

vegetables australia



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set to wow industry

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exporter Peter Wauchope

43 Import increases:
The reasons revealed

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A word from the AUSVEG Chairman

Recent figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that imports of processed and semi-processed vegetables continue to rise. This has been an issue of note for the vegetable industry for a number of years; it dovetails with an additional concern about food labelling laws and how the Country of Origin information processors are obliged to supply can be confusing for consumers.

To put the industry's position to the Australian Government, AUSVEG CEO Richard Mulcahy gave evidence at the Senate Economic Committee last month, following AUSVEG's submission to the Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling Laws) Bill 2009.

The legislation seeks to clarify confusing labelling laws through

amending the Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act 1991 to require Food Standards Australia New Zealand to develop and approve food product labelling standards to be used by food producers, manufacturers and distributors.

AUSVEG will continue to represent the interests of growers and the industry to decision-makers, to ensure that government agencies understand the challenges that growers face every day.

In exciting news, AUSVEG has formed a strategic partnership with industry leader Elders. This will result in close collaboration between the two organisations on issues specific to the horticulture industry.

Growers will have the opportunity to share in the expertise of both

these organisations at the recently announced inaugural AUSVEG National Convention, which will be held in Queensland in May next year.

The AUSVEG Convention will have a different focus to the Australian Vegetable Industry Conference, which has been organised by AUSVEG in previous years.

Attending growers will hear from key industry figures and prominent Australians, and the event will be complemented with an exciting social program.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome and congratulate John Lloyd on his appointment as the new CEO for Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL), and also welcome new Industry Services Manager for the



John Brent
Chairman
AUSVEG Ltd

vegetable program, Will Gordon.

AUSVEG looks forward to continuing to work together with HAL to improve the outlook for the vegetable and potato industries.

From the editor



The industry is putting its best foot forward with the roll-out of the new Vegetable Industry Development Program (VIDP), which covers the communication of levy benefits and R&D project outcomes to growers, people development, knowledge management, and economic analysis.

The VIDP replaces the previous, fragmented industry development projects, housing them all under the one umbrella. See how the program will benefit you on page 34.

There has been much interest in the continued increase in processed and semi-processed vegetable imports. Industry Economist Ian James looks at the driving forces behind these increases and makes sense of the latest industry data on page 43.

For growers who want to fight fire with fire, this issue's feature profile is Western Australia carrot exporter Peter Wauchope, who has been sending abroad fresh Australian produce for almost 25 years. Read about the changing face of export markets on page 26.

The 2009 Vegetable Growers' Tour to the US, subsidised by the National Vegetable Levy, was successfully held last month. Participating growers reported that when it comes to American operations—unsurprisingly—bigger is better. To read more, see page 22.

A big thank you to everyone who completed the *Vegetables Australia* reader survey. Details of this year's survey prize winner can be found on page 12.

It's hard to believe this is already our final issue for 2009. A happy festive season to you and your families, and stay safe as we gear up for what's sure to be another long and hot summer. We'll be back with more industry news in January; until then, good growing.

Jim Thomson
Editor, *Vegetables Australia*



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vegetables australia

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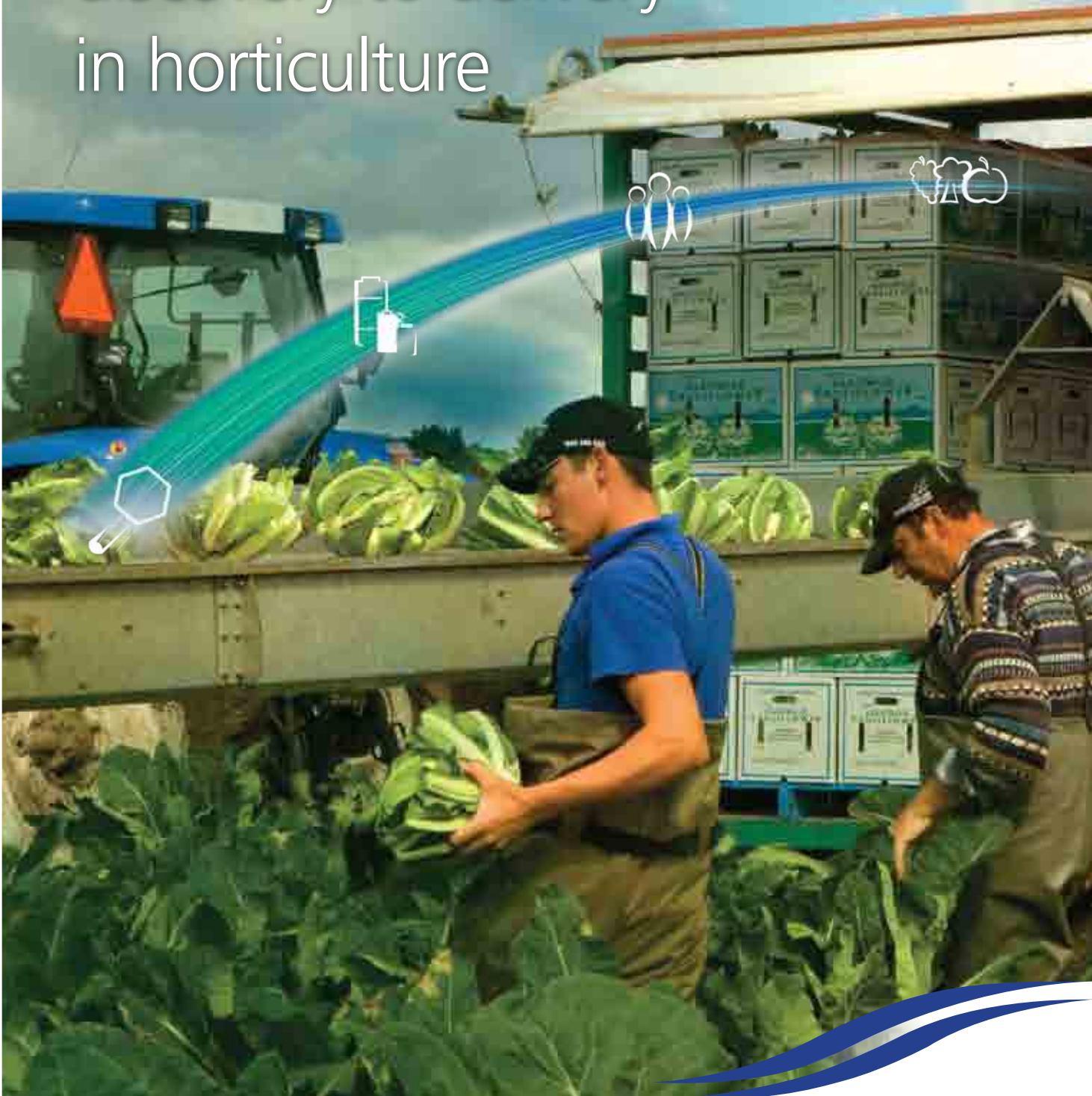
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Briefly

New HAL CEO appointed

Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) has appointed John Lloyd as its new Chief Executive Officer. Mr Lloyd assumed the role on 2 November from Vanessa Goss, who has been acting CEO since April.

Mr Lloyd has previously been the CEO/Vice President of CNH Australia/New Zealand, General Manager Commercial at Incitec Pivot, and General Manager Marketing at Wesfarmers Dalgety. Until recently he ran a consultancy specialising in operational and strategic advice to agricultural clients. [va](#)

Levy report on its way

Each year, an annual industry report for the National Vegetable Levy research and development (R&D) program is sent to levy payers. This year's report will again be produced by HAL and is scheduled for distribution in November.

If you do not receive your copy of the *Vegetable Industry Report*, contact AUSVEG on 03 9544 8098. [va](#)

Organic Standard released

The first Australian Standard for organic and biodynamic products was released last month by Standards Australia.

AS 6000-2009 Organic and biodynamic products outlines the minimum requirements to be met by growers and manufacturers who want to label their products "organic" or "biodynamic". It establishes an agreed set of procedures to be followed for the production, preparation, transportation, marketing and labelling of organic and biodynamic products including food and processed food.

To download a copy of the standard, visit www.saiglobal.com.

In other organic news, the second annual National Organic Week (NOW) took place from 16 to 25 October, with a series of launches, tastings, awards and events held around the country. For more information, visit www.organicweek.net.au. [va](#)

New ISMs for veg, potato and onion industries

HAL has appointed two new Industry Services Managers (ISM). Based in Melbourne, Will Gordon is the new ISM for the vegetable industry. Stuart Burgess, based in Hobart, is the new ISM for the potato and onion industries.

Vegetables Australia profiles Mr Gordon on page 32. [va](#)

AUSVEG and Elders forge strategic partnership

Growers are set to benefit from increased collaboration between Peak Industry Body AUSVEG and industry powerhouse Elders.

Elders Chief Operating Officer Mike Guerin and AUSVEG Chief Executive Officer Richard Mulcahy announced in September that AUSVEG and Elders have forged a new strategic partnership.

"This represents a great opportunity for the Australian vegetable and potato industry to cooperate on a new level that will benefit the whole of industry," said Mr Guerin.

"We are impressed with the advances that AUSVEG is taking within the horticulture industry and are delighted to be forging even closer links with them over this coming year."

The partnership will result in close collaboration between the two organisations on issues specific to the horticulture industry and enable growers to share in the collective expertise of the organisations.

Industry benefits

"We are proud to be a part of this exciting new partnership with Elders, one of Australia's most respected and successful rural organisations," said Mr Mulcahy.

"Elders has a long and proven history of supporting Australian growers and this partnership is

yet another indication of their commitment to our industry."

AUSVEG Chairman John Brent welcomed the partnership.

"The AUSVEG Board believes this is a very significant partnership for both AUSVEG and the \$3.7 billion wholesale Australian vegetable industry," he said.

Research and development (R&D) initiatives will form a key focus for the partners, with Elders to be involved in a number of industry events planned to take place over the next 12 months. Elders has identified horticulture as a key growth platform for its business, recognising the opportunity that the vegetable industry presents to Australia's agribusiness sector.

Elders will also play a key role in the inaugural AUSVEG National Convention and Trade Show, and National Awards for Excellence scheduled to be held in Queensland in May 2010.

More information about the AUSVEG National Convention can be found on page 15 of this issue of *Vegetables Australia*. [va](#)

For more information visit:
www.ausveg.com.au

Chilli consumption thins blood

Chillies may play a part in the future prevention and treatment of diabetes and heart disease, according to new research from the University of Tasmania.

Capsaicin and dihydrocapsaicin—two active ingredients found in chillies—could revolutionise the treatment of diabetes and cardiovascular disease with the discovery that they have the potential to lower blood glucose and insulin levels, reduce the formation of fatty deposits on artery walls and prevent blood clots. This is accomplished without some of the side-effects of traditional medications.

Replacement medication

A research team from the University of Tasmania's (UTAS) School of Human Life Sciences is working on a study that aims to confirm these health benefits, which could see chillies replacing or being used in conjunction with

current medications for treating and preventing cardiovascular disease, one of the biggest causes of death in developed countries.

UTAS research fellow at the School of Human Life Sciences, Dr Kiran Ahuja, and her co-researchers are assessing the comparative effectiveness of chilli and aspirin on blood thinning.

Hyper-aggregation of blood platelets—where platelets clump together—is associated with cardiovascular disease and thrombosis. Thrombosis occurs when a blood clot obstructs the flow of blood through the circulatory system.

The study will investigate what amount of chilli gives the

“Chillies could replace current medications for treating and preventing cardiovascular disease.”

same effect as a standard dose of aspirin on platelet aggregation and will be followed up with a dietary intervention study.

“Aspirin is commonly used to inhibit platelet aggregation,

however, it has a

nasty side effect, which causes stomach bleeding in patients,” said Dr Ahuja.

Risk reduction

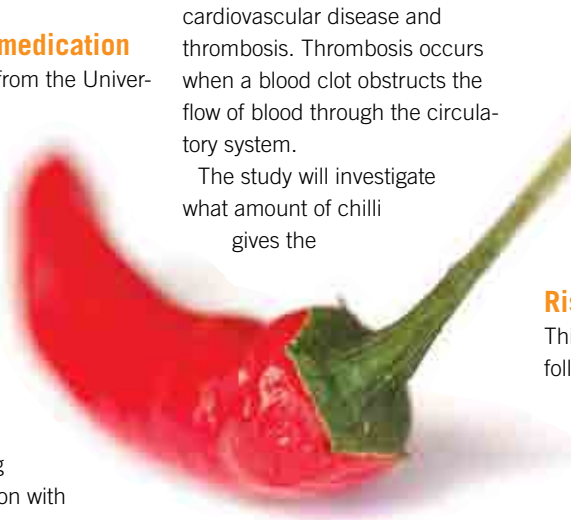
This work on blood coagulation follows from Dr Ahuja's earlier investigations that showed the potential role of chilli in the prevention of diabetes and formation of fatty deposits

on artery walls.

Her study, which was published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, found that consuming a meal that included chillies lowered post-meal blood glucose and insulin concentrations. High levels of glucose and insulin are associated with an increased risk for the development of diabetes.

The School of Human Life Science also confirmed that regular consumption of chillies helps prevent the development of fatty deposits on artery walls.

Dr Ahuja and her co-researchers found that chillies help reduce the oxidation of LDL-cholesterol and therefore reduce the chance of plaque formation in arteries. va



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Government funds new greenhouse facility

A new controlled environment training facility is expected to open mid-2010.

A new purpose-built training facility for the Controlled Environment Horticulture industry will be constructed at the Cranbourne Campus of the Chisholm Institute of TAFE in Victoria after the institute secured \$1.2 million worth of Australian Government funding. The facility aims to provide industry with the most modern controlled environment training resource in Australia.

"The facility is being developed to service the demonstrated training needs of growers in our local and regional area," said Chisholm Institute's Horticulture Instructor, Tony Bundock.

"It is vital that we are able to provide a facility that industry can easily access and draw immediate benefit from. We have been working closely with The Hydroponic Farmers Federation and the Australian Hydroponic and Glasshouse Association (AHGA) to

achieve this goal," he said.

AHGA President Graeme Smith said he'd been in discussions with Chisholm Institute with a view to working together to provide industry-driven training when the facility opens.

Construction to commence

The facility's initial construction of 1,000 square metres of six-metre-high commercial glass will house the latest in environmental management, staff management, and crop production technologies. Specialised computer-based and practical teaching resources will also be installed.

