

# vegetables

## australia

January/February 2013

### **Chef Michael Ryan:**

**Thinking regional,  
staying seasonal**

### **Farm Direct**

**Delivering a direct  
alternative**

### **Scott Huf:**

**Pushing for a  
collaborative future**

### **Stuart Grigg:**

**Striving to find a  
spinach solution**

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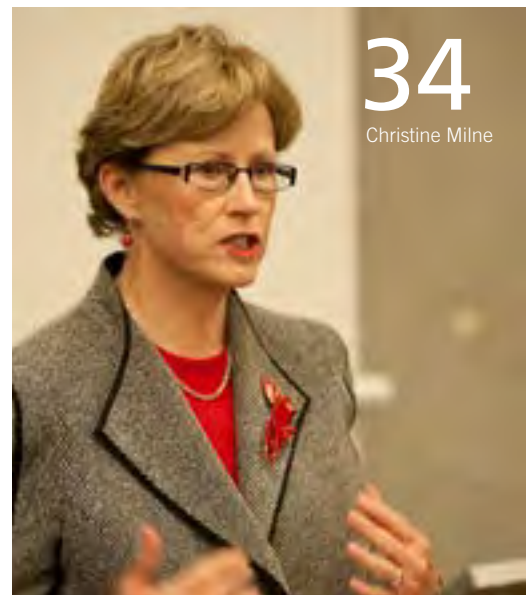
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## John Brent AUSVEG Chairman

The grim reality is that the past 12 months were extremely challenging for the vegetable industry, and 2012 concluded with some moments of real concern. The closure of Gourmet Food Holdings and its iconic Australian brand Rosella was particularly disheartening, as such processors and manufacturers represent a vital component of our industry. It served as a high-profile example, though far from isolated, that points to a sector moving in the wrong direction. As long as we continue to see these major players cease to exist in Australia, local consumers will increasingly be subject to products grown and processed beyond our shores, which will only further reduce the avenues of supply available to Australian growers.

I hope that in 2013, the Federal Government will be determined to work with

AUSVEG and other relevant bodies to ensure that such closures are halted, so that we can begin to see an environment that is sustainable for local processors.

More satisfying is the progress made by the recently formed Vegetable Industry Design Teams. At the time of publication of this magazine, a range of project tenders have recently been reviewed by the three Design Teams, which comprise growers and relevant industry experts, and which were formed to generate ideas for new R&D projects that align with the industry's five-year Strategic Investment Plan (SIP). The project briefs approved by the teams will subsequently be presented to the Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) toward the end of this month, before being sent out to tender. Formed through collaboration and

consultation at the Design Team level, these latest R&D projects have again been developed to match the specific needs of industry and they form part of a more targeted process of investment in R&D that has been implemented over the past six months.

The 2013 AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence is also progressing with pace and already places at Jupiters on the Gold Coast are filling fast. Over 70 per cent of booths for the Trade Show have been allocated to a broad range of dynamic exhibitors from across the industry. Those interested in exhibiting at the Convention are encouraged to contact AUSVEG as soon as possible, as positions are limited.

I wish you all a safe and successful 2013.



John Brent  
Chairman  
AUSVEG

## Richard Mulcahy AUSVEG Chief Executive Officer

In late December, the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) released the national agricultural commodity statistics for 2012. Unfortunately, it made for a largely sobering Christmas-time read. There were some positives, particularly with regards to vegetable exports. The 2011-12 period saw a rise in exports of more than 17 per cent to a total value of AUD\$712 million. It is pleasing growth, however, as has been discussed countless times, there is still much potential that has yet to be realised in this area of trade. Of more concern though is the alarming AUD\$122 million rise in vegetable imports to a total value of AUD\$908 million. Given we possess an industry capable of growing produce for the entire country and far beyond, this is a

situation that simply cannot be allowed to continue unchecked.

We know that the majority of consumers want to buy Australian-grown produce. They want to support Australian growers. It is time for government to follow suit and simplify the process in the supermarket aisle, so that locally-grown produce can be easily identified and purchased by those who want to. In this issue of *Vegetables Australia*, Leader of the Australian Greens, Senator Christine Milne, speaks about the need for stricter Country of Origin Labelling legislation to make this consumer choice clearer (page 34). This is a key area for growers and producers that AUSVEG has long campaigned for, and it is encouraging that legislation to remedy the situation is now

being put forward. Senator Milne's presence as a speaker in Hobart for the 2012 AUSVEG National Convention in May was significant, so it is pleasing to see her party's support for our industry extend to important issues for the industry.

This edition of the magazine also contains a profile on a key figure at AUSVEG, Communications and Public Affairs Manager William Churchill (page 18). For more than three years, William has been central to the efforts of AUSVEG and as Public Affairs Manager, he has served as a vocal and passionate advocate for growers, producers and our industry on a host of issues. AUSVEG looks forward to furthering the vegetable industry's presence in the media and halls of Parliament in the coming year, in order

to advocate on the issues that are most affecting Australian vegetable growers.



