AHGA to draft plans for an Australian national greenhouse training institute. Although an official date has not been set, course modules will be made available to growers through TAFE and other training organisations within the short-term.

“In greenhouses you focus on individual plants rather than crop management—a subtle but important difference.”

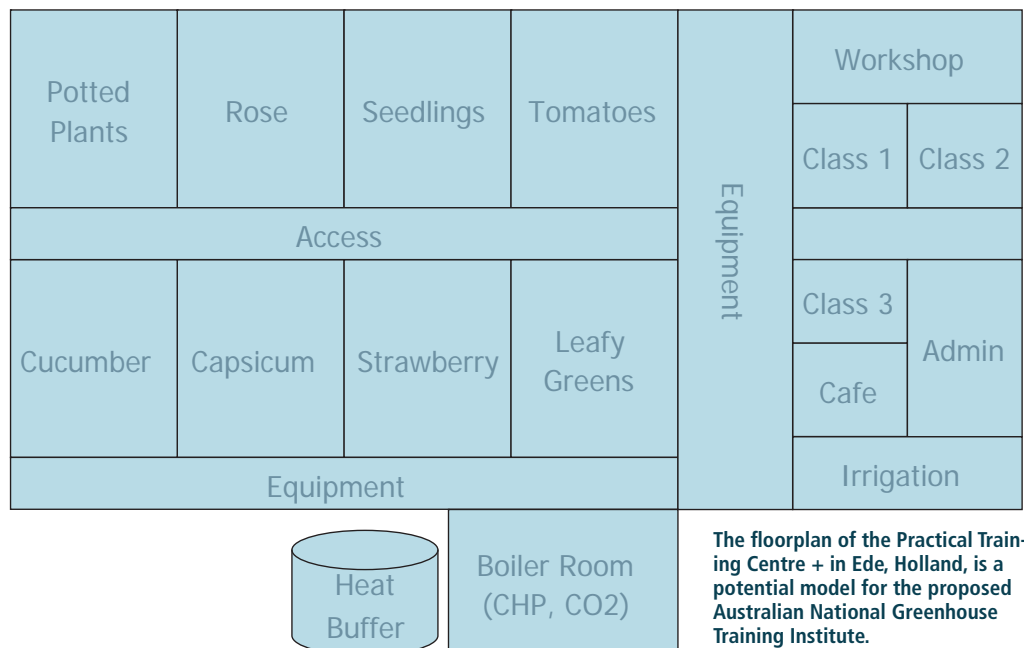
"It was really difficult to put it back into Australian conditions," she said. As a past president of the Hydroponic Farmers Federation of Victoria she recognises the need for skills training. "It's like standing on a mountain with skis on but with no one to show you how to get down. You can wing it, even though you don't know how to stop or steer, or you can have lessons and do it safely and efficiently," she said.

A national qualifications system would allow employers to easily

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Australia's protected cropping industry does not have an industry-specific training system, which means that growers must travel overseas to receive training.
- The Pathways to Production project aims to formalise protected cropping training in Australia.
- Formalised training may help growers hire qualified workers, keep abreast of new technology and increase product yields.

i For more information visit: www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers
 Project number: VG05095
 Keywords: Skilling initiative or contact Australian Hydroponic & Greenhouse Association
 Email: <administrator@ahga.org.au>
 Phone: 0414 333 996
 Web: www.ahga.org.au



The floorplan of the Practical Training Centre + in Ede, Holland, is a potential model for the proposed Australian National Greenhouse Training Institute.

AUSVEG CEO Message

In 2008, AUSVEG will continue to put the vegetable and potato industries at the top of the agenda for consumers, government, growers and other stakeholders.

We will motivate the industry to work together to harness the skills, passion and wisdom to overcome challenges and take advantage of the many opportunities that are coming to light. We need to become more serious about marketing, exports, training and people development. We must also continue to invest in smart research and development to drive industry productivity and achieve the goals of VegVision 2020.

Vegetables will claim the “centre of the food hub” and be part of every well balanced and healthy meal.

AUSVEG will continue to work closely with Horticulture Australia Limited to administer the partnership agreements for our industries and ensure that growers are well consulted and the National Vegetable and Potato Levies are invested wisely.

We will also continue to seek grower involvement in the decisions made that affect our industry. We will represent your views to government and other stakeholders and continue to build the industry's profile to ensure it is always considered when important decisions are made.

I would like to acknowledge the fantastic support supplied to the industry throughout 2007, including the sponsors of our conference, awards and campaigns and advertisers for

Vegetables Australia and Potatoes Australia. Your support is greatly appreciated and has given our industry an opportunity to achieve things that previously we only imagined. Thank you.

Please note that the final round of consultations for the handling of chemicals of security concern are to be conducted starting February and ending in March 2008. AUSVEG has been a member of the Prime Minister and Cabinet – Industry Reference Group on the issue and will ensure growers provide their view.

Finally, welcome to the new Federal Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Tony Burke. AUSVEG looks forward to working closely with the new government to achieve the goals of the vegetable industry. Our election platform and its policies seem well aligned with our key issues, such as climate change, health, water and high-speed broadband.