Construction of the facility's initial stage is expected to commence in January 2010 and be completed by June 2010. [va](#)

Recent minor use permits

Permit number	Permit description (pesticide / crop / pest)	Date issued	Expiry date	States covered
ALLIUM VEGETABLES				
PER10596*	Success (spinosad) / Spring onions, shallots / Western flower thrips	23-Apr-08	31-Oct-11	All states except Vic
PER10824	Copper Oxychloride, Cuprous Oxide or Cupric Hydroxide / Spring onions, shallots / Downy Mildew	27-Sep-09	30-Sep-14	All states except Vic
BRASSICAS				
PER8819**	Filan (boscalid) / Brassicas, brassica leafy vegetables, lettuce, beans / Sclerotinia rot	10-Oct-05	31-Jan-10	All states except Vic
FRUITING VEGETABLES				
PER5815*	Success (spinosad) / Eggplant / Melon thrips	11-Aug-08	31-Jul-13	All states except Vic
LEGUME VEGETABLES				
PER10976	Basagran (bentazone) / Snow and sugar snap peas / Broadleaf weeds	10-Aug-09	31-Mar-15	All states except Vic
PER10988	Bladex (cyanazine) / Snow and sugar snap peas / Broadleaf weeds	10-Aug-09	31-Mar-15	All states except Vic
ROOT VEGETABLES				
PER7603***	Rovral Aquaflo (iprodione) / Beetroot / Alternaria leaf spot, Sclerotinia rot, Grey mould	21-Apr-06	20-Apr-11	All states
PER11510	Mouseoff & Ratoff Zinc Phosphide Baits (zinc phosphide) / Sweet potato / Mice, rats	12-Aug-09	31-Jul-11	NSW, Qld
PER11350	Mancozeb / Radish, swede, turnip / Alternaria, Cercospora leaf spot, White blister	10-Aug-09	31-Mar-15	All states except Vic

* Success² added to product list

** Minor modifications have been made to this permit, including insertion of an Attachment listing the Brassica leafy vegetables. Also, the maximum number of applications in lettuce is two per crop. Users should ensure they have a copy of the updated version.

*** Rates were incorrect - rates have been corrected in this permit

Grower incomes drop 3 per cent

Falling farm incomes for 2007/08 are an indication of the increased pressure growers are under from imports and rising input costs.

Findings from a national survey released in September show that vegetable farm incomes decreased three per cent on average in 2007/08. The estimated average cash income for growers in 2007/08 was \$166,100, down \$5,900 from 2006/07.

These findings are an indication that rising farm input costs and competition from China are affecting the bottom line of Australian vegetable growers, said AUSVEG CEO Richard Mulcahy.

"The results are a reflection of the fact that Australian growers

are increasingly competing with imports from countries such as China, where input costs such as labour are significantly lower," he said.

The findings are contained in the report *Australian Vegetable Growing Farms: An Economic Survey, 2007/08*, which was released by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE). The report also revealed that 86 per cent of vegetable growers perceive rising farm input costs to be one of the greatest obstacles to the future

viability of the industry.

Industry overview

The ABARE survey found that during 2007/08, an estimated 3,781 commercial vegetable farms were operating in Australia, each with an estimated value of agricultural output (EVAO) of at least \$40,000. These farms accounted for 73 per cent of all vegetable farms.

The average area sown to vegetables was 29 hectares per farm in 2007/08. However, half of Australian vegetable growers

produced vegetables on areas of less than nine hectares in 2007/08.

The ABARE report is the second in a series of three commissioned by Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) and funded by the National Vegetable Levy and matched funds from the Australian Government.

To download *Australian Vegetable Growing Farms: An Economic Survey, 2007/08* visit: www.abareconomics.com



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Vic strategic plan an Australian first

After months of development, VGA Victoria's long-awaited Vegetable Industry Strategic Plan has been released.

Victoria is the first state in Australia to release a Vegetable Industry Strategic Plan. Published in September, the plan sets out a vision for the Victorian industry that aligns with the industry's national strategic plan, VegVision 2020.

Strategic achievements

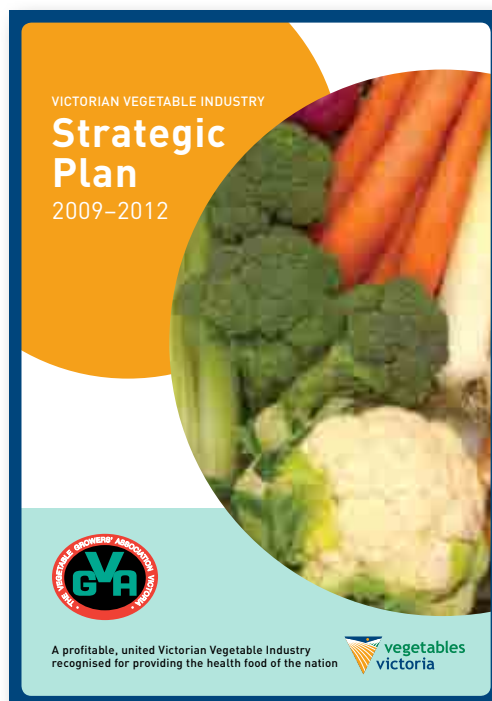
According to Tony Imeson, Executive Officer VGA, the plan has been developed to identify the industry's strategic imperatives and ways that these imperatives can be achieved.

"The plan will assist key industry stakeholders to deliver a stronger future for the Victorian vegetable industry," he said.

Mr Imeson was part of the seven-person steering committee that oversaw the plan's development. The committee also included Luis Gazzola, VGA President, and Euan Laird, Program Manager Horticulture from Victorian Department of Primary Industries.

The plan was devised to facilitate the vision of a "profitable, united Victorian vegetable industry recognised for providing the health food of the nation".

While growers have adopted many recent advances in agronomy, irrigation, pest management, mechanisation and quality assurance, the plan recognises that further advances are needed in plant physiology, business management, market development and people management if the industry is to fulfil its potential.



Power of five

The strategic plan identifies five areas where development will better prepare Victorian vegetable businesses for future success. These are:

1. Consumers and markets

To drive consumer demand for Victorian vegetables, leading to consumers eating more fresh vegetables.

2. Competition

To enhance industry competitiveness, in both local and international markets.

3. Information

For growers to be aware of, have access to and act on the latest industry information.

4. Leadership and management

For the Victorian industry to have skilled, engaged, produc-

tive and recognised leadership and management.

5. Resources

Proactive management of natural resources and awareness of climate change.

The five strategic areas will be progressed by Industry Development Officers (IDOs) appointed under the Victorian Government's "Better Services to Farmers" initiative.

It is anticipated that the plan be reviewed in one year's time to assess its progress.

To download a copy of the Victorian Vegetable Industry Strategic Plan visit:
www.vgavic.org.au

VA survey winner announced

Vegetables Australia's readers have helped guide the magazine's future direction.

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

Clear benefits

Funded by the National Vegetable Levy and matched Australian Government funds, *Vegetables Australia* is dedicated to communicating levy benefits to growers. R&D articles are included alongside grower profiles, industry news and updates about industry leaders and organisations.

Now in its fifth year, the magazine aims to help you become the most efficient, profitable and environmentally aware growers you can be.

Lucky Jim

The winner of the Reader Survey prize has been drawn.

Congratulations to Jim Azzopardi from Londonderry, New South Wales, who has won the five-litre pack of Amistar, valued at approximately \$1,000.

Vegetables Australia thanks Syngenta for its support.

Expressions of Interest Invited

Vegetable Levy Payers who have an interest in serving on the Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) for Vegetables and specialised Working and Advisory Groups are invited to register their interest with AUSVEG. Role of the IAC:

- To represent vegetable levy payers by acting as the final Advising Group to HAL in recommending the investment of industry R&D levy funds.
- To assess the relative return to growers from investing in one area over another, and determine a weighting of significance for each strategy based on chance of success, value of return to growers, relative cost, and significance to the industry as a whole.

Requirements for Appointees:

- IAC Members must be levy payers or could be a senior employee with a levy payer, however, specialists who are not levy payers are encouraged to nominate for Working and Advisory Group membership and should bring a range of skills to the Committees (Working Groups comprise: Environmental, Chemical, IPM, Biosecurity, and Protected Cropping. Advisory Groups comprise: Market Development, Information Technology Development and Dissemination, Production, Consumers, and Leadership and People Development).
- A knowledge and commitment to horticultural industry issues and R&D work is essential.
- An ability to participate in monthly one-hour teleconferences to discuss R&D proposals and to attend face-to-face meetings on two occasions each year for approximately 3-4 days in total, as well as an induction day.
- Must be capable of reading and reviewing R&D project proposals.
- Preference will be given to those applicants demonstrating involvement with established industry networks that provide linkages with other growers of their product at state or national level.
- Willingness to participate in an interview as part of the selection process for the Committee.

Successful nominees will receive Sitting Fees for face-to-face meetings at the rate of \$315 per day (taxable), plus reasonable expenses incl. economy class air fares, accommodation and meal costs for attendance at meetings.

Individuals who wish to be considered for appointment should enclose curriculum vitae and any other information demonstrating the ability to undertake the role and write to:

IAC Expression of Interest

C/- AUSVEG Limited

PO Box 563

MULGRAVE Vic 3170

OR email richard.mulcahy@ausveg.com.au (CEO of AUSVEG)

... by no later than 11 December 2009.

All applications will be treated as confidential to AUSVEG and HAL. Nominees may expect to be interviewed from December 2009 by representatives of the PIB, and the successful appointees will be notified after agreement is reached between the PIB and HAL with a view to commencing as IAC members in 2010.

For additional information please refer to HAL document "Investment of Levies for Australian Horticultural Industries—Roles and Responsibilities" available from AUSVEG or through the AUSVEG website: www.ausveg.com.au/RD_levy.cfm

Industry communication is facilitated by HAL in partnership with AUSVEG and is funded by the National Potato and Vegetable Levies. The Australian Government provides matched funds for all HAL's R&D activities.

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AUSVEG Convention set to wow industry

The 2010 AUSVEG National Convention, held in Queensland in May, will be the largest industry gathering of its kind.

The AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show, and National Awards for Excellence—held at Conrad Jupiters Hotel Casino from 27 to 30 May 2010—is expected to be the biggest gathering of growers, researchers and supply chain representatives in the vegetable industry ever held.

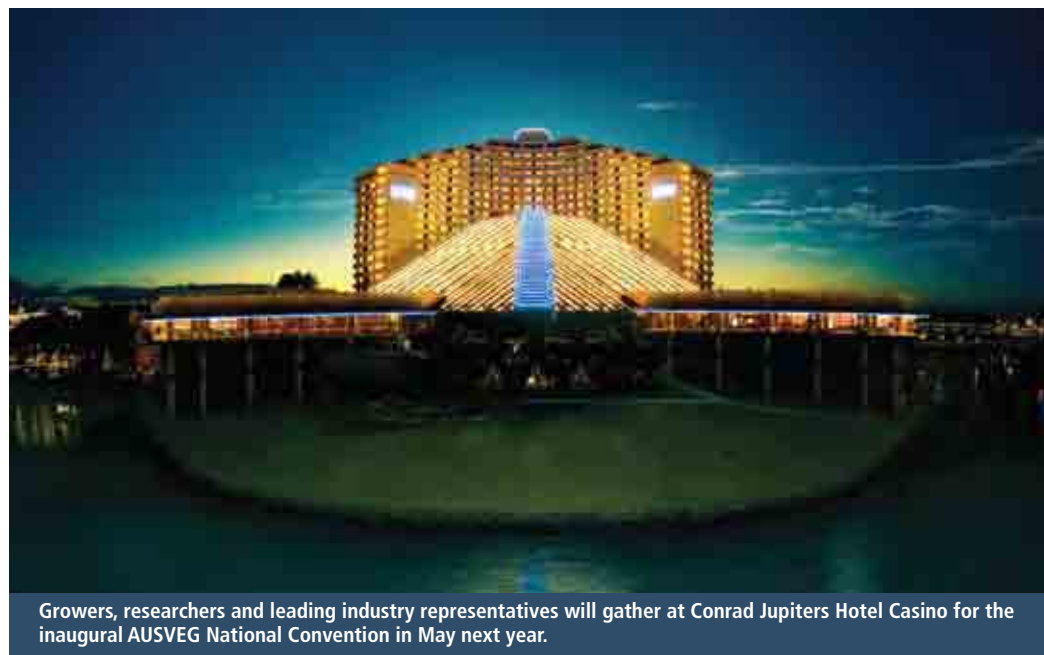
At the time of going to print, key strategic partners for the event include Elders, one of Australia's leading rural services providers; Syngenta, industry leader in crop protection solutions; Dupont, one of Australia's most well regarded crop protection and seed technology suppliers, and specialist vegetable seed company Terranova Seeds. Further partnerships will be announced in coming weeks with other leading Australian supply companies.

AUSVEG has previously held conferences that have focused mainly on research and development (R&D) and been funded in part through grower levies. This is the first time AUSVEG will be relying on industry support to stage this spectacular national event.

Diverse drawcards

The program will feature prominent Australians addressing delegates from such diverse areas as politics, business, R&D, retailing and sport. Details of the speaker program will be announced shortly, together with registration details for attending participants.

There will be a strong social program that will include a golf competition held at one of the Gold Coast's leading golf courses on Sunday 30 May and a special "Kids' program" for families



Growers, researchers and leading industry representatives will gather at Conrad Jupiters Hotel Casino for the inaugural AUSVEG National Convention in May next year.

attending the convention that will include visits to the Gold Coast's famous theme parks.

One of the features of the convention will be a trade show where up to 70 companies will demonstrate goods and services of interest to growers who want to familiarise themselves with the industry's latest products, technologies and services.

Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) vegetable working groups and IAC meetings will be held at the Gold Coast to coincide with the convention. Levy payer meetings for vegetable and potato levy payers will take place on the afternoon of Friday 28 May at Conrad Jupiters Hotel Casino commencing from 2.30 pm.

Participants in the Vital Vegetables program, including members of the governance board as well as marketing and research partners, also plan to meet at the time of the convention. This will enable growers to discuss opportunities

and developments presented by the Vital Vegetables program.

The AUSVEG Board of Directors will also meet at the Gold Coast, as leading industry representatives come together for what will be an exciting and memorable event.

Awarding excellence

"Invitations have been issued to a number of prominent Australians and we expect a first-class line-up of interesting and informative presenters," said AUSVEG CEO Richard Mulcahy.

"We also plan to give focus to the key role that women play in the Australian horticulture industry; they will be recognised at a Women in Horticulture breakfast on the morning of Saturday 29 May."