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**FRONT COVER:**

Michael Ryan

Photograph by Erin Davis Hartwig

# Editorial

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Michael Ryan



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Delivering a direct alternative



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Investigating innovation in Italy and Israel



**V**egetables Australia moves into 2013 with a packed edition of features, industry interviews, R&D updates and grower profiles. The *Good Food Guide's* '2012 Chef of the Year,' Michael Ryan, speaks about his acclaimed regional Victorian restaurant Provenance, the role of vegetables in his cooking and his close relationship with grower Angelo Grassi (page 10).

In 'Providing a presence' (page 18), AUSVEG Communications and Public Affairs Manager, William Churchill, talks about his

experiences over three years at the peak industry body and the need for growers to engage with the issues that surround and affect them.

Queensland-based rugby-playing vegetable grower Lachlan Hauser is interviewed in the 'Q&A Young grower profile' (page 20), while Leader of the Australian Greens, Senator Christine Milne, speaks at length about the need to introduce clearer Country of Origin Labelling legislation (page 34).

Elsewhere, 'Delivering a direct

alternative' (page 22) sees the magazine take a detailed look at the rise in home direct vegetable deliveries and the benefits that exist in the model for growers and consumers.

There are significant R&D updates in the form of a project on improving eye-health through a 'superyellow' pigment in sweet-corn (page 14) and new on-farm technology designed to help greenhouse growers (page 46).

'Investigating innovation in Italy and Israel' (page 44) features a full report from the

inaugural AUSVEG Women in Horticulture Grower Study Tour, while Dr Kevin Clayton-Greene emphasises the need to increase public awareness about biosecurity in this edition of 'Biosecurity brief' (page 17).

DuPont Australia and New Zealand Business Director, Scott Huf, discusses some of the key industry issues in 2013 (page 28) and *Vegetables Australia* has 20 DVD copies of the popular ABC series *Great Southern Land* to giveaway (page 9).

# TOP SPEED

PROTECTION AGAINST POTATO MOTH



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# Veggie bites

Facts & figures...

## 1.1 kilotonnes

In 2011-12, the amount of fresh and processed lettuce exported was 1.1 kilotonnes, reports ABARES.



## \$51,349,000

The total value of carrots exported in 2011-12, as documented in Agricultural Commodity Statistics 2012, published by ABARES.



## 4.4%

New Zealand fruit and vegetable prices fell 4.4% in November 2012, Statistics New Zealand reports.



## 69.4%

The cost of Brussels sprouts in the UK has risen 69.4% in the past five years, reports The Guardian.

## 27.7 million tonnes

The total production volume for vegetables grown in Turkey in 2012, as reported by the Country's Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock.

## \$3,418,000,000

The gross value of production of Australian vegetables in 2011-12, as reported by ABARES.



## \$122m

Vegetables imports have increased by \$122m over the past twelve months, reports ABARES.





Aerial imagery of rural Australia, taken during filming of *Great Southern Land*.



Professor Steve Simpson.



# Documenting the nation

With sweeping panoramas and up-close insights, ABC's *Great Southern Land* stands as one of the finest locally produced documentary programs of 2012. Travelling the length and breadth of the country, the program celebrates the grit, grace, dust and dirt of modern Australia.

Hosted by Professor Steve Simpson, *Great Southern Land* adopts a unique vantage point to investigate "the systems and

structures that keep us alive."

Using helicopters, hot air balloons and gliders as a means of transportation, the four-part series takes an aerial perspective to examine key aspects of Australian life. Among them, a detailed look at the innovation and resources required to fuel Australia's food and energy production.

The vegetable industry comes under the microscope, as Professor Simpson visits a vast

Victorian glasshouse facility and a carrot producer north of Adelaide. Elsewhere, transport and communications networks are viewed in moments of intense public demand, to observe how the country's infrastructure copes at times of peak use.

The series has now been released on two-disc DVD and has already been slated as a key text for secondary school teachers and students.

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## Thinking regional, staying seasonal

In the third instalment of *Vegetables Australia's* series profiling the link between high-profile restaurants and the growers from whom they source produce, Jeremy Story Carter talks to zucchini flower grower Angelo Grassi and Provenance chef and owner, Michael Ryan, about their unique business relationship and how the latter has made his rural location work.

Oxley-based grower Angelo Grassi.



Thoughts of Michael Ryan's enviable reputation as one of the country's finest chefs prevail during the three and a bit hour drive from Melbourne to Beechworth. The latter part of 2012 saw Ryan's face splashed across the cover of *The Age* newspaper, whose 2013 *Good Food Guide* awarded him 'Chef of the Year' and his Provenance restaurant, 'Regional Restaurant of the Year.' The two highly-coveted titles carry both industry and commercial significance, and it is conceivable that one or two passing cars on the Hume Highway are also venturing to Victoria's north-east for the purpose of visiting the in-demand Provenance.