Happy International Year of the Potato.



John Roach
CEO
AUSVEG Ltd

AROUND THE STATES

New South Wales



Peter Darley, Chairman of the NSW Farmers Association Horticulture Committee was recently appointed chair of the Horticulture Australia Council Horticulture Code of Conduct Committee after Mark Pannitz from Growcom stepped down.

Meetings between the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) and the NSW Farmers Association revealed that the ACCC found it unacceptable that growers and traders were mutually agreeing to ignore the code. Acknowledged problems were: wholesalers not using agency agreements, traders able to extract exorbitant agency commissions and the absence of any litigation taken by the ACCC against those who fail to follow the code.

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Northern Territory



AUSVEG has taken the important and welcome step of proposing changes to its constitution to include a board representative from the Northern Territory. AUSVEG has also entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Northern Territory Horticultural Association to formalise a working relationship between the two bodies.

The Northern Territory vegetable industry has struggled to establish an identity in the national arena, due partly to its comparatively low gross value of production. Commercial vegetable production did not commence until the mid-1980s when evaluation of a number of crops was undertaken in Central and Top End Northern Territory. By the late 1990s, public investment into traditional vegetable varieties and agronomic practices in the wet/dry tropics and the arid zones had all but ceased.

Successful crops in the Top End (wet/dry tropics) include Asian vegetables, cucumbers, snake beans, gourds, and leafy vegetables. Katherine and surrounding areas produce pumpkins, sweet potatoes, sweet corn, zucchini, squash and cabbage. There are currently trials underway for potato and carrot production and potential for expansion in asparagus and onions. Central Australia (arid zone) currently produces cabbage, cauliflowers, lettuce, and cucumbers. Potentials for growth include asparagus, spinach and broccoli.

Since the 1800s, the national industry has been dominated by potatoes and other traditional vegetables. However, climate change, water availability and an increase in multicultural diversity is likely to propel the Northern Territory to the forefront of domestic vegetable production in the future. The value of the Northern Territory vegetable industry has increased from \$7 million per annum in 1997 to almost \$27 million per annum in 2007.

There are fewer than 100 vegetable producers in the Northern Territory with 63 of these being Asian vegetable growers. Compared with other agriculture regions, the Northern Territory is very immature, but with pressure

on water availability, the Northern Territory vegetable industry will experience rapid growth, becoming a significant contributor to the national economy.

Tracey Leo

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Queensland



With the appointment of a Labour Federal Government and Australia ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, a focus on climate change is now more prevalent than ever in the horticulture industry. Peter Deuter from Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries Gatton, Queensland, has been committed to understanding the implications climate change will have on Queensland's vegetable industry through a series of climate-change workshops. Vegetable Industry Development Officer Simon Powell attended workshops in Gatton and Ayr and was impressed with growers' knowledge about climate change.

The Queensland vegetable industry was delighted to see Tim Harslett of Harslett's Farming Company receive a Nuffield scholarship for 2007. Tim is focused on mechanised harvesting and different methods of disease management and developing technology to offset the ever diminishing availability of labour for on-farm growing practices.

The ALP promised a \$200 million Reef Protection Plan during

the election campaign, \$146 million of which is expected to come in the form of grants to help growers improve their practices. Growcom will provide input into how this money can best develop attainable outcomes for industry.

Growcom has welcomed the election of the newly appointed board chairman, John Bishop. John has a vegetable-growing background and now specialises in fig production in the Lockyer Valley.

Jan Davis

Chief Executive Officer
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The recent inflows into Paradise Dam in the Burnett catchment resulted in an increase in water allocations for some Bundaberg irrigators from three per cent to 24 per cent. Growers who were operating on almost nothing have been given a much needed boost. While the irrigation scheme still needs additional infrastructure, water management rules also need an overhaul. SunWater has highlighted the concept of Continuous Share, previously known as Capacity Share.

Problems with the current system of resetting Announced Allocations at the start of each water year are: it promotes a "use it or lose it" attitude towards the end of a water year; water users who conserve water or invest in

efficiency measures are not rewarded; it makes future planning for irrigators difficult; and there is limited scope for carrying over unused water.

The continuous-share model fixes many of these problems. There are no upfront deductions from water accounts for losses at the start of a water year. Instead there is daily accounting of individual customers covering water orders, evaporation loss provision, transmission loss provision, water trades, and cap and scheme inflows shared immediately after the end of each inflow event.

This results in 100 per cent of each customer's unused water account balance automatically carried over at the end of each water year. From a grower's prospective it allows you to self-manage your share of available water. It promotes and rewards your investments in efficient water management and allows you to plan for more than just the current water year, a plus for irrigators whose growing season does not align with the water-year calendar.

Matt Dagan

Executive Officer

Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers

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Victoria



Despite all the media hype regarding price increases for vegetables and shortages due to drought, produce traded through central markets does not reflect that shortages are causing higher

prices to the consumer. Vegetable growers are not experiencing any major increase in farm-gate prices, yet costs in maintaining levels of vegetable production continue to increase. There are areas in Victoria where vegetable growers have reduced their growing acreage due to the lack of available water to maintain saleable vegetable crops.