One of the highlights of the event will be the AUSVEG National Awards for Excellence that will be held at a gala dinner on Saturday 29 May. The awards

will feature new categories and will be an occasion to recognise the achievements of growers, researchers and others who have made outstanding contributions to Australia's horticulture industry.

AUSVEG has negotiated heavily-discounted accommodation rates at Conrad Jupiters Hotel Casino and details of these special offers will be published shortly.

Delegates interested in receiving a convention brochure, companies wanting to exhibit in the trade show and businesses wishing to become sponsors of the event or strategic partners with AUSVEG should call AUSVEG on 03 9544 8098 or email <info@ausveg.com.au>. **va**



More information will soon be published on the AUSVEG website: www.ausveg.com.au

Softly does it

The roll-out of a new generation of pest-specific pesticides that are soft to beneficial insects, growers and consumers is being overseen by consultant Peter Dal Santo, writes Dan McGuire

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Many older pesticides will be replaced by new pesticides that are soft to beneficial insects and people, but deadly to targeted pests.
- This transition is being facilitated by Agrichemical Consultant Peter Dal Santo and his company AgAware.
- A state-by-state review is currently underway of pesticides used for the top 12 vegetable commodities.

i For more information contact:
 Peter Dal Santo, Agrichemical Consultant, AgAware
 Email: <pds@agaware.com.au>
 Phone: 03 5439 5916
 or visit www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers
 Project numbers: MT07029, VG07109
 Keywords: Pesticide access

News that widely-used pesticide endosulfan is being reviewed internationally should not overly concern growers, according to Victorian Agrichemical Consultant Peter Dal Santo.

In fact, growers should expect more of the older pesticides to be phased out in the wake of a “soft” revolution. Older pesticides will be replaced by new chemicals that are soft to the crop, soft to beneficial insects, soft to operators and consumers—but deadly to targeted pests.

“Many of the products registered for use on vegetables are either under review in Australia or being questioned overseas,” said Mr Dal Santo from his AgAware consultancy, which is based near Bendigo.

“Some face a limited life in Australia and that’s a good thing, because if their safety is being seriously questioned in another part of the world, do you really want to use them?”

Reduced-risk chemistry

Endosulfan has been banned in more than 60 countries, and its use in Australia is restricted to a range of fruit, vegetable and cereal crops. However, the Review Committee of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, to which Australia is a signatory, is expected to soon ban endosulfan internationally.

Such changes accentuate the importance of AgAware’s work in finding safe and effective alternatives for growers through a “soft”

approach.

“Soft doesn’t mean weak, it means reduced risk,” said Mr Dal Santo. “What it allows growers to do is move into a system of agriculture where they are more in harmony with natural mechanisms working at the same time. Reduced-risk chemistry allows them to not disrupt natural biological systems that will also work in their crops, like beneficial insects and predatory mites.”

That doesn’t mean a chemical-free, organic approach—an ideal Peter believes is admirable but generally unrealistic on the Australian commercial vegetable production scene.

“Most of our crops are grown as monocultures on short rotations and that intensification of horti-



Agrichemical Consultant Peter Dal Santo is confident that growers will embrace the “soft” revolution of chemical controls.

culture does not allow itself to be organic to a great degree because once a pest gets in it becomes rampant very quickly," he said.

Matchmaker man

While growers in the US and Europe have access to a wide range of "off-the-shelf" beneficial insects and bio-pesticides—extracts of plants lethal to certain pests—Australia's strict quarantine laws mean these are not an option for our growers.

This is where Peter Dal Santo and AgAware enter the picture.

Mr Dal Santo's work, funded by Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) using industry levies and matched funds from the Australian Government, involves finding products to deal with a particular

the pest is the same, the crop structure is basically the same, so APVMA may give us the permit without generating the data. In a situation where the same pest occurs in silverbeet, ECSR data will be generated to support the permit."

AgAware generates its data through trials, sometimes in conjunction with overseas agencies such as the US Department of Agriculture, so Australian growers can have access to the best and latest products without delay.

The firm has had a hand in obtaining about half of the 800 permits currently available in Australia. There are certain pests—such as White blister, Western flower thrips and Silverleaf whitefly—for which most

“Reduced-risk chemistry allows growers to not disrupt natural biological systems that also work in their crops.”

pest on a particular crop and getting that use approved by the national regulatory body, the Australian Pesticide and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA). It is this work that saw Mr Dal Santo receive the AUSVEG Industry Recognition Award at the 2009 Australian Vegetable Industry Awards in Melbourne in May.

"You cannot use a pesticide on a crop it is not approved for, but in the majority of cases manufacturers register a product only for use on major crops," he said.

"Most vegetable crops aren't on most pesticide labels. What we try to do is match those two, so growers have legal access to the pesticides they need."

One way to do that is to generate the necessary data through existing studies into efficacy, crop safety and residues (ECSR).

"What we do is generate ECSR data to support a permit, which is not a registration but an allowed off-label use. For instance, we want a use in eggplant and there's a registration in tomatoes. They're both fruiting vegetables,


controls available are via HAL/AgAware permits.

Review underway

Recently Mr Dal Santo has been involved in a state-by-state review of the pesticide situation, working alongside government regulators, researchers, growers and those in the retail chain to review pesticides used on the top 12 vegetables in each state.

The review covers the effectiveness of the pesticides, resistance issues, environmental safety, residue concerns, integrated pest management (IPM) compatibility, and occupational health and safety issues.

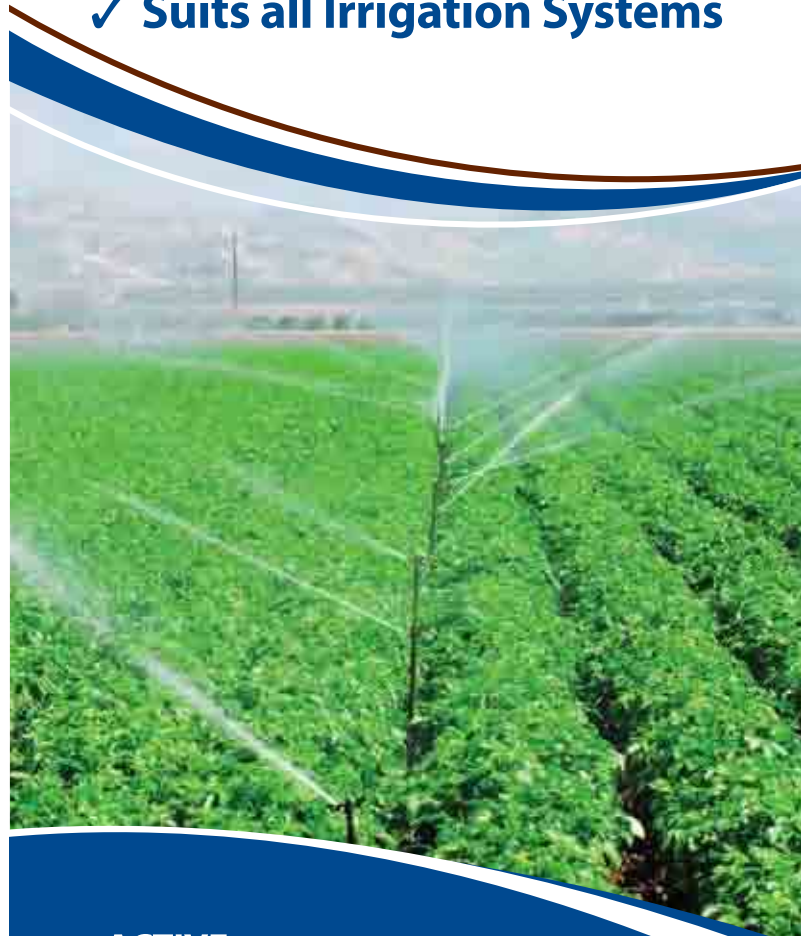
Mr Dal Santo is confident growers will embrace the soft revolution of chemical controls.

"Growers are getting smarter all the time," he said. "They want better products to do only the job they need to do, so the consumer gets the best possible produce with the least chemical residue." 

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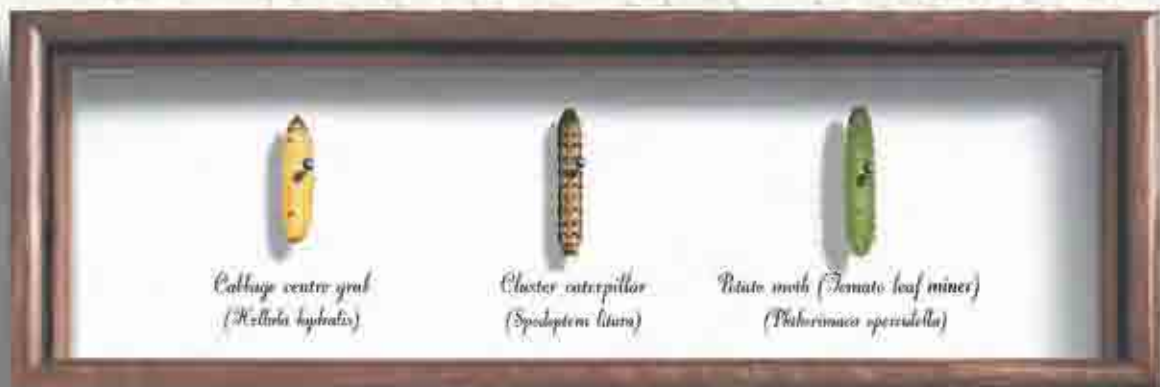
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Blown away by sweet heat

Fresh wasabi production is a growing industry in Australia, with growers working together to streamline marketing and distribution, discovers Karen Shaw.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- The fresh wasabi industry in Tasmania is growing, assisted by the increased networking of local wasabi growers.
- Three wasabi growers have formed Shima Wasabi, which supplies wasabi products to restaurants and wholesalers in Australia.
- There is also scope for the product to be exported, which provides opportunities for further industry growth.

For more information visit: www.rirdc.gov.au and search for 'Increasing production of Australian wasabi'

Shima Wasabi is a business on a mission: to provide fresh wasabi to its customers 365 days a year. The Tasmanian enterprise began operation in 2007 and has already carved out a niche market for its products—wasabi stems, leaves and flowers.

A Rural Industry Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) project investigated the different varieties of wasabi and suggested there was an Australian market for fresh wasabi stems. The project report, which was published in April this year, recommended that wasabi growers work together to develop the industry to minimise competition for the same market.

Hence the formation of Shima (Japanese for island) Wasabi—a business run by three Tasmanian growers: Rob Gibb, Stephen Welsh and Melina Parker—who

have joined forces to streamline marketing and distribution.

Each partner has a farm located in a different area of the island and has wasabi at different stages of development to ensure there is always product available.

High risk, high return

Wasabi is a perennial herb that belongs to the same family as broccoli and the mustards. It is native to Japan and used to prepare a hot condiment usually served with sushi and sashimi.

Although Tasmania has ideal conditions for wasabi growing, it's a labour-intensive enterprise that takes skill and patience. According to Shima Wasabi's Marketing Manager, Melina Parker, it takes two years for the small *Wasabi japonica* plants to become mature enough to produce a marketable stem.

"We currently have about 7,000 plants under cultivation. Some are hydroponically grown, and others are in soil," said Ms Parker.

"We grow six different varieties of wasabi, including the better known 'Mazuma' and 'Daruma'. On some varieties once the primary stem is cut, secondary stems develop and these can also be used. Others are best grown for their leaves and flowers."

Wasabi plants are best suited to colder, wetter climates.

"Spring is when they really take off, growing to about 50 centimetres, and flowering through September/October. They need protection from pests such as aphids and are grown in fully enclosed shade houses," said Ms Parker, who monitors and inspects

continued page 20



Fresh wasabi—a high-risk, high-return product that sells for about \$130 per kilogram—is well suited to the growing conditions in Tasmania. Image supplied by Stephen Welsh.

her crop daily for aphids and other damaging problems.

“We don’t spray, so it’s a case of constantly being vigilant to keep control. Being a member of the brassicaceae family, wasabi is also susceptible to downy mildew and phoma. It’s a high-risk and difficult plant to grow.”

Markets and uses

Shima Wasabi distributes its products to most Australian states. “We target three main markets: top restaurants, manufacturers who make wasabi powder products, and ‘foodies’ at home who want to try something different,” said Ms Parker.

“The grated stem is used to make wasabi paste, but restaurant chefs like using the leaves to make bar snacks and garnishes. We really want to educate people about what fresh wasabi tastes like. It certainly has heat, but it’s coupled with a sweet taste-sensation and it’s this taste that really blows people away,” she said.

“Fresh wasabi sells for about \$130 per kilogram, so it’s a fairly expensive product. However, one kilogram goes a long way. We suggest people keep it submerged in cold water in an airtight container and change the water every couple of days. We want to make sure people get the most from what they are buying.”

Shima Wasabi currently produces between 200 to 300 kilograms per year, which is enough to supply the domestic market.

“Our wholesale customers have sent small amounts of wasabi to Hong Kong and the Maldives so that’s really exciting. The feedback so far about Australian-grown wasabi has been really positive,” said Ms Parker. [va](#)

Asian Vegetable Profile

Tong ho *Chrysanthemum coronarium*

Otherwise known as: Tong hao, tung ho, tang ho, chong ho, crown daisy, edible or garland chrysanthemum

Background

Tong ho is an edible or cooking chrysanthemum that is similar in appearance to the leafy portion of ornamental chrysanthemum. Native to Europe and Northern Asia, it is a vegetable of importance in Asia and Asian communities in western countries.

Where and how does it grow?

There are two main kinds of tong ho—small leaf and broad leaf. The small leaf variety has deeply serrated leaves, and is prone to slow bolting. Broad leaf tong ho does not grow as quickly as the small leaf variety, nor is it as aromatic.

Leaves and stems are ready for harvest one to two months after seeds are sown. Tong ho can be grown all year, depending on temperature. Both varieties prefer cooler growing conditions, although small leaf tong ho has a greater cold tolerance. Optimal growth temperature is around 20 °C.

In regular growing conditions, tong ho is relatively disease tolerant, so there is little need for the use of pesticides or other chemical controls.

Preparation and cooking

Asian cultures use tong ho in both a vegetable and herbal medicine capacity, where it is sometimes a substitute for camomile.



Leaves and stems have a slightly succulent texture, and their distinctive flavour increases in strength as the plant ages. When tong ho is flowering or has sign of flowering, the leaves and stems become bitter and fibrous.

Leaves and stems can be eaten raw in salad, cooked (stir-fried or boiled) or used in soups.