So, after entering the spacious, high-ceilinged gold rush-era former bank site, it is somewhat surprising, perhaps even a little affronting, to see a decidedly humble starter of pickled vegetables arrive as the first example of the restaurant's much-vaunted menu. Yet in many ways, it is a dish that speaks to Ryan's overarching cooking philosophy; one that showcases rather than subdues the role of vegetables.

The presentation of the dish is simple, but the flavours are clean and bright; a slight hit of acid and salt from the pickle enhancing, rather than overpowering, the innate flavour of the assorted vegetables.

"Vegetables and fruit are what drives my menu," says Chef Michael Ryan. "Sometimes you get stuck about menu ideas, and you always go back to what's in season and what's around, and what's coming up."

For Ryan, this means maintaining a close network of trusted local growers and suppliers.

"Local is a pretty important part of our menu. Not just because it's local - that's not part of my reasoning. If it's not good enough, I won't use it, even if it is local. It has to be good," he says. "Fortunately, most of the local stuff is a pretty high quality. There are a lot of benefits to using stuff that is locally sourced. Freshness is the pretty crucial one. The fresher the piece of fruit or vegetable is, the better the flavour. Some keep better than others, but generally as time goes on, they have less vibrancy."



Travel a little over 30kms back towards Melbourne and you will reach the town of Oxley, home to one of Ryan's supplying growers, Angelo Grassi. A former tobacco farmer, Grassi now uses his site primarily for growing zucchini flowers, alongside small-scale seasonal tomato production. Chickens and dogs may wander among the property's fruit trees, but the imposing shed jutting out of the idyllic surrounds speaks to the fact that, despite growing an extremely niche product, this is no mere hobby.

"When the tobacco industry shut down I looked for something else. Obviously the zucchini flowers aren't going to replace the tobacco industry, but it's a help," says Grassi

"It needs to be smaller scale. With the more commercial lines, you have to grow the volume and the price is so volatile.

At least with the niche stuff, the price is a little bit more regulated because there are not great quantities of it and you are not on the open market."

Key to Grassi's success appears to lie in his specificity to this one product. Zucchini flowers are never likely to gain broader consumer appeal, but by growing a product with knowledge and care, Grassi has established a defined market for himself.

"We tried to grow pretty much every vegetable that you can think of, either on a commercial scale or a niche scale, and the zucchini flowers are what suited us the best," says Grassi.

"They have to be treated very carefully. They have to be chilled and packed carefully. They are packed individually; we have to treat them like babies. It is an ornamental plant, so they have to look the part."



Step inside the large, central shed and you will be greeted with a gleaming array of rifle and shotgun barrels. It is quite a confronting site - one that is somewhat at odds with the delicate nature of the vegetable grown outside - but it accounts for a good portion of the Grassi income. If the gun shop points to a tough-guy grower persona though, the relationship he shares with Michael Ryan suggests anything but.

"I've been selling stuff to Michael for about six years. He's a very good chef, very good," says Grassi. "We sell direct and get a local courier to take it

straight to Beechworth for him, so it's nice and fresh. We usually pick the zucchini flowers in the evening and Michael gets them the next morning."

At times, even the courier has been bypassed.

"When we were away, Michael actually came and picked some tomatoes himself," says Grassi.

The thought of an outsider coming on-site to hand-pick produce would make most growers cringe, but such an example only serves to underscore the level of trust that exists within their relationship.



Chef and owner of Provenance, Michael Ryan.

“Vegetables and fruit are what drives my menu.”

- Chef and owner of Provenance, Michael Ryan.



Back in Beechworth, dishes arrive with increasing sophistication on the Provenance's dark, polished wooden tables. The theme introduced by the pickled vegetable starter is, however, carried throughout. Even when plates are occupied by robust pieces of protein - such as a braised wagyu short rib - they are likely to be joined by an assertive vegetable accompaniment (in the case of the short rib, a spicy, acidic cabbage kimchi). In spite of his passion for fresh produce though, Michael Ryan says that making contact with producers

remains a significant challenge. His relationship with Grassi was only forged after Grassi directly approached him and several other restaurants in the region. "There are people growing, not only veggie and fruit growers but other producers, [who] you would think would come to restaurants, but they don't," says Ryan. He concedes that for most local producers, supplying to restaurants does not represent a significant priority. "They are small farmers and they are busy and they don't always get time to go out and market their produce. So quite

often, you have to chase them down. If they are good, they are probably selling all their stuff anyway, so they don't need to." The economics of sourcing direct and local can also be somewhat prohibitive. "Cost-wise, the actual produce might be cheaper, but the logistics of getting something 30kms down the road is usually more expensive than getting something in Melbourne. And also, if you're getting something from Melbourne you're usually getting a box of things, rather than one thing from 30kms away. As much as I would like to be travelling around doing all

the bucolic things, I just don't have the time." In spite of the barriers, Ryan manages to successfully negotiate his relationship with Grassi and his regional location. "There are good and bad things about being in the country, just like there are good and bad things about being in the city," he says. "Access to some produce is great, other produce, not so good. It doesn't really matter - it's what you do with what you've got."