Relocation to Epping

The efforts of the Strategic Alliance Group to remain trading at Footscray Road have not been successful. It was recently made clear to VGA Victoria representatives that the current Footscray Road site will not be available to operate a Melbourne Wholesale Fruit and Vegetable Market in the future.

The state government is moving forward with plans to relocate the market operation to a proposed site at Epping from 2011 and negotiations are continuing between state government agencies and Strategic Alliance Group members.

VGA Victoria continues to represent the interests of vegetable growers, especially those with current market trading stands as an ongoing participating member of the Strategic Alliance Group. VGA Victoria will ensure that facilities for grower traders are effectively provided at the proposed new location with representation on the market design and planning committees.

Food safety

Food safety is a paddock-to-plate effort that requires the entire supply chain to be effective and play its part. Growers bear the on-farm cost burden from regulation, quality assurance, MRL testing and packaging presentation to meet specifications and demands of the buyer, yet remain mystified when rejections or objections oc-

cur when handling produce down the supply chain and the open displays at retail outlets.

There is a need to maintain consumers' confidence in the vegetable industry and that the industry is doing all it can to assure a safe food supply. Consumers need to be reminded that fresh produce requires washing before eating. We cannot have consumers avoiding fresh produce. The main question to be answered is: who should educate the consumer about food safety?

On behalf of President Luis Gazzola and the Executive Committee of the Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria, New Year greetings to all vegetable growers and their families with health, prosperity and lots of natural rain during 2008.

Tony Imeson

Executive Officer

VGA

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Western Australia



Water reform is still being driven by the state government, in line with national priorities. It will continue to be the number one issue for industry in the coming year. Grower adoption of the Efficient Irrigation Expert System has been strong; its three-tiered approach (updated vegetablesWA website, daily SMS service and web-based irrigation system) has proved to be a success.

The Fertiliser Action Plan is undergoing consideration by the state government. At this stage,

plan adoption will be for domestic use only. However, the industry will keep watch for any further developments that will affect growers.

VegetablesWA has a number of programs helping growers meet environment objectives, government regulatory and market objectives. The association is happy to work with any growers who wish to meet these objectives. Additionally, vegetablesWA continues to represent growers in issues relating to biosecurity, and vegetable and potato marketing and promotion.

Jim Turley

Executive Officer

vegetablesWA

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WA 6005

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Fax: 08 9481 0024

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February 2008

29 February

Australian Vegetable Industry Awards 2008—

Closing date for award nominations

The vegetable industry gathers once a year to commend those at the forefront of industry. Make sure you nominate growers and researchers who deserve to be short-listed.

For more information:

Website: www.vegetableindustryawards.com.au

Phone: Hannah Burns, AUSVEG, 03 9544 8098



March 2008

4 March

Vegetable Advisory Groups Meeting

Sydney, NSW

For more information:

Contact AUSVEG

Phone: 03 9544 8098

5 March

Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee Meeting

Sydney, NSW

For more information:

Contact AUSVEG

Phone: 03 9544 8098

18 March

Fresh Potato Industry Advisory Committee

For more information:

Contact AUSVEG

Phone: 03 9544 8098

19-20 March

Processed Potato Industry Advisory Committee

For more information:

Contact AUSVEG

Phone: 03 9544 8098

18-20 March

Pollination Australia grower workshops

Canberra, ACT

For more information:

Contact Margie Thomson, General Manager Established Rural Industries, RIRDC Canberra

Email: margie.thomson@rirdc.gov.au

31 March

AAA FarmBis program

Queensland—Closing date for applications for subsidy

For more information:

Contact QRAA:

Phone: 1800 623 946

May 2008

18 May

National Vegetable Levy R&D Priority Identification closes

For more information:

Contact AUSVEG

Phone: 03 9544 8098

26-27 May

restaurant Melbourne 08

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

Australian Vegetable Industry Awards 2008 & West Australian Vegetable Growers Association 60th Birthday Anniversary Dinner

Burswood Grand Ballroom

Perth, WA

For more information:

Website: www.vegetableindustryawards.com.au

Phone: Hannah Burns, AUSVEG, 03 9544 8098

(Awards enquiries only)

Phone: Jim Turley, vegetablesWA, 08 9481 0834

(Anniversary dinner enquiries only)

August 2008

11-12 August

restaurant Sydney 08

Royal Hall of Industries, Sydney, NSW

For more information:

Website: www.restaurant06.com.au/default.asp

Phone: 02 9331 7507

September 2008

20 September

Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers Gala Ball

A fantastic event, held every two years.

For more information:

Email: info@bfvg.com.au

Phone: 07 4153 3007

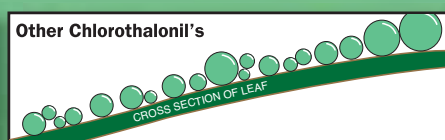
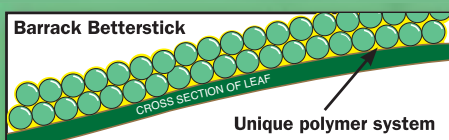
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- More even distribution
- More surface area of active ingredient in contact with the leaf



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