When used in meal preparation, tong ho should be young, fresh and crisp. [va](#)



For more information contact:
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Super-sized operations impress Aussies

Large-scale farms and grocery stores were an eye-opening experience for participants in this year's grower tour to the US.

The 2009 AUSVEG California and PMA Fresh Summit Study Tour kicked off with eight keen growers and their group leader, AUSVEG Communications Manager Hugh Tobin, flying from Australia to Los Angeles in early-October.

The tour, which was subsidised by the National Vegetable Levy and matched Australian Government funds through Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL), followed similar successful grower tours to the US in 2006 and 2008. It incorporated farm visits in the prime vegetable-growing regions of California as well as attendance at the Produce Marketing

Association (PMA) Fresh Summit International Convention and Expo in Orlando, Florida.

Growers were exposed to technological, marketing and business-development initiatives undertaken by US growers, along with a host of fantastic networking opportunities. As the tour took place during the US harvest period, farm and production visits allowed growers insight into large-scale, profitable supply-chain systems. Current and future issues common to both countries were discussed.

Food safety focus

Tour participant Andrew Smith, a

25-year-old cabbage, sweet corn and cauliflower grower from New South Wales, was surprised by the focus on food safety in the US.

"It blew me away—even down to the fact that if growers find animal tracks through their crops, they can't use any of the produce. If they see a dog walking through the field, any produce that comes within a certain radius of the dog has to be destroyed. That will be a big issue for us [if it becomes legislated in Australia], especially with the amount of wildlife we have like kangaroos, rabbits and foxes," he said.

Led by tour company Agrotours,

the 11-day tour began with the group's attendance at the PMA Fresh Summit, which boasted more than 19,000 attendees from around the globe. Growers found the speakers insightful and the workshops both informative and relevant to challenges faced in Australia.

Tour participants also attended sessions where guest speakers included the 2005-2009 US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice; the President and CEO of PMA, Bryan Silbermann; and the 2008 Obama Presidential Campaign Manager, David Plouffe, who gave a speech on online branding strategies and tactics.

Bigger is better

After growers left the PMA Fresh Summit, they visited local retail grocery stores in Anaheim, California. The highlight of these store visits was Whole Foods Market, a natural and organic retailer with more than 275 locations in the US, Canada, and the UK. Whole Foods “stood out,” said Mr Smith, who remarked on the vast amount of produce and products available.

Growers also saw the extensive packaging and marketing methods used to sell vegetables in the US.

“As cauliflower growers, we’d never considered packaging every cauliflower with a barcode. All the US vegetables were bagged and barcoded, whereas in Australia the bigger vegetables aren’t really packaged like that,” said Mr Smith.

After a whirlwind weekend at the PMA Summit and touring California, the group departed Anaheim and made their way up the US west coast, where the growers visited several farms and supply-chain operations.

San Ysidro Farms in Santa Maria was a highlight of the farm visits with tour participants praising the property and its managers. The San Ysidro operation spans 1,600 acres with large-scale production of broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, lettuce, spinach, sugar peas and celery. The farm boasts a 6-tonne transplanter with mounted radar gun and onboard computer that can plant one acre per hour.

Nick Miall, an organic carrot, potato, celery, pumpkin, tomato and corn grower from Gatton, Queensland, was impressed by the extent to which “the owners opened their books” to the visiting Aussies.

For Andrew Smith, the scale of the San Ysidro operations was impressive. He said they grow \$30 million worth of vegetables on the property each year and even had purpose-built machinery specific to their operations.

Visiting the Salad Bowl

The group travelled through many vegetable-growing regions

between Los Angeles and San Francisco, giving them a good perspective on the breadth of the industry. One region, the Salinas Valley—where the large majority of salad greens and other crops are grown—has earned itself the nickname, “America’s Salad Bowl”.

The group also had the opportunity to visit the Sequoia National Park in the southern Sierra Nevada, where the world’s largest living, single-trunked tree—the General Sherman Tree—is found.

After arriving in San Francisco, the group visited the Ferry Plaza Farmers market where 10,000 to 15,000 shoppers attend each Saturday to purchase fresh produce. On the final day before returning to Australia, the growers had a short but welcome chance to sight-see world-famous attractions including the Golden Gate Bridge and the San Francisco cable cars.

Tour organisers were complimented for planning an informative and well-rounded tour that exposed the participants to significant local knowledge and expertise.

“The tour was definitely worthwhile, it was very productive,” said Mr Niall.

“We got to see a huge amount in a very short space of time. I’d highly recommend it to anyone, it was a great tour.”

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Eight Australian growers attended a National Vegetable Levy-subsidised tour of Californian farms and the PMA Fresh Summit Conference in Florida.

- Food safety concerns are a major issue for American growers, who must destroy portions of their crop that come into contact with wildlife.

- Tour participants were impressed by the depth and breadth of local knowledge they were exposed to, and the generosity with which their US peers shared information.

• For more information visit:
www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers
 Project number: VG09141
 Keywords: California, PMA

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School's out for graduate leaders

An annual course designed specifically for the vegetable industry has helped develop the next generation of industry leaders, writes course manager Jill Briggs.

After six months and three residential programs of workshops, skills sessions, industry tours, guest speakers and networking events, the 12 participants of the inaugural Vegetable Industry Strategic Leadership Course (VISLC) graduated in Canberra in August. Industry and political leaders, including Tasmanian Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck, were in attendance.

In addition to the three jam-packed residentials—which were held in Devonport, Melbourne and Canberra—graduates committed to working in teams to deliver a mission strategy (similar to a team project).

The 2009 VISLC mission was to form a network to provide communication that would benefit the vegetable industry. Three strategies were developed to facilitate this, with each strategy delivered by one of three participant groups. The strategies were to:

1. Identify existing networks, including relevant groups and bodies
2. Create a network to improve communication
3. Produce an Industry Services Guide for national and state purposes.

The strategies were fully or partially delivered by the conclusion of the course and many of the 2009 VISLC graduates have made a commitment to continue with these projects [see panel].

Forward thinking

The aim of the VISLC was to better equip individuals to assume leadership positions within the industry, develop networks and connections, and increase their knowledge of the workings of a variety of industry sectors.

“If we can continue to develop 12 or more people each year, the industry will be in a great position going into the future,” said course graduate David Troidahl, District Horticulturalist at Industry & Investment NSW.

On an individual level, participants also developed skills that they put to use in their workplaces. Victorian broccoli and lettuce grower Andrew Bulmer implemented a number of changes as a direct result of completing the course.

“We have employed a business manager and this has allowed us to better organise the workplace. We are also working through the implementation of roles and responsibilities for all staff members,” he said.

More than a course

For David Troidahl the networking opportunities were a program highlight. These included meeting a range of high-calibre industry stakeholders.

Tasmanian hydroponic tomato grower Marcus Brandsema agreed. He said that that the opportunity to meet with current leaders helped participants gain a broader industry perspective.

“The course has better equipped me for the various leadership roles I will take on in

On a mission

Growers nationally are set to benefit from the three strategy projects that developed from the VISLC mission statement.

1. Identify existing networks, including relevant groups and bodies

This strategy group has developed a database of contact details for about 400 groups, including industry bodies, government departments, agribusiness, certification bodies, consultants, retailers and other organisations.

This database will be distributed to all VISLC participants, who will forward it to organisations and individuals that will use it to benefit industry.


2. Create a network to improve communication

This group aimed to build on existing industry networks, while forging new connections with other stakeholders to further enhance communications within the industry. It is anticipated that this new network will support the new Vegetable Industry Development Program.

3. Produce an Industry Services Guide for national and state

The aim of the Industry Services Guide was to clarify the roles and responsibilities of organisations and agencies that service the vegetable industry, and make this information available to growers. Each guide contains national services and a state-specific section.

Draft guides for national, New South Wales and Tasmanian services have been produced, and an application has been submitted for funds as part of this year's Industry Call for the National Vegetable Levy's annual investment plan.

If funding is secured, the group's intention is to complete the guide for other states and territories, and distribute this information nationally. 

the future. I also feel significantly more skilled when approaching current industry leaders," said Mr Brandsema.

For Simplot Potato Officer Stuart Millwood, the VISLC was a chance to gain the necessary tools to better his leadership skills.

"It has given me a better understanding of communication, facilitating high-value meetings, networking and team building. Also the group's diversity brought great knowledge to the group," he said.

Lasting benefits

Marcus Brandsema said that the course will have a long legacy—which is the intended impact.

"As we [graduates] find ourselves in various leadership roles, we will be better equipped to handle the situation. As more people complete the course, there will be more leadership skills being used, so this has to

create a positive impact in the horticultural industry," he said.

The lasting benefits of the VISLC will also be felt as growers and industry representatives make full use of the benefits of the three strategic projects.

National leadership training for the vegetable industry will continue to be provided as part of

“If we can develop 12 or more leaders each year, the industry will be in a great position.”

the Vegetable Industry Development Program (VIDP).

"Becoming involved in the industry leadership program is an opportunity for vegetable growers to widen their networks with other growers and people working in the supply chain. I would encourage all growers to consider

enrolling in the renamed 'Growing Leaders' program for 2010. There is no cost to vegetable levy payers except their time and the rewards will be evident in their business and personal life," said Dianne Fullelove, who is overseeing the People Development sub-program of the VIDP.

Growing Leaders is enrolling

now for 2010. The course will be held at the following locations and dates:

- Brisbane, 2 – 4 March 2010
- Melbourne, 8 – 10 June 2010
- Canberra, 31 August – 2 September 2010.

THE BOTTOM LINE

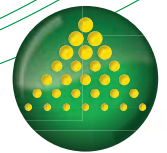
- Twelve participants from the inaugural Vegetable Industry Strategic Leadership Course (VISLC) graduated from the course in August.
- The course has been specifically designed to develop leadership within the vegetable industry.
- Participants are already using their newly acquired skills within the industry, and projects are underway that will benefit all of industry.

For more information contact:
Dianne Fullelove, Manager People Development sub-program, Vegetable Industry Development Program

Email: <diannefullelove@optusnet.com.au>

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Expanded



horizons

For carrot exporter Peter Wauchope, vertical integration, specialisation, and a willingness to invest in new technology are the secrets to success. Words by Jim Thomson. Photography by Westways Colorgrafix.

It says something about the all-encompassing nature of Peter Wauchope's work that when questioned about his job title at Center West Exports, there's a noticeable pause as he struggles to describe the position in a few words.

As the contact for all sales and marketing enquiries, Mr Wauchope also oversees the programming of Center West's production arm—Sun City Farms—to ensure that there's enough produce to meet peak periods and lesser quantities when demand eases.

"That includes growing different-sized carrots for different markets to coincide with peak demand periods in those markets," he said.

For many growers this will sound very much like business as usual—except, in Center West's case, 80 per cent of produce is exported. Current export markets include Japan, The Maldives, Singapore, Hong Kong and Dubai.

Challenging industry

Center West Exports and Sun City Farms are located on 1,000 acres of prime carrot-growing farmland in Woodridge, 90 kilometres north of Perth.

As a vertically integrated growing and packing operation, Center West is able to pack product from "crop to carton" in 45 minutes. This is accomplished using a \$3 million state-of-the-art packing shed, which was installed in mid-2008. The company packs up to 120 tonnes a day, five to six days a week.

Mr Wauchope said that the installation of the packing shed was part of Center West's five-year plan, and that the capital investment is expected to be fully repaid within that timeframe.

"Through the height of the mining boom in Western Australia, it was getting increasingly difficult to find reliable staff, so the idea was to mechanise whatever we could to reduce our reliance on labour and also our labour costs per kilo," he said.

An emphasis on vertical integration to decrease overheads is partly why Center West has flourished as an export business. This is no small feat, considering the myriad challenges that Australian exporters face. The Australian dollar's fluctuating value, increased paperwork, chasing payments, and the removal of the Australian Government's 40 per cent subsidy for export inspection and certification costs are all factors that need to be considered.

At the moment, Center West's biggest challenge is the rising Australian dollar, which was up to 92.8 cents the morning that *Vegetables Australia* spoke with Mr Wauchope.

"We've had a 35 per cent rise in the value of the Aussie dollar in the past six months, which has the effect of making our produce that much more expensive overseas. All of a sudden, alternatives that were not attractive to our customers are becoming viable," he said.

"Apart from minimising your cost basis and being as competitive as possible on the production and

packing side, there's not much you can do to insulate yourself from such a meteoric rise in the currency."

While chasing payments for product is also a concern for exporters—as it is for any farming business—Center West has established a strong and regular client base, which means that this isn't the issue for the company that it could be.

"However, for an exporter getting started, it's probably one of the bigger problems they would face," said Mr Wauchope.

Changing scene

An exporter for almost 25 years, Peter Wauchope first traveled to South-East Asia to sell Australian fresh produce in 1985. Back then, he worked for a diversified export company.

"We handled a full range of products—apples, stone-fruits, strawberries, carrots, cauliflowers, Chinese cabbages and lettuce. Of course, the markets for many of those products have been taken over by China now," he said.

"In the 25 years I've been exporting, there has been the demise of quite a few export industries. There used to be very large markets for cauliflowers, Chinese cabbages and lettuce, but other countries have taken the markets away from us."

To survive in this increasingly competitive environment, Australian vegetable exporters have had to specialise.

“There used to be large export markets for cauliflowers, Chinese cabbages and lettuce, but other countries have taken these away from us.”



Center West Exports' \$3 million state-of-the-art packing shed was installed to reduce the company's reliance on labour and its labour costs per kilo.

"You generally have operations that grow, pack and export. In the past it was a lot more fragmented. There were growers and there were packer-exporters. Vertical integration has developed because of the increased competitiveness of the overseas markets. You have to reduce costs wherever you can."

It was this need for cost-reduction, and a desire to shore up its carrot supply-base that saw Center West Exports establish Sun City Farms in 1989.

"Center West existed for quite a few years before Sun City Farms was established. Center West was quite a diversified operation back in those days—in the late-1980s through into the mid-1990s," said Mr Wauchope.

"Even so, Center West has always been a strong player in carrots. The company was lacking in the supply side, so some of the directors started up Sun City Farms."

Plenty of paperwork

Documentation and certification is a fact of life for exporters, which

increases the required paperwork for transactions.

"We export to Japan and Taiwan and they have very strict Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs), as do other markets we supply to. We're SQF certified and we conduct regular MRL testing. Many customers want to see the current certificates and the most recent tests, which we're able to provide whenever required," said Mr Wauchope.

The SQF (Safe Quality Food) Program is a global system that provides independent certification that a supplier's food safety and quality management system complies with international and domestic food safety regulations.