## Developing a sweet solution to enhance eye-health



A groundbreaking Australian project is developing a sweetcorn variety to help improve eye-health, writes Karen Shaw.

A Queensland research team is leading the world in developing a sweetcorn with enhanced levels of a yellow-orange pigment called zeaxanthin, a carotenoid that helps to protect the retina and prevent age-related blindness.

The sweetcorn hybrid called 'Supergold' is expected to be put out for commercial tender in 2013 - a step that will be closely watched internationally.

It is an exciting breakthrough for the research team led by Chief Investigator and plant physiologist, Dr Tim O'Hare, from the University of Queensland's Alliance for Agricultural and Food Innovation.

"We are world leaders in this particular project," said Dr O'Hare. "We've already had enquiries from leading seed companies in Europe, the USA and Asia."

The research project was funded by HAL, using the National Vegetable Levy, voluntary contributions from industry and matched funds

from the Australian Government.

The development of sweetcorn such as 'Supergold,' with its higher than normal levels of zeaxanthin, has enormous potential for eye-health. Research shows that zeaxanthin helps slow a condition called age-related macular degeneration.

The condition is associated with the depletion of pigment in the retina and is the leading cause of blindness in the western world. Zeaxanthin actively accumulates in the retina, protecting it against the harmful effects of excess blue light by working as a natural sunscreen.

"The body can't make these pigments so we have to get them from what we eat. Sweetcorn is one of the best natural sources of zeaxanthin on the planet," explained Dr O'Hare.

To achieve the required levels to make a difference would, however, mean eating more cobs than most people could manage in a day.

"Our aim was to increase the level of zeaxanthin found in sweetcorn so that people would only need to eat half a cob, or what we call a cobette, to get enough pigment (20 micrograms per gram) to improve eye-health," said Dr O'Hare.

He emphasised that 'Supergold' was not designed to replace other commercial sweetcorn varieties on the market.

"Sweetcorn is already a growth industry," he said. The enhanced pigment corn would be a niche market product, offered at a premium price.

"It is designed to attract consumers willing to pay more for a vegetable that not only tastes good, but is better for your health. This higher marketplace value would also benefit farmers and give them a better return for each cob," he said.

"Consumers can already buy zeaxanthin supplements from a pharmacy. We want to give people an alternative to popping

a pill. We want them to choose a daily dose of high zeaxanthin sweetcorn instead."

### Breeding

Using conventional breeding practices, the team started work in 2008.

"We selected sweetcorn with the highest levels of zeaxanthin and bred from these, constantly selecting the best of the best. Once we reached a certain level we started crossing different lines. The aim [was] to produce corn with maximum zeaxanthin levels as well as boosted overall carotenoid levels," said Dr O'Hare.

"We use what is called high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) to measure the zeaxanthin in sweetcorn. Corn kernels are blended, and a solvent extracted, which is put in the machine that then measures the concentration."

There were, however, some setbacks. Increasing the



Dr O'Hare displaying some standard yellow sweetcorn (right) and high-zeaxanthin (left) inbred lines.

yellow-orange pigment can dramatically change the colour of the kernel. Some cobs appeared orange and another line produced mottled cobs with kernels ranging in colour from

yellow to vivid orange.

Dr O'Hare said market research showed that an unusual looking corn cob was not appealing to consumers.

"Even a cob that was really

high in health-benefiting zeaxanthin was not appealing to customers if it looked unnatural," he said.

The breeding program also had to focus on producing a sweetcorn of uniform colour.

"We wanted it to be distinguishable from the yellow sweetcorn already in the marketplace. The ideal colour is a deep golden yellow - that looks appealing and can also be differentiated by the consumer."

While Dr O'Hare is pleased with the project's success, he is also enthusiastic about undertaking further research on sweetcorn.

"We believe the amount of carotenoid in sweetcorn is largely genetic, but we're curious to see if there are any seasonality effects that can also contribute to levels," he said.

"It's been exciting working on a project designed to expand what's already a successful industry. We hope in future that people will choose to buy 'Supergold' sweetcorn for culinary as well as health benefits."

## THE BOTTOM LINE

- A groundbreaking plant breeding project has developed a sweetcorn with high levels of zeaxanthin to help improve eye-health.
- Zeaxanthin is effective for slowing the progress of aged-related macular degeneration - the leading cause of blindness in the western world.
- Sweetcorn is one of the best natural sources of zeaxanthin.
- Increasing the zeaxanthin levels in sweetcorn to 20 micrograms per gram means people can eat a practical amount of corn each day to manage the condition.