"Documentation issues are very market-specific. Some markets require certificates of origin, phytosanitary certificates, as well as SQF spray diaries and MRL certification—the whole works—which you're not going to face in a domestic situation."

Mr Wauchope mentioned the removal of the Australian Government's 40 per cent subsidy for export inspection and certification

“Vertical integration has developed because of the increased competitiveness of overseas markets. You have to reduce costs wherever you can.”

services.

"The removal of the subsidy will dramatically increase costs, making it difficult for Australian growers to remain competitive in international markets," he said.

"The amount you pay varies according to the product and what scheme you're on. We're lucky enough to have three staff members who are qualified to make AQIS (Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service) inspections, so our costs are lower, but I have heard from other exporters that availability of inspectors is an issue."

Market loss

Despite having all these checks and balances in place, many factors are beyond the control of individual businesses like Center West.

In December 2007, the Taiwanese equivalent of Biosecurity Australia lodged a notification with the World Trade Organization that it was proposing amendments to Taiwan's Plant Protection and Quarantine Act that would apply from 1 March 2009.

The impact on Australian growers was that carrot exports from Western Australia would be prohibited entry into Taiwan due to evidence of *Radopholus similis* (burrowing nematode) in WA. Taiwan is free from burrowing nematode.

Carrots have been exported from Australia to Taiwan almost entirely from Western Australia since 1989. In that time there have been no recordings of burrowing nematode infecting carrots anywhere in Australia.

"If you lose any market, it affects you as a business. Taiwan has always been quite a lucrative market for us because it's a market that is prepared to pay for quality," said Mr Wauchope.

Thankfully, through negotiations between Australian and Taiwanese quarantine officials, Taiwan has accepted Australia's submission in respect to declaration of pest-free places of carrot production. The next step—on-site audits of Australian carrot-production facilities—is the first in the restoration of trade to Taiwan.

"We intend to be on the list to be audited and hopefully under the new protocol we can proceed to ship into that market again," said Mr Wauchope.

Identify your market

For growers who are interested

in expanding their horizons with a view to exporting produce, Mr Wauchope recommends contacting government organisations.

"Because we're so specialised, we don't get many enquiries from growers looking for advice. They generally go through the Trade and Market Services Division of the Department of Agriculture and Food WA or Austrade—the Australian Trade Commission—if they're looking at identifying a market and getting a start," he said.

"Market identification can come through various avenues. It could be as simple as getting an enquiry from overseas for your product from someone who's seen it in another market, or someone you've met at a trade show. When building a relationship with a client, you need to establish exactly what their requirements are and proceed from there."

Mr Wauchope spends about six weeks traveling overseas each year, including attendance at trade shows every two years.

"Mostly I travel to see existing customers and perhaps follow up on enquires we've had from those markets, as far as new customers are concerned."

Cultural and language difficulties minimal, and speaking a second (or third) language isn't a necessity.

"It does benefit a little, but when



you're dealing in so many markets you'd need to speak a dozen languages if you were going to cross that barrier. If you remain professional, that's enough," he said.

"In most markets, English is the language of business for the majority of customers. Many of the older generation are handing over businesses to the next generation, who have been well educated and have a good command of English."

No doubt this transition will make transactions a little easier, especially considering the rapid evolution in communication technology.

"In the early days, we had to use telex, or telephone exchanges. If we wanted to speak to a buyer we'd have to book a call through the overseas operator. Then we moved on to faxes and international direct dial; now it's all about email, mobile phones and Skype. It brings us into closer contact with our buyers, and makes the world a smaller place."

When it comes to exporting, Peter Wauchope clearly knows his stuff. Perhaps that is why he struggled to define his job title earlier on. After mulling it over, he eventually settled on Marketing Manager.

"That would be fine," he said.

Fine though it may be, that title doesn't even begin to do him—or the work he does—justice. **va**

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Healthy soils for sustainable farms



Growers who want to maintain good soil-management practices have a number of tools available to them, writes EnviroVeg Consultant Dr Siwan Lovett.

Healthy soil is defined as soil that is productive and easy to manage under the intended land use. Healthy soils have chemical, biological and physical properties that promote the health of plants, animals and humans. They also support profitable farming systems and grow regional economies.

In some parts of Australia, past farming practices have resulted in degraded soils. Key degrading processes include erosion, structural decline, carbon depletion, nutrient loss, acidification and salinisation. These processes threaten the short- and long-term sustainability of productive agriculture.

Soil workshops

The Healthy Soils for Sustainable Farms Program (2005-2008) was established in response to these threats; it aimed to assist farmers to adopt good soil-management practices. Key messages to come out of the program were the six attributes of healthy soils, and the 10 habits of healthy soil farmers [see panel].

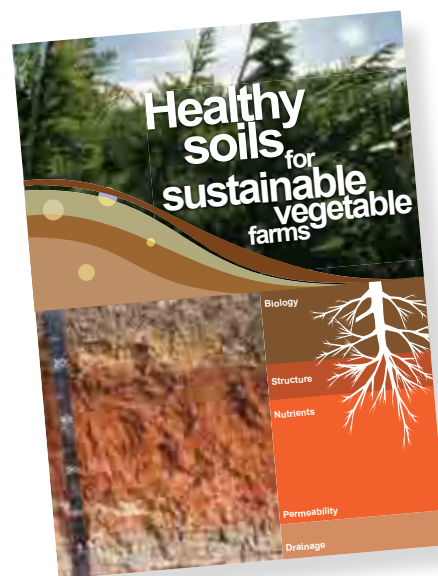
These were developed by bringing together the science of soil health with the experience of farmers. For vegetable growers, the *Healthy Soils for Sustainable Vegetable Farms Ute Guide* and accompanying DVD were produced to communicate these messages in practical ways for on-farm use.

To continue the work of the Healthy Soils for Sustainable Farms, the EnviroVeg Program is running two soil health workshops. The first of these was scheduled to be held in Bowen, Queensland, on 11 November; the second workshop will be in Cranbourne, Victoria, on 20 November.

Vegetable growers in the Cranbourne region will be given the opportunity to talk to researchers and practitioners first-hand about the latest developments in managing soil for optimal health and productivity.

If you are interested in attending this workshop, please email <admin@ausveg.com.au> or call AUSVEG on 03 9544 8098.

For growers unable to attend



EnviroVeg

these workshops, a new Soil Health Knowledge Bank is available online at www.soil-healthknowledge.com.au. This website contains a range of free, locally-relevant soil health guides, case studies, soil assessment tools, and education and training materials.

Links to the website can also be found on the new EnviroVeg soil health webpage, www.ausveg.com.au/healthy-soils.cfm.

Climate Change seminars

In other EnviroVeg news, three of the four EnviroVeg Climate Change seminars have been



Soil Health Knowledge Bank

an Australian Government initiative

“ There is much in agriculture we can't control, however healthy soils and sustainable practices are our best opportunity to be successful. The decisions we make regarding sustainable practices and soil health now, will cement our place in profitable agriculture for generations to come. ”

*John and Kerry Steel, Farmers,
Mid-Loddon sub-catchment, Victoria*

successfully held in Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland.

The final workshop, Understanding Climate Change Impacts in the Vegetable Industry: Opportunities and Risks, will be held in Ulverstone, Tasmania, on 27 November. Attending growers will learn about the impacts of climate change on the vegetable industry, and be given information about the latest research and practical tools.

Speakers include AUSVEG CEO, Richard Mulcahy; Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries Senior Principal Horticulturalist, Peter Deuter; and representatives

from Elders. Further information can be obtained from the EnviroVeg website. [va](http://www.ausveg.com.au/enviroveg.cfm)

i For more information visit:
www.ausveg.com.au/enviroveg.cfm

The Healthy Soils for Sustainable Farms Program was managed by Land & Water Australia on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and in partnership with the Grains Research and Development Corporation.

Healthy soils:

- Maintain organic matter for robust soil structure and carbon storage
- Match nutrient supply and demand
- Optimise water entry, storage and supply
- Enhance soil biological function
- Optimise productivity
- Enhance environmental and community health and well-being.

The 10 habits of healthy soils farmers:

1. Maintain organic matter, ground cover and plant diversity
2. Balance (targeted) application of inputs to maintain soil fertility
3. Maintain healthy plant growth
4. Manage for soil structural stability
5. Monitor and evaluate soil condition
6. Understand soil limitations
7. Learn for continuous improvement
8. Value the balance between production, and ecological and environmental services
9. Invest in profitable strategies to enhance soil health
10. Manage for climatic variability.



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New Veg ISM is Willing and able

Levy payers are set to experience an improved R&D program with HAL's new Vegetable Industry Services Manager, Will Gordon.

As the main point of contact for the vegetable industry in Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL), Will Gordon—the new Vegetable Industry Services Manager (ISM)—oversees the industry's research and development program, which is funded by the National Vegetable Levy and matched Australian Government funds.

"HAL works closely with the Peak Industry Bodies (PIB) so we've moved to position the ISMs geographically closer to the relevant organisations," said Mr Gordon. This means he'll be based in Melbourne, where AUSVEG is located, to deliver an integrated R&D program that runs more efficiently in response to industry needs.

According to Mr Gordon, in recent years HAL has experienced growth in both the value of R&D projects it oversees and its membership.

"The Industry Services team had not increased in step with the R&D program, so we're addressing this by adding two more ISMs. Everyone will notice improved coordination and servicing from us as a result," he said.

Another change to the Industry Services team is that Mr Gordon will look after the vegetable industry only; Tasmania-based Stuart

Burgess will be the ISM for the potato and onion industries.

Reality check

Growing up on a cropping and livestock farm in Colac in south-west Victoria, Will Gordon is no stranger to the realities of life on the land.

"It certainly stands you in good stead when you're having discussions with growers; you can understand where they're coming from because you've been there yourself," he said.

Studying Agricultural Science at university, Mr Gordon began working for the Australian Wheat Board (AWB) in a part-time capacity as he finished his degree.

In his six years at AWB, he worked in grain

purchasing and contract management before moving into stakeholder relations, which involved significant liaising with local and state governments, and different supply chain sectors.

Three years ago, he moved to HAL where he assumed the role of ISM for the mushroom, summer fruit, processed tomato and canned fruit industries.

"Through my work with the summer fruit industry, I've been involved with market access issues for all of horticulture and acted as a point of contact on market access R&D for the Industry Services team," he said.

Challenging times

When talking of challenges faced by industry, he mentions increased imports of processed vegetables, as well as market access issues.

"We have a higher cost of production compared with our competitors overseas. It's a big challenge for the Australian industry to reduce our production costs while providing a product that's differentiated from imports," he said.

"It's critical to maintain a collaborative approach across the whole industry, which can be challenging when you consider the diversity of crops and stakeholders."


He highlights Australia's reputation for growing quality produce, and is enthusiastic about the opportunities for increasing exports.

As the new ISM for the vegetable industry, Mr Gordon has two key priorities: to enable growers to receive the full benefits of projects funded as part of the R&D program, and to ensure that there is no duplication of effort across the vegetable, potato and onion industries.

"Stuart Burgess and I will be liaising to make sure that resourcing and projects are aligned; for example, that the potato industry does not fund a project that's already being conducted by the vegetable industry," he said.

While multi-industry and general horticulture projects are funded through the various industry levies, it's important that these are managed effectively.

Despite the challenges that lie ahead, Mr Gordon is upbeat about the potential for growth and increased communication and collaboration.

"I look forward to working with industry to help create a R&D program that really delivers for levy payers," he said. 



Will Gordon, the new Vegetable Industry Services Manager, is enthusiastic about the opportunities for increasing vegetable exports.

 Will Gordon, Vegetable Industry Services Manager
Email: <will.gordon@horticulture.com.au>
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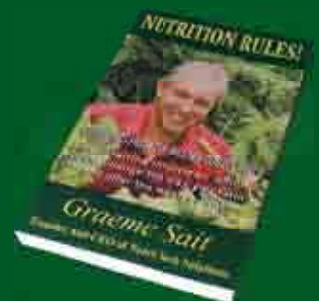
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Get with the program

The innovative new industry development program is underway, with growers set to reap the benefits.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- The Vegetable Industry Development Program (VIDP) commenced in August 2009. At time of writing, five of six specialised sub-programs had been contracted.
- The VIDP will roll-out industry information and products through an upgraded AUSVEG website and through local industry partnerships.
- VIDP outputs will be channelled through the AUSVEG communications program. Updates on the VIDP will be available periodically via the AUSVEG website.

i For more information contact:
 Andrew White, Senior Communications Officer, AUSVEG
 Phone: 03 9544 8098
 Email: <andrew.white@ausveg.com.au>
 or Lu Hogan, VIDP National Coordinator
 Phone: 0427 687 432
 Email: <luhogan@optusnet.com.au>
 or visit www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers
 Project numbers: VG09144 – VG09147
 Keywords: Industry development

The Vegetable Industry Development Program (VIDP) was devised to help growers build their businesses and remain competitive in an increasingly market-driven and globalised industry. The VIDP will also help the industry achieve the aim of its strategic plan, VegVision 2020—to double the 2006 value of fresh, processed and packaged vegetables in real terms.

“There has been a range of reviews and needs assessments undertaken for the vegetable industry in recent years. This work has highlighted the need for an industry development program that supports vegetable growers and those in the supply chain to make better business decisions,” said Lu Hogan from Rural Directions, an agribusiness management consulting company that is coordinating the VIDP.

Replacing previous project-based approaches to industry development, the VIDP comprises

six sub-programs that are being delivered by a range of service providers. The sub-programs, most of which commenced in August, are:

- National Coordination—Rural Directions
- Knowledge Management—freshlogic with AUSVEG providing liaison support
- People Development—Dianne Fullelove & Associates
- Consumers and Markets—freshlogic
- Economics—Industry Data and Economic Analysis
- InnoVeg—uncontracted at time of writing.

An integrated pest management (IPM) project specification is also being revised and the product development and delivery component of this work is likely to be a future inclusion in the program.

Centralised program

The VIDP’s six key objectives are to:

- Enhance communication to consumers of the benefits and qualities of Australian vegetables
- Ensure business decisions are increasingly market driven
- Ensure outcomes from industry investment in R&D are utilised by industry stakeholders in their decision making
- Help growers actively develop new business models that can evolve to meet new marketing challenges
- Ensure industry stakeholders utilise research findings in formulating policy, and manage the image of the industry
- Develop a new generation of leaders actively working in the industry.

The Consumers and Markets, and Knowledge Management sub-programs aim to distil research and development (R&D) data and raw consumer information and develop into practical knowledge packages so that

Economics


Managed by Industry Economist Ian James from Industry Data and Economic Analysis, the Economics sub-program encourages growers to view their farms as businesses, and cultivate an approach to these businesses that reaches beyond the farm gate.

“The sub-program will also help growers understand economic issues and the impact that economic decisions taken elsewhere will have on the vegetable industry and their own operations,” said Mr James.

Outputs from this sub-program include the provision of information relating to data and economic issues that impact on growers, and weekly updates on the AUSVEG website. These updates aim to “educate growers on broader economic issues to guide their

decision making,” said Mr James, who is also a regular contributor to *Vegetables Australia*.

The Economics sub-program uses economic expertise to argue the vegetable industry’s case to decision-makers, and promotes interaction with key organisations such as the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) and Biosecurity Australia (BA).

Mr James said that the program will assist growers to develop their businesses into best practice, and enhance their understanding of broader economic market developments and the impacts that these have on vegetable businesses. 

growers can easily and proactively apply this information to their businesses.


The People Development sub-program will promote industry-based leadership activities and develop a new generation of leaders, while the Economics sub-program will undertake research to support policy formation and increase growers' understanding of economic issues and their impacts.

“The VIDP was devised to help growers build their businesses.”

Ms Hogan said industry assessments revealed that growers needed a centralised program that would increase awareness about consumers and competitors in target markets, improve cost effectiveness, and develop a culture of continual innovation and collaboration within the industry. The VIDP is well placed to deliver on these imperatives.

“The key strengths of the team members is that they comple-

ment each other to deliver a more powerful and integrated program to the industry and ensure that the industry achieves substantial returns from this investment,” said Ms Hogan.

The VIDP is funded through the National Vegetable Levy with matched funds provided by the Australian Government. 

Consumers and Markets

The Consumers and Markets sub-program will offer a range of benefits to growers, helping them better understand vegetable markets, customers, distributors and consumers.

Managed by freshlogic—a Melbourne-based market analysis and consulting firm specialising in food and agribusiness—this sub-program will produce a weekly report of vegetable market information, called Veginsights; quarterly market summaries and consumer insights; and an annual industry situation and outlook.

According to freshlogic Director Martin Kneebone, the program will communicate accurate and timely information to growers that assess market, distribution channel and vegetable category performances.

“[It will provide] a more informed base to forecast production and in time [it will] potentially align these forecasts with demand,” said Mr Kneebone.

The sub-program also aims to define and track markets in greater detail, which will be instrumental for when the industry plans new initiatives.

“This will make it easier for those investing in new products to quantify the value they are adding and convey



The VIDP will use the 1,200-person Mealpulse panel to chart the vegetable consumption habits of Australians.

this value to their supply chain trading partners,” said Mr Kneebone.

Finger on the pulse

A pivotal tool behind the Consumers and Markets sub-program is a 1,200-person, nationally-weighted panel called Mealpulse. With more than 14,000 responses per year, Mealpulse is the largest single-purpose continuous monitor of the food market in

Australia.

Under the VIDP, the rotating panel members of Mealpulse will be surveyed regularly about the vegetable industry, with an emphasis on vegetable consumption habits.

“We are aware that consumers often switch between vegetables and we will seek to understand the influences that can lead to incremental consumption,” said Mr Kneebone.

It is anticipated that the weekly Veginsights and vegetable market size volume and value definition will commence later this month. Growers can expect a market summary and consumer trends profile based on the October-December 2009 quarter in late January 2010, and future profiles will be communicated to growers at the end of every quarter following that. 

Knowledge Management

Using a range of formats to communicating levy benefits to growers will increase on-farm adoption of R&D findings. Image supplied by SARDI.




Also managed by freshlogic, the Knowledge Management sub-program aims to improve industry access to R&D information by acknowledging growers' preferences for different information formats.

"While growers will have more information available to them, the aim of the

program is not to clutter the airwaves, but enable growers to get better access to R&D insights that are most relevant to them," said freshlogic Director Steve Spencer.

In tandem with a range of alternative outputs, R&D information will be com-

municated to growers primarily through an upgraded AUSVEG website.


"The website will be easier to use, there will be more information available on it, and it can be tailored by users to make it more suitable," said Mr Spencer. 

InnoVeg

Tenders for the sixth VIDP sub-program, InnoVeg—Vegetable innovations for the future, closed in October, with the sub-program expected to be contracted in November.

According to the National Coordinators of the program, industry research has shown that growers prefer to receive

information from trusted individuals within their local region.

"InnoVeg provides a mechanism to develop partnerships with a range of service providers in the local regions, who can then deliver information and new innovations to their client base," said Lu Hogan from Rural Directions. 

People Development

The VIDP understands that while enhanced communication and information delivery is important, it is the people within the industry who will drive change and innovation. The People Development sub-program aims to foster the industry's future leaders through facilitating existing leadership programs and by managing a mentoring program.

According to Dianne Fullelove, who is administering the sub-program, the Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee

(IAC) has rated people development as its top priority.

Ms Fullelove said that there is a need to develop leadership and business skills across the industry, and to steer away from generic skills training, which is currently occurring in an ad hoc manner.

"There is a lack of leadership development for younger growers and little encouragement to participate in industry organisations. The People Development sub-program will develop the human capacity of the vegetable industry and

provide a pathway for the industry to move forward," she said.

"The sub-program is based on increasing networks between growers, with a view to developing leadership and business skills for individual growers and the industry as a whole."

In addition to the vegetable industry-specific "Growing Business" program, a range of generic business programs is available for growers to hone their business skills. Growing Business is currently taking

place in north Queensland and Western Australia in conjunction with AgriFoods Skills Australia—the peak body for agricultural training in Australia. There are plans to offer a similar program in Tasmania early next year.

Growers who wish to become involved in Growing Leaders as a mentor or are interested in leadership and business skills opportunities in general should contact Ms Fullelove on 0413 101 646 or email <diannefullelove@optusnet.com.au>. 



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Nuffield scholarships for two SA growers

Global educations await two vegetable growers who have been awarded the prestigious farming scholarships.

Two South Australian vegetable growers have been awarded Nuffield scholarships at the Innovation in Australian Farming Awards dinner held in Hawkesbury, New South Wales, in October, as part of the four-day Nuffield Australia Spring Tour.

The Nuffield vegetable scholars for 2010 are:

- Steven Newman, a cauliflower, lettuce and leek grower from Gumeracha, South Australia
- Minh Hieu Ly, a truss tomatoes grower from Waterloo Corner, South Australia.

Mr Newman and Mr Ly were two of only 18 Australians to be awarded the scholarships, which fund international study programs so scholars can research agricultural issues and opportunities in a global context.



Nuffield scholars Steve Newman [left] and Minh Hieu Ly at the announcement of the 2010 scholarships in Hawkesbury in October. Image supplied by Dianne Fullelove.

Automation advantage

Mr Newman is the production manager for Hills Fresh, which produces cauliflower, lettuce and leek on 25 hectares of irrigated land for domestic markets. He will use his scholarship to research automation and soil management in vegetable production.

“On our family farm we have already introduced compost trials in an attempt to improve our soils and we are working with the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) to improve soil insect and disease control. I would like to investigate what other countries are doing in this area,” said Mr Newman.

“The Nuffield Scholarship is a great opportunity for me to understand farming in other countries and develop friendships with other scholars.”

Hydroponic transition

Mr Ly, who runs a hydroponic vegetable business with his father, will use his Nuffield scholarship to investigate hydroponic vegetable production.

“Hydroponics is a booming industry all around Australia and many growers are converting from soil-based systems to hydroponics in passive glasshouses. But hydroponic systems require a huge investment, particularly for smaller family businesses, and managing these systems is very different to managing soil-grown crops. We need to evaluate the equipment and techniques that will work for us,” he said.

“I want to work with the Vietnamese growers in my area so my study project is to research the transition from protected

cropping in the soil to a hydroponic system.”

Worthy recipients

AUSVEG CEO Richard Mulcahy said he understood that applicants for this year’s scholarship had been of a very high calibre and he wished the successful candidates well in their overseas study programs in 2010.

“The winners are deserving of the recognition they have received and will no doubt serve as exceptional ambassadors for the Australian vegetable industry in the period ahead,” said Mr Mulcahy.

Nuffield scholarships aim to increase practical farming knowledge, techniques, and management skills by affording scholars the opportunity to study farming practices in foreign countries.

As scholars, Mr Newman and Mr Ly will each be provided with an allowance of \$27,000 funded by the National Vegetable Levy and matched funds provided by the Australian Government. On their return they will share the information they have learned with fellow farmers and industry stakeholders.

Their initial six-week tour will include a compulsory Global Focus Programme, which takes in New Zealand, Asia, the Middle East, the Americas and Europe.

For more information contact:
 Jim Geltch, CEO Nuffield Australia
 Phone: 03 5480 0755
 Email: <enquiries@nuffield.com.au>
 Web: www.nuffield.com.au

Ask the industry

Phil Hoult, Technical Services Lead for Syngenta Crop Protection, responds to questions, concerns or problems you have about protecting your crops.

Why monitor vegetable crops and how does this relate to integrated pest management?

Integrated pest management (IPM) relates to the management of beneficial insects as well as pests. The basic components of IPM are prevention, observation and intervention.

Remain alert to protect against pests


Prevention includes growing crops where they are suited to climate, soil and topography. Providing crops with optimal growing conditions from the start is also important. Prevention entails cropping rotation, variety selection, crop husbandry and hygiene, irrigation practices, plant nutrition and the use of inter-row cropping and perhaps tillage.


Observation determines if, when, what and how action should be taken to maximise crop production and optimise quality at harvesting. Growers need to be able to distinguish between pest, non-pest and beneficial species when they conduct a crop "walk-through". Various tools are available to assist in pest monitoring, including pheromone and sticky traps.

Calculated intervention

Intervention may include both cultural and physical controls, such as working the soil inter-row to disturb pest habitats. However, before including such methods in IPM recommendations, their impact on yields (for example, through root disturbance) and their requirements for labour inputs and energy consumption need to be assessed.

Biological controls and chemical controls are also options. The use of crop protection products is an important and widespread means of achieving a reliable and cost-effective reduction of pest infestations. IPM principles allow for the carefully-planned application of chemical products to minimise the risk of adverse effects of pests. Growers must ensure that the treatment's timing (day and season) and the product used work to minimise any adverse effects on beneficials.

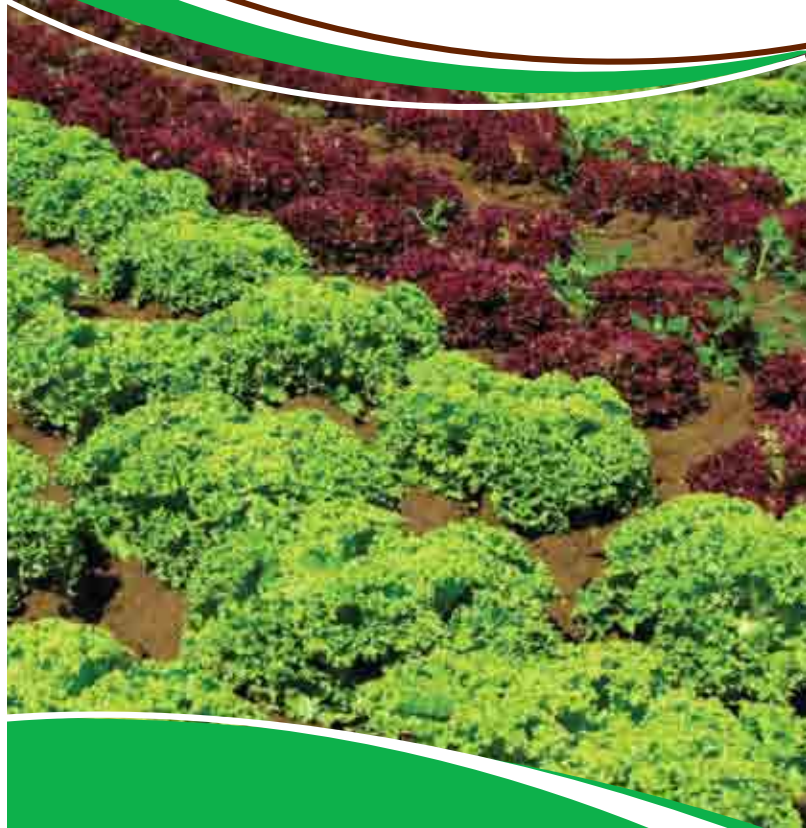
The need for intervention requires an understanding of economic or action thresholds for particular pests, which may change depending on the stage of crop development. When developing these thresholds, it is important to monitor infestation levels in a crop and treat only those that cause economic damage. Thresholds should be defined in a simple and understandable way so that growers can adopt them in practice without undue difficulty or risk to yield and produce quality. 

 If you have a question to ask the industry, email <editor@ausveg.com.au> or ring the Syngenta Technical Product Advice Line on 1800 067 108. Some questions may be published.

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Keeping it fresh

Revisions to Freshcare's Food Safety and Quality Code of Practice will ensure that members continue to have a cost-effective way of demonstrating food safety compliance, writes Brea Acton.

After consultation with key stakeholders and Freshcare members, the third edition of the Freshcare Food Safety and Quality Code of Practice (CoP) has been released. The revised CoP has been upgraded to reflect the changing needs of the vegetable industry and ensure that Freshcare remains competitive as a national certification program.

Now in its 10th year, Freshcare is the largest on-farm assurance program in Australia, with more than 4,300 members—about half of whom are vegetable growers. The Food Safety and Quality Code of Practice sets the terms for growers seeking certification for their businesses.

“New food safety research and knowledge about risk management practices meant there was a need to review and strengthen the second edition of the Code,” said Clare Hamilton Bate, National Program Manager, Freshcare.