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# Biosecurity brief

## Dr Kevin Clayton-Greene



In this instalment of *Vegetables Australia's* series on biosecurity, AUSVEG biosecurity advisor, Dr Kevin Clayton-Greene, discusses the importance of heightening public interest in the subject and some of the simple biosecurity practices growers and producers should be aware of.

### Historically, there has not been a great amount of public interest in the subject of biosecurity. How do biosecurity incursions stand to affect the public and what can industry do to enhance broader concern about the issue?

I think the classic one as a public issue is the Tomato-potato psyllid. One of the impacts in New Zealand when it came, apart from the impact to the industry, was the fact that people's tomatoes and home gardens were affected. That's what filled up the gardening journal pages for the year or two after it came about - where everyone was complaining about their tomatoes dying. That was one of the biggest issues for home gardeners. As an example - 'my sister has to net all her tomatoes in her garden' - that sort of thing. These pests don't just restrict themselves to growers.

The other side of it is that they always result in increased cost. So if you are putting on \$1,500 extra worth of sprays on your crop, you are going to have to get that back somewhere and that is going to mean that the public are going to have increased prices for their fruit and vegetables. It will also quite possibly affect how and what they can grow in their own gardens, depending on the pest. And it may result in

inconveniences relating to the transport of fruit and vegetables and movement of produce. So the less pest and disease outbreaks we have, the less inconvenience there is for the general public.

### Does industry need to communicate the issue of biosecurity in a more effective way to the public?

Absolutely. That is a role that industry is going to have to increasingly do. Governments are focus-group driven. In most cases, they are now reactive rather than proactive and they are looking for funding cuts. So they will take it out of the bucket in the electorates that are least important. The reality is that country electorates cut very little ice. It is inner-city electorates that people get the most fired up about, not those in rural locations. As biosecurity is not presently a significant issue for those in metropolitan centres, it remains something that exists in the margins of political discussions.

Biosecurity has had a large cut-back in investment over the past few years, from government trying to save where they can. It is in the country's interest that this isn't allowed to continue to the point whereby it is all thrown back on the shoulders of a few people who are really under enormous pressure, but who the greater country benefits from.

Recently, there were a

series of 'Farmer of the Year' awards, which included a biosecurity category. I would like to see something like that extended out to the general public, to somebody who has done something outside of the industry. That sort of recognition will help to get the discussion going. It is never going to be a headline-puller, but it is something that people can be aware of. I think it is something that, as an industry, we have to work at. Once again, these things have to happen at a local level and build to a bigger platform.

### What are some of the more basic biosecurity practices growers can employ day-to-day?

For a start, Plant Health Australia and some grower groups have produced on-farm biosecurity manuals that are now available. Ultimately, it is about being aware of the fact that it is part of your management procedures and a key component of keeping your farm clean. It is all the little things that go into being a good producer.

There are guidelines for implementing good on-farm biosecurity, but it could be as simple as ensuring that people go through foot baths when they go onto your paddocks. It could be making sure that contractors have properly cleaned their equipment when they come onto your farm. That includes

not only harvesting contractors, but also when public utilities, for example, come on farm, whether it be to read meters or perform work. Where have they just come from, for example, and what have they done?

While there is no definite proof, I am aware of cases in the grain industry where outbreaks of certain pest and diseases can be reasonably attributed to the movement of public utility vehicles. These are the sorts of issues that people need to be aware of. If you have been in somebody's paddock, you don't necessarily want to bring that back with you.

You can't do much about the wind, but you can do a lot about what goes on and off your property by human means. Even the water that you use; know where it comes from and make sure that it is clean. It needs to occupy some of your thinking in how you manage your farm day-to-day.

You wouldn't have someone come into your house with a highly infectious disease that you can see or that you know they have, so why would you do it on a farm with plants or animals? Some of them you can see and some of them you can't. It is about ensuring that you uphold basic hygiene measures.



Biosecurity manuals are available through the Plant Health Australia website: [www.planthealthaustralia.com.au](http://www.planthealthaustralia.com.au). Email: [info@ausveg.com.au](mailto:info@ausveg.com.au) Project Number: VG11013



## Providing a presence

After more than three years at AUSVEG, William Churchill is more committed than ever to providing a media and political presence for the nation's vegetable growers.

If you watched the news, listened to the radio or read a newspaper in 2012, chances are you may have seen William Churchill's face, heard his voice or read his name at some stage in the national media. Throughout the past year, AUSVEG's Communications and Public Affairs Manager occupied a central position in debates surrounding topics as wide-ranging as the supermarket pricing wars, anti-dumping legislation and the potential importation of fresh potatoes from New Zealand.

It makes for a gruelling day-to-day schedule and long hours in and out of the office, but Churchill is more exhilarated than exhausted by the challenge.

"We've had a lot of wins this year. We have had more visibility as an industry than ever before," he says. "But we continually want to build on that and further gain leverage from it."