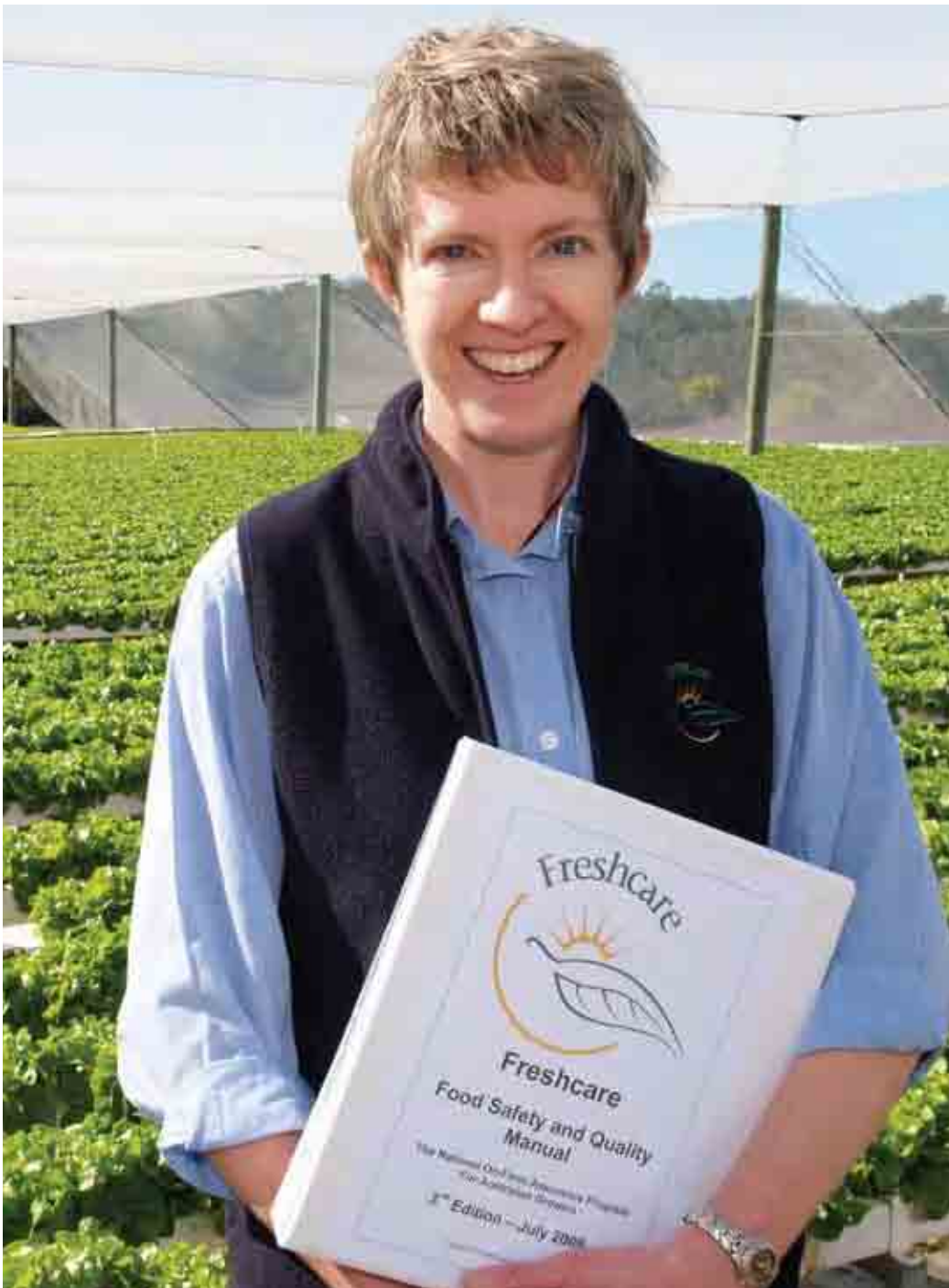
Retailer approval

The CoP is scheduled for review every four years. In 2008, when Freshcare approached the major retailers for input, both Coles and Woolworths requested alterations to the Code before they would continue to endorse the Freshcare program.

Coles went one step further, agreeing to include Freshcare as an approved standard for its direct suppliers. In the past, growers were required to apply for certification through international program SQF 2000 to be approved as a direct supplier to Coles.

Although there was some hesitation in reworking the Code, Ms Hamilton Bate said that Freshcare needed to consider the implications for its members of not upgrading to a third edition.

“The reason for Freshcare's existence is to provide a service to members that is a cost-effective and practical way of implementing and demonstrating food safety compliance. If we didn't make the changes, the more than 4,300 people who use Freshcare as their program would cease to be approved by the major retailers,”



Coles has included the third edition of Freshcare's Code of Practice as an approved standard for its direct suppliers, said Clare Hamilton Bate, National Program Manager, Freshcare.

she said.

"Whilst we'd prefer to have kept it simple, there were some areas that needed to be tightened.

The changes remove the 'grey areas' of previous editions of the Freshcare Code of Practice. It's now very clear what growers need to do."

Tighter restrictions

Changes to the CoP include:

- Structural improvements to make it a more accessible and user-friendly process
- Improved hazard analysis tools to help growers identify and assess food safety hazards on their property
- Advice about correct storage and application of chemicals
- A new section devoted to allergens.

The third edition of the Code sets tighter restrictions on the use of untreated fertilisers and organic soil additives, such as untreated

animal manures. There is also a more rigorous risk assessment component.

"In the past, Freshcare asked you to look at your water quality and do a risk assessment; now [the Code requires] your water to meet this standard. The Code states some critical limits, which before were left a little grey," said Ms Hamilton Bate.

The third edition of the CoP was developed over an 18-month period under the direction of a steering group that included Freshcare trainers and auditors, and the Freshcare Board of Directors, which comprises grower and non-grower representatives. On-farm trials were also held in Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria.

Training needed

For some growers, the revision of the Code will require a significant change in practice.

"It will put more rigorous requirements on some sectors of the vegetable industry, particularly in areas of water source and use, and fertiliser management," said Ms Hamilton Bate.

All current Freshcare members must undertake a one-day transition-training workshop to implement the new components of the third edition of the CoP.

Growers new to the Freshcare Program and existing Freshcare members moving to the third edition CoP may apply for funding to cover training and out-of-pocket costs through FarmReady, an Australian Government initiative that provides training grants for up to \$1,500 per year to growers.

With more than 4,300 Freshcare members, the roll-out of the revised Code is going to take time. All members will be required to complete training and upgrade to the third edition by 1 March 2011.

Coles's deadline for its direct suppliers to move to the third edition is 1 March 2010. Any audit of a Coles direct supplier after this date must meet the requirements of the revised Code.

Ms Hamilton Bate is optimistic that the modifications to the CoP will result in a more thorough certification process, meeting higher food safety and quality standards.

"The changes to the Freshcare Food Safety and Quality Code of Practice will help growers, customers, trainers and auditors understand exactly how good agricultural practices must be implemented and maintained by a Freshcare-certified business," she said. **va**

i For more information contact Freshcare:
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VICTORIA

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ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Globalisation continues to increase import pressure

The threat of processed vegetable imports is a growing concern for the Australian vegetable industry, writes Industry Economist Ian James.

After the deluge of imports in 2007/08, the vegetable industry's trade performance, despite the return to growth of exports, continued to deteriorate over 2008/09. The trade balance (the difference between exports and imports) blew out to -\$385 million [see Table 1]. In the early 2000s Australia ran a positive trade balance with exports in excess of imports. The trade balance is now strongly negative and has more than quadrupled over the past four years.

While the value of exports remained flat over that period, imports increased more than 80 per cent. It is important to note that the import challenge facing the Australian vegetable industry is not restricted to produce from China [Table 2].

Imports are increasing from a number of countries and many of these do not have the wide disparity in labour costs that exist between Australia and China. Detailed information about trade data for the past five financial years can be accessed on the AUSVEG website at www.ausveg.com.au/statistics.cfm.

Table 3 shows that imports of fresh vegetables remain relatively low; in fact, in 2008/09 they decreased. Fresh vegetable imports, with the exception of garlic, tend to be counter seasonal. All the import pressure is coming from vegetables that have had some form of processing applied to them.

Increase consumption of local produce

Unlike most other Australian agriculture industries, the vegetable industry is highly focused on domestic markets. Many vegetable growers have never exported, but in a rapidly globalising world, trade and domestic markets cannot be separated. While the vegetable industry's strategic plan,

VegVision 2020, aims to increase significantly the consumption of vegetables, the question remains: will it be Australian vegetables that are consumed? If the industry successfully increases vegetable consumption, these gains may be captured by importers.

Thankfully, there are outstanding examples of successful growers in both export and

domestic markets that, through innovation and adaptation, have created thriving vegetable growing enterprises that can compete with imports.

As British politician Benjamin Disraeli famously said in 1867: "Change is inevitable. In a progressive country change is

Continued page 44

Table 1. Vegetable trade balance (A\$ million)

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Exports	256.8	249.7	246.9	234.9	252.7
Imports	351.9	374.8	446.0	550.1	637.2
Trade balance	-95.1	-125.1	-199.1	-315.2	-384.5

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

Table 2. Top 10 source country of vegetable imports (A\$ million)

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Total	351.9	374.8	446.0	550.1	637.2
New Zealand	93.2	104.3	121.2	142.8	126.8
China	46.3	54.2	76.4	87.9	110.1
Italy	50.5	54.6	63.7	75.4	88.5
United States	32.1	34.4	35.5	55.8	75.3
Netherlands	20.8	17.9	18.1	25.6	32.8
Canada	1.2	1.0	1.2	11.6	28.8
Thailand	14.1	15.2	19.7	29.0	26.5
Turkey	11.6	14.1	17.6	18.7	20.5
Germany	4.7	4.6	6.4	7.1	18.1
Belgium	7.3	5.9	6.1	10.6	12.8

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Table 3. Vegetable imports by major category (A\$ million)

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Total	351.9	374.8	446.0	550.1	637.2
Processed vegetables	142.3	144.2	171.5	200.2	247.4
Frozen vegetables	105.1	114.0	142.8	203.5	234.0
Other vegetables*	72.7	75.2	87.1	93.6	107.0
Fresh/chilled vegetables	31.8	41.4	44.5	52.8	48.8

*Vegetable seeds, tuber vegetables, dried and provisionally preserved vegetables
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

constant". The vegetable industry has been dealt some tough cards and it needs to adapt to these changes. Understanding the economic reasons for the growth in vegetable imports is the first step.

Volatile exchange rate

A high Australian dollar exchange rate makes imports more attractive. While the value of the Australian dollar will vary depending on the country being traded with, a great deal of world trade is conducted in US dollars, so the Australian/US dollar exchange rate is important. In recent months the Australian dollar has increased in value and at the time of writing had moved above US 90 cents.

Some economists are forecasting that the Australian dollar will move to parity with the US dollar. At this level, the processing side of the vegetable industry will be under even greater pressure than in the recent past. However, the Australian dollar is considered a 'commodity currency' because of its high dependence on commodity exports; and as such, it is highly volatile.

For example, over the past financial year the Australian dollar fluctuated between a high of US 98 cents and a low of US 61 cents. Imports were already surging at a much lower exchange rate, so it is worth investigating whether other factors are at play

to explain the loss of market share to imports.

Retail concentration

The Australian food retail sector is dominated by Woolworths and Coles. Despite this, market concentration cannot by itself provide an explanation for the increased level of imports. The major supermarket chains are in business to make a profit and this guides their sourcing policy. In some cases they may see a profitable opportunity to promote Australian produce and we have already seen evidence of this.

New entrants into the food retailing sector are spurring

“ The reason for the surge in vegetable imports is a lack of price competitiveness for processed vegetables. ”

competition and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) keeps an ever watchful eye to ensure that there are no breaches of the Trade Practices Act.

Processing considerations

Scale is an important issue in food processing and it is driving a move towards streamlining and rationalisation within the industry. In Australia most of this rationalisation has already occurred. The

remaining Australian vegetable processors are under pressure to justify their existence, which will happen only if these operations receive a reasonable rate of return.

Australian vegetable processors weigh the cost of producing locally to supply their retail base against the option of sourcing product from overseas. A range of factors must be considered, including security of supply, but for retailers profitability will be the guide. Thus, it is likely that the growth in imports is a combination of retailer and food processor preferences.

Lack of competitiveness

The reason for the surge in vegetable imports is a lack of price competitiveness for Australian processed and semi-processed vegetables. Retailers and processors are increasing their sourcing from overseas because it is cheaper to do so. While a case can be made for consumer preference for imported processed vegetables over Australian product it is more feasible that consumers are driven by price

considerations.

While the vegetable industry needs to step up its campaign for accurate country of origin labelling, vegetable growers selling into the processing market need to think about their business model. Australian food processors have a vested interest in maintaining a domestic grower base—for food security reasons—but not to the exclusion of imports.

Vegetable growers have no control over price in this market and for many the rate of return is inadequate. Imports or the threat of imports will cap the rate of return that growers receive. In order to improve returns either costs have to be driven down or growers need to move into a niche market to provide some market power. Neither path is easy.

Costs can be driven down through mechanisation, increased scale and improved practices such as precision agriculture, but all these require capital. Niche markets require considerable work in logistics, relationship building and marketing. However, as the import figures show, the alternative of doing nothing is not a long-term option for many growers. va

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Imports of processed vegetables into Australia continue to rise, while imports of fresh vegetables have decreased slightly.
- Increased imports are driven by a lack of price competitiveness for Australian processed and semi-processed vegetables.
- Growers who sell into the processed markets need to further reduce their operational costs or move into niche markets—neither of which are easy options.

R&D project preview

Property identification scoping study

Project number: VG09021
Start date: September 2009
End date: December 2009
Project leaders: Jan Paul van Moort, Principal Consultant, GHD Hassall
Email: jp.vanmoort@ghd.com
Phone: 0410 005 132


A range of regulatory and market-driven schemes and registration schemes of industry organisations exist in Australia. These cover matters such as biosecurity, quality assurance, food safety, chemical user safety and accreditation, market transparency, and consumer demand for locally-produced product.

The Property identification scoping study will assess the potential of

a national property identification scheme for vegetable growers. To do this, it will provide industry with:

- Information that will help assess the merits of property identification schemes—in all their forms—and their applicability to the Australian vegetable industry
- Case studies of practical examples of how these schemes were introduced and their benefit to industry
- An indication of the level of interest and support for property identification schemes from industry representatives, including supply-chain sectors
- The opportunity for industry representatives from across the supply chain to discuss how such schemes impact on industry and the benefits and costs of a national scheme.

The study will also review Australian and international literature and consult with stakeholders who have successfully implemented similar schemes.

Targeted focus groups will be held with growers and industry organisations in regional hubs across the supply chain in November 2009. If you are interested in participating in these focus groups, contact the project leader, Jan Paul van Moort. 



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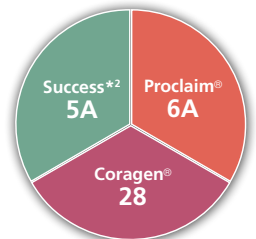
The 3 products in the diagram below are all registered for diamondback moth control in brassicas. They fall into 3 MoA groups as shown.