The New South Wales-born, Queensland-raised Melbournian has achieved much during his three years at AUSVEG, but the sheer volume of media appearances generated by the organisation's small Communications team in 2012 served to exceed even his expectations.

AUSVEG's much-publicised opposition to the importation of fresh potatoes from New Zealand and the potential incursion of the Zebra Chip disease serves as perhaps the

most prominent example of a dedicated team punching well above its weight.

"For the potato industry and even growers of solanaceous crops like tomatoes and capsicums, a potential incursion of the Zebra Chip disease would be disastrous, but that is not something that the media, general public and even some Members of Parliament seem to appreciate fully," says Churchill.

"The issue had to gain greater visibility and prominence, so we devised a targeted, provocative campaign designed to get attention and raise awareness. It worked."

Built around an inflammatory cartoon video featuring Prime Minister Julia Gillard, Agriculture Minister, Joe Ludwig, and

Trade Minister, Craig Emerson, depicted as children playing Space Invaders against New Zealand potatoes, the campaign garnered extensive national media coverage. It was augmented with countless interviews by Churchill and other AUSVEG staff, and the effect was such that a Senate Inquiry was called in October by the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee to review the proposed importation of fresh potatoes from New Zealand.

"The most satisfying thing was that we took an issue of great significance, raised its profile, called DAFF out on their flawed workings and ultimately, initiated a meaningful response."

Churchill also points to the

rolodex of phone numbers to government, businesses, industry leaders, journalists and media as another of AUSVEG's key achievements.

"One of the most successful things AUSVEG has managed to achieve is the support of groups who took no serious notice of AUSVEG four years ago. The successful position we find ourselves in as an industry has only been achieved by engaging with our peers to get the job done and secure agreements on policy areas such as Country of Origin Labelling," says Churchill.

"We have been able to draw massive amounts of attention to issues by being able to exploit our availability and work with others. During last year's 2012 AUSVEG National Convention in Hobart, we had seven television appearances over the three days. I knew we had a great formula when I was driving into the ABC studios to do a News 24 cross and heard Paul Howes on the radio being interviewed from the Convention. By being available to the media at all times and working with others of similar interests, you can build a lot of visibility for an issue."

The purpose of such media appearances naturally extends far beyond merely getting the organisation's name and faces out in the public arena. The AUSVEG Public Affairs department continually seeks to harness its presence and momentum in order to subsequently secure political and industry change for the benefit of growers.

"You want to make sure that the industry has a future; that growers' businesses have a future," says Mr Churchill. "Ask yourself, why should business and industry represent itself to Government? Why is it important to go and do these things? Well,



Photographs by John McRae.

other than natural weather disasters, Government is the only thing that can, overnight, destroy your business and your ability to make an income. It is extreme, but it can happen. We've seen it around the world; overnight governments have changed and people's lives have been affected significantly as a result. Here in Australia, there might be new legislation that changes water allocations in your area. All of a sudden, you can't water your crops as often. You then have no choice but to sell wilted produce and the end result will be that your sales go down. It can affect your livelihood and ultimately, affect your life."

It is as a result of this potential that Churchill enthusiastically encourages growers to take up the fight as well. September of 2012 saw he, Nationals

Senator Bridget McKenzie and over 40 growers front a rally in Ballarat to protest the issue of fresh potato imports from New Zealand. The rally attracted national media interest from as far away as Channel Seven in Townsville, and Churchill would like to see others spending time to voice their concerns on such issues.

"I think the biggest thing this industry needs to do is to have its 9,000 businesses, growers and members spend more time off the farm, allocating time to the external threats posed to their operations," he says.

"Get more involved with your industry. Get involved with the local association, get involved with your state organisation, get involved with AUSVEG. Go to local events, have a presence and have a voice. If your local MP is going to get

up in Parliament and give a speech about you, they want to know that you exist. Our politicians aren't expected to be mind readers. If we don't speak up, you risk your issues being looked over."

Churchill says AUSVEG's presence in the media and public sphere will continue to grow in 2013, but he hopes to see those from outside the organisation represent the industry in a public capacity.

"I would love to have growers out there being spokespeople for some issues. To put a grower's face to some of these issues adds a substantial amount of gravity to our statements," he says. "We can't let our industry slip from public and political view. We need to be seen and we need to be heard."

## Notice of Annual Vegetable Levy Payers Meeting 2013

**This is an official notice to all levy paying vegetable growers advising that the Annual Levy Payers Meeting for 2013 will be held on 1 June on the Gold Coast, Queensland.**

This is an important opportunity for vegetable levy payers to hear about the collection of the National Vegetable Levy, strategic priorities for the industry, and receive updates on current industry issues. It also allows growers to provide feedback on the levy process and R&D levy investment.