Important fact:

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3Phase beats nitrogen leach

Mineral nitrogen could see the end of poultry manure's costly nitrogen leaching—and its polluting after-effects—writes Angela Brennan.

For years Western Australian vegetable growers have been bombarded with complaints about the excessive number of flies due to the use of raw poultry manure to fertilise crops. Recent concerns include groundwater pollution from fertiliser nitrates. After nearly a decade of research to resolve these problems a solution is being offered to growers.

A team of Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia (DAFWA) researchers, led by Dennis Phillips, has developed fertiliser strategies called "3Phase" that replace manure

with mineral nitrogen for use on leafy and brassica vegetable crops.

Consistent results

Results of this research have been consistently positive. Mineral fertilisers, applied regularly and at rates that match plant growth, can provide an effective substitute to poultry manure. They supply less nutrients while improving uptake, reducing costs, increasing yield, maintaining quality, and significantly reducing pollution and fly breeding.

The research targets growers

of lettuce, broccoli, cabbage and celery on the infertile sandy soils of the Swan Coastal Plain near Perth, but the principles are applicable in most other production areas of Australia.

The recommendations set benchmark levels of nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus for these crops.

"We've tested these on possibly the least fertile soils in Australia, using only mineral fertilisers and limited residues from preceding crops. Trials consistently produced high yields of good quality," said Dennis Phillips.

"For higher-quality soil types we have set upper limits for nitrogen and potassium that should never need to be exceeded to grow successful crops."

At this stage of the project, the research team is keen to help growers adopt the 3Phase methodology with minimal upheaval to growers' current farm management systems.

"With 3Phase we are producing 'recipe style' blueprints that pay particular attention to the importance of early growth, while minimising the number of products, any need for special-

Technical Officer Gavin D'adhemar from the Medina Research Station sprays fertiliser on one the 48 different plots that comprise the trial crop.



ised equipment and changes to machinery settings as the crop grows. Commercial realities are also fully considered,” said Mr Phillips.

“If you follow it to the letter, you can’t go wrong—even if you get unexpected rainfall.”

Rewarding change

Andy Tedesco and his brother Mick grow iceberg lettuces and Chinese cabbage on a small farm in Wanneroo. The brothers adopted 3Phase seven years ago.

“Change is very difficult. You are asking people to change from a system they have been using for 40 years. You need to be certain the new system is going to work better. At first we were laughing at [Mr Phillips] because his new system didn’t look feasible, but gradually his research started to look better than our fertilising program so we gave it a go,” said Andy Tedesco.

“At first, our previous system with manure seemed easier. But we’d put the whole lot on at the start of a crop and by the time the plants matured a lot of that nutrition had leached away. There was no benefit to the crop and it was getting into the water. This is our drinking water,” he said.

“3Phase is more precise and costs less because we use everything that goes onto the crop. We’ve been using this method since 2002 and we have not lost any production.”

Leave nothing to chance

“Growers need significant reasons to make fundamental changes to the way they grow crops,” said Dennis Phillips.

“The dramatic rise in the price of some fertilisers in the past year has been one driver for change, but issues such as groundwater pollution have not been enough to convince everyone, and there is a risk that many growers won’t change until the situation reaches crisis point.”

Pollution was not what stirred Damien Rigali to adopt 3Phase on his farm. “I simply didn’t get the quality I needed using my father’s methods when I started out. Now



Growers inspect trials at Medina with Project Leader, Dennis Phillips [left]. Images supplied by Dennis Phillips.

I’m teaching him,” said Mr Rigali.

“The old system was too risky. You could lose an entire crop’s fertiliser in one heavy downpour. Now I leave nothing to chance. It’s not cheaper at the outset, but it’s more efficient and savings are made at the end. I have more control and more certainty; the quality is better, there is more growth.”

“3Phase is more precise and costs less because we use everything that goes onto the crop.”

Mr Rigali had his soil tested and nitrates on his property were down to 14ppm (parts per million), compared with 140ppm on nearby properties still using poultry manure.

“We save on irrigation, fertiliser and our own time. Our only problem is labour. But I’ve done my figures and I still make more even though I have had to take on another worker,” said Damien.

Soil health considerations

Many growers argue against the new system on the basis of soil

health. Dennis Phillips does not agree, and queries some practices that are put out to promote soil health.

“Compost and cover cropping can play an important role in improving the efficiency of plant nutrition but they work best in an environment where there is a good understanding of the crop’s mineral nutrient needs,” he said.

“There is still a lot of work to do and future funding is subject to the outcomes of the current project and the levels of grower uptake.

“A number of growers have used the research results to cut their fertiliser rates and costs. Others will benefit from the information we can provide when poultry manure is banned for use in 2011. In the long term, the two key outcomes will be less pollution and more cost efficient production. It’s a win-win for everybody.”

THE BOTTOM LINE

- 3Phase fertiliser strategies have been developed to promote early crop growth. They also minimise product numbers and reduce the need for changes to machinery settings as the crop grows.
- Growers who have adopted 3Phase have found it successfully fertilises crops and reduces nitrogen leaching.
- Labour costs may increase with the 3Phase methodology, but savings are made on irrigation and fertiliser costs.

i For more information contact: Dennis Phillips, Director Horticulture Industries Development, Department of Agriculture and Food WA

Email: <dennis.phillips@agric.wa.gov.au>

Phone: 08 9368 3319

or visit www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers

Project number: VG07036

Keywords: Mineral fertilisers

AUSVEG CEO Message

AUSVEG continues to work with industry experts and key stakeholders to represent the industry to decision-makers in government. Over the past few months, we've achieved a number of significant advancements for the vegetable and potato industries.

In September, AUSVEG Chairman John Brent and I had an opportunity to continue talks in Canberra about issues such as the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement with policy-makers including the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon Tony Burke.

The ongoing dialogue we have with decision-makers ensures that the vegetable and potato sectors can look forward to closer cooperation between trade negotiators and our industry. It also ensures that our voice will be heard on a host of other policy decisions.

Last month, both myself and Industry Economist Ian James appeared before the Senate Economic Committee, following AUSVEG's submission to the Food Standards Amendment (Truth in Labelling Laws) Bill 2009.

I am excited about the new strategic partnership between leading rural services organisation, Elders Australia, and AUSVEG. The partnership will focus on sharing R&D initiatives as well as collaborations on a number of industry events planned for the next 12 months, including the first AUSVEG National Convention, which will be held in Queensland in May.

This important event will see growers come together with the whole supply chain for a series of keynote presentations by industry experts and leading Australians.

Coupling this with an incredible social program, the convention will be unlike anything the industry has seen before.

EnviroVeg workshops continue to be held around Australia, with growers in Western Australia, New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania benefiting from presentations about climate change or soil health.

On a recent visit to Western Australia, I had the pleasure of engaging with industry leaders including vegetablesWA Executive Officer Jim Turley, AUSVEG WA Director Paul Bogdanich, VGA President Maureen Dobra, and a group of Bunbury growers who raised a number of topics including issues relating to Horticulture Australia Limited, communications, and R&D.

Media interest in the vegetable industry remains high, with television, print and radio all keen to talk with AUSVEG representatives about a range of issues affecting the industry and consumers.

Finally, I had the opportunity to welcome and meet with new Industry Services Manager Will Gordon at the AUSVEG offices in Melbourne and introduce him to AUSVEG staff.

Based in Melbourne, Mr Gordon will work closely with AUSVEG to ensure that the National Vegetable Levy's R&D program delivers for levy payers. I am confident

that growers will continue receive a host of levy benefits.

At AUSVEG we look forward to developing opportunities for growers and keeping you fully informed of these and other happenings. To share your thoughts about the industry and the challenges and opportunities that await us, please email <info@ausveg.com.au> or call 03 9544 8098.



Richard Mulcahy
Chief Executive Officer
AUSVEG

AROUND THE STATES

New South Wales



The NSW Farmers Association has held a series of seminars around the state to ensure that growers are aware of the current and imminent changes to the Fair Work Act.

The seminars were particularly useful for horticulturalists and provided opportunities for one-on-one advice on how the new laws will apply to farmers and their employees. The new laws that came into effect on 1 July this year, along with others that will commence from 1 January 2010, affect the day-to-day interaction of employers and employees.

Issues highlighted

The new Horticulture Committee has held its first face-to-face meeting at Griffith in the Riverina. This was a great opportunity to bring growers together in a rich fruit and vegetable growing region.

Producers highlighted the issues that affect horticulturalists every day and the Committee will follow up these issues including the impacts of changes to the Horticulture Industry Award.

If you're not a Horticulture Member of the NSW Farmers' Association, I urge you to join. We've had some great political wins in recent months and we pride ourselves on listening to growers and achieving outcomes.

Peter Darley

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Queensland



Growcom believes that the Australian Government should make an earlier decision about whether horticulture should be included in the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) before its arbitrary decision deadline of 2013.

Overseas countries such as the US and Europe are already taking steps to protect their food production from the impacts of emissions trading and offering, in the case of the US, emissions reductions incentives to farmers through an offset scheme.

While the Australian Government repeatedly cites "business certainty" as a justification for pushing through its CPRS as quickly as possible before the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December, where is the business certainty for our sector if a decision is delayed for four years?

The Australian Government's scheme, in its current form, would artificially increase the cost of producing food at a time when authorities are predicting a rapidly increasing demand for food as populations increase in Australia and overseas in the next 40 years.

As price-takers, horticultural producers have limited capacity to pass on increased production costs through the value chain. Under the CPRS in its current format, the only real option for growers to reduce costs is to reduce production or switch to alternative land uses.

Growcom believes that horticulture should be excluded from the CPRS because of the low levels of emissions produced

by the sector—about one per cent of agricultural emissions or about 0.2 per cent of total emissions. The cost to administer the scheme across thousands of small independent businesses would be crippling, as would the difficulty of measuring agricultural emissions on individual farms.

There are better ways to encourage reductions in emissions on horticultural farms by encouraging land management changes to maintain and improve soil carbon content and to use fertilisers and irrigation more efficiently. However, alternatives such as controlled traffic farming (CTF) are capital intensive and require business certainty, which an early Australian Government decision would provide.

An incentives-based scheme, such as the Australian Government's successful Great Barrier Reef Rescue program being rolled-out in Queensland, would encourage the adoption of best management practices known to reduce emissions.

Read Growcom's policy on the CPRS at www.growcom.com.au.

Rachel Mackenzie

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South Australia



With Grow SA's head office in Virginia and its Murraylands regional office both working hard with horticulturalist from Lock 2

to the Murray mouth, a second regional office has been opened in Waikerie to provide the same grower services through to the Victorian border. Operating since January this year, the Waikerie office moved to a new location in July.

Plans are also under way to establish a Grow SA presence in south-east South Australia, where horticulture is becoming increasingly important. This would provide a truly state-wide voice for horticulture.

Membership in Grow SA continues to rise rapidly and the establishment of the Murraylands Regional Council is well under way with room for one or two more interested growers to join. Grow SA is currently forming the Riverland Regional Council to ensure connection with growers and that the issues and needs of this important region are addressed as part of our single industry voice.

IR update

Support for the Grow SA Industrial Relations roadshow was exceptional with well over 100 growers attending the four sessions held. In a great example of state bodies working together for the benefit of Australian growers, Growcom's Industrial Relations Manager, Donna Mogg, explained the potential impacts of the new Horticulture Industry Award in easily understood terms, which provided a viable way forward for growers.

Grow SA's Policy Council has also been busy formulating the industry position on many issues including the recently released State Government's 30-year plan for Greater Metropolitan Adelaide. The Policy Council has commenced development of pertinent

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

November 2009

17-19 November

Eurofruit Middle East Congress

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

For more information:

Website: www.mideastcongress.com

27 November

Understanding Climate Change Impacts in the Vegetable Industry: Opportunities and Risks workshop

Ulverstone, Tasmania

For more information:

Phone: AUSVEG on 03 9544 8098

Website: www.ausveg.com.au

30 November

AUSVEG Annual General Meeting

NSW Farmers' Association, Level 25, 66 Goulburn Street, Sydney, NSW

For more information:

Phone: AUSVEG on 03 9544 8098

January 2010

13-15 January

Produce Marketing Association (PMA) Leadership Symposium

Dallas, Texas, USA

For more information:

Website: www.pma.com/leadership/2010/index.cfm

May 2010

27-30 May

AUSVEG National Convention 2010

Includes announcement of the 2010 AUSVEG National Awards for Excellence on May 29

Conrad Jupiters Hotel Casino, Gold Coast, Queensland

For more information:

Phone: AUSVEG on 03 9544 8098

October 2010

15-18 October

Produce Marketing Association (PMA) Fresh Summit Convention
Orlando, Florida, USA

For more information:

Website: www.pma.com/freshsummit/2010/index.cfm

policy as we move towards a state election in March 2010.

Mike Redmond

Chief Executive Officer

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Victoria



VGA Victoria is pleased to announce the appointment of Ken Orr as its new Industry Development Officer (IDO).

With more than 30 years experience in production horticulture, most recently as an agronomist with Incitec-Pivot, Mr Orr will provide vegetable growers with

a range of services under the Victorian Government's "Better Services to Farmers" initiative. This initiative provides government information and assistance to farmers through their industry associations.

Mr Orr will also help deliver many of the actions identified in VGA Victoria's recently released Victorian Vegetable Industry Strategic Plan, which aims to shape the future development of our industry.

Based at Ballarat, the new IDO is keen to start working with growers to the west of Melbourne, including Robinvale. Contact Mr Orr on 0428 502 936 or via email at IDOWEST@vgavic.org.au.

Tony Imeson

Executive Officer

VGA

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Western Australia



vegetablesWA

VegetablesWA is pleased to announce John Shannon as the new Field/Extension Officer for vegetable growers.

Mr Shannon moved to Western Australia from Canberra, where he worked for the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) for the past six years.

Coming from a farming family, Mr Shannon is eager to get back to his roots and work directly to assist growers. In his time with DAFF, he gained a great deal of experience building strategies and policies and will apply this knowledge in his role as the new Field/Extension Officer.

"I am really looking forward to meeting the growers and working with the team in Western Australia to drive industry development and communications," said Mr Shannon.

VegetablesWA is excited to welcome such a well regarded and enthusiastic person to the team.

Mr Shannon commenced with vegetablesWA on 19 October. During his first week, he undertook an induction program that provided him with an introduction to Western Australia's vegetable industry and important meetings with stakeholder contacts.

Georgia Thomas

Program Manager

vegetablesWA

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103 Outram St

West Perth WA 6005

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Fax: 08 9481 0024

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