To RSVP, please email AUSVEG: [info@ausveg.com.au](mailto:info@ausveg.com.au)

**Where:** Jupiters Gold Coast, Surfers Paradise, Queensland  
**When:** Saturday 1 June, 2013 from 2.00-2.30pm

**Name:** Lachlan Hauser  
**Age:** 23  
**Location:** Lockyer Valley, Queensland  
**Works:** Hauser Farms Qld  
**Grows:** Pumpkins, Carrots, Potatoes, Broccoli, Sweetcorn, Lucerne

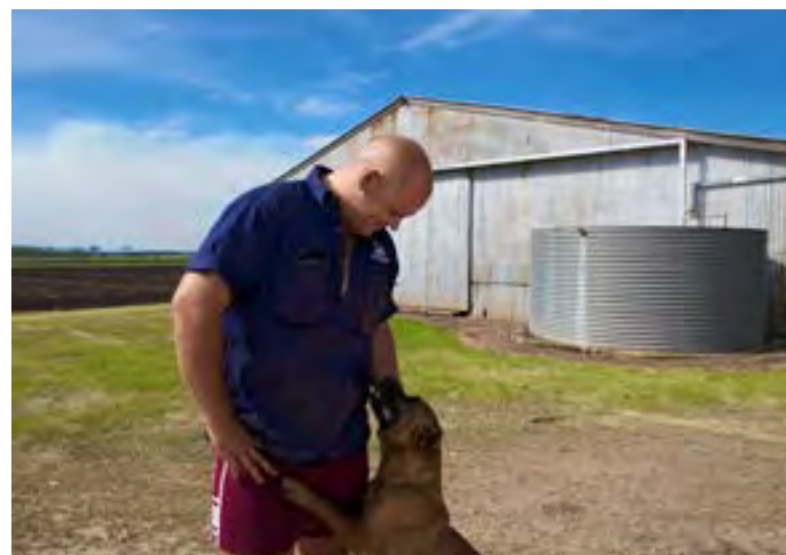


# Q&A Young grower profile



Photographs by John McRae.

Lockyer Valley, Queensland



### How did you first get involved in the vegetable industry?

My family have been farming for the past 40 years. I am the third generation, so I've been involved most of my life in some way or another. Growing up on the farm, I never saw a future for myself but I guess you could say I saw the light and moved home. Officially, I started in the business two and a half years ago.

### What is your role on the farm?

Along with my father, I look after the running of the farm. This means I predominantly handle the growing of our product, including a vast selection of activities, ground preparation, irrigation, harvesting, staff management, quality control, nutrient, weed and pest management.

### Describe your average day on the farm?

There is no average day on the farm; you rarely have the same day twice. Depending on seasons, daily tasks vary with what is grown. At the moment, we are in the middle of the planting stages and harvesting of pumpkins. Harvesting of pumpkins for us begins just before Christmas until May, so generally that will involve getting the crews together either to harvest or wash and pack. Also, within these months, we are preparing ground vigorously for our next planting stages of

potatoes, carrots and broccoli.

### What do you most enjoy about working in the vegetable industry?

I thoroughly enjoy the sense of pride when growing a vegetable from scratch to a quality product. It is extremely rewarding after nurturing a plant for up to four months, witnessing the highs and lows of its growth, and then to be left with a quality fresh product.

### What are the biggest challenges you face as a grower?

Currently, there are a few key challenges we are facing, such as increasing input costs, extreme weather conditions and the lack of quality labour. With the mines heavily recruiting, there are a vast amount of farmers within our area who are struggling to find and keep skilled, reliable and quality workers.

### You were part of the recent AUSVEG Young Grower Tour to China, Vietnam and Hong Kong. How was the experience and what did you get out of the tour?

I thoroughly enjoyed the Young Grower Tour. It gave me the opportunity to interact and network with a variety of other young growers as well as number of companies at the Asia Fruit Logisitca. It was a great experience. It was interesting to see the growing techniques

that China and Vietnam implemented to successfully produce their products. It was a little step back in time; at some farms we witnessed donkeys carting broccoli to be hand packed in the back of a truck.

### You have a strong background in rugby league. Do you still play?

As much as I love working on the land, playing rugby league is my dream profession. Juggling both is quite intense and time-consuming. I am currently playing for my local team the Gatton Hawks. I find it extremely difficult to find time to train and play due to conflict in schedules.

### How do you think more young people could be encouraged to take up jobs in horticulture and the vegetable industry in particular?

As a young person, personally I don't think I would be involved in the vegetable industry if it wasn't for the existence of my family's business. Farming is a quite demanding and spontaneous profession. To attract a young person to the industry, we have to invest in the promotion and training required within our industry, so the vast array of options can be exploited. After now being involved in vegetable game, there are so many aspects that interest me that I wasn't even aware existed beforehand. Awareness is the key.

### If you weren't working in the vegetable industry, what would you be doing?

I'm not sure what I would be doing. I think I would be more heavily involved in rugby league, maybe teaching Phys Ed.

### Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

In 10 years I want to be able to reflect and be proud of how far our company has come. Hopefully with a little more acreage and a full-time packing shed running for 12 months of the year.

# Delivering a direct alternative

With the rise in farm direct delivery services, Jeremy Story Carter looks at what the business model has to offer consumers and growers.

It is midway through an impossibly sunny afternoon in the affluent Melbourne suburb of Kew. A delivery van winds its way through a series of tree-lined streets, frequently stopping to pull into driveways. At each stop, the driver, John Hatznikolaidis, jumps out and opens up the refrigerated back end of his van; pulling out a large box of fresh fruit and vegetables before bouncing up to the house's front door. On more than one occasion, a parent and their child come out to greet him and stop for a minute or two to talk, before he hands over the box and moves on to his next delivery.

His is one of many vans likely to be seen around the country offering such a service. It might recall days when milk was brought to neighbourhood doors, but the business model of home direct deliveries, particularly of fruit and vegetables, is one that has recently garnered distinctly modern enthusiasm. So why has this occurred? Is it purely driven by convenience for the consumer? Good marketing on the part of the company offering the service? A broader public desire to move away from the big supermarkets? Or is it similar to the farmers' market example, where consumers feel a more immediate sense of connection with growers? The answer, it seems, differs from case to case.

Derrimut, Victoria resident Kylie Griffin began using national home delivery service Aussie Farmers Direct when she was pregnant and found

that going to the shops was becoming increasingly difficult.

Over a year later, she still spends around \$100 a week on vegetables, fruit, bread and milk with the same company.

"I prefer to get the Aussie Farmers' box because it's always fresher and it lasts longer than what I get from the supermarket," says Griffin. "The kids get quite excited when they see the box getting delivered... and then they want to eat more. When I get food from the supermarket, I've got to force them more to eat their veggies. If they know the farmer's brought it to them - because that's what I tell them [laughs] - they are more likely to eat vegetables."

Back in the delivery van in Kew, John Hatznikolaidis scarcely changes tone when talking about his two sons and his network of established customers.

"You end up becoming like part of the family," he beams.

The van stops and delivers to several more stately homes, then a hairdressing salon, before pulling up to a set of offices. Barrister and solicitor, Barry Woods, accepts the delivery from Hatznikolaidis as if greeting an old friend, and immediately begins espousing the benefits of the service.

"I've been spreading the word - I think it is a great service. The quality of the stuff is good, and John never seems to sleep in," laughs Woods. "The thought that the service is supporting Aussie Farmers is a great incentive too."



“ We never tell [growers] the price, we ask them the price. They are the owners of the produce, it is their produce and I respect that. ”

- Aussie Farmers Direct National Fruit and Vegetable Manager, Andrew Fletcher.



John Hatznikolaidis delivers to a house in Kew.

### The model

While different services operate from contrasting business models, there are similarities to be found among each provider. At their core, each offers a product that doesn't need to travel to a central marketplace prior to being sold.

In Victoria, Aussie Farmers Direct has its produce delivered to distribution centres either side of Melbourne's CBD in Tottenham and Clayton, where it is sorted, boxed and sent to the homes of customers. While they are not able to leverage losses on fruit and vegetables against the gains made on other products, such as occurs in many supermarkets, Aussie Farmers Direct CEO, Braeden Lord, says they are able to keep costs low through the direct nature of the model.

"Without the overheads of bricks and mortar, it creates low-cost, efficient depot operations," says Lord.

Customers are able to order their produce either over the phone, online or from forms on their delivery boxes. They are able to choose their own specific items, or pick from preselected mixed boxes of fruit and vegetables, at varying volumes and cost.

Elsewhere, Farmhouse Direct, the recently introduced service offered by Australia Post, sees growers and producers setup their own virtual shopfronts in a central online marketplace, before using its network of couriers to deliver to consumers. As with most online retail services, products can be browsed, added to a cart and then ordered, although shipping is relatively expensive and customers are encouraged to order from a single producer to reduce the cost.

*continued over page* ▶

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#### What is in it for growers?

Lord says that Aussie Farmers Direct's origins were very much informed by considerations of the growers they would ultimately source from.

"From the very beginning about seven years ago when we first started, it was really around being able to support rural farming with a sustainable business model," says Lord.

"Being able to cut out the middle men and deliver great quality, fresh produce right from farm gate to front door; and do that in the most efficient, expedient way. Efficient, so that everyone wins from a low cost of operation [and] expedient, so that everyone gains from receiving great quality produce."

National Fruit and Vegetable Manager for Aussie Farmers Direct, Andrew Fletcher, meanwhile describes the company's approach to working

with growers as "collaborative."

"We never tell them the price, we ask them the price," says Fletcher. "They are the owners of the produce, it is their produce and I respect that."

Joe Ruffo from Tripod Farms has been involved with Aussie Farmers Direct for over 12 months, after being approached directly by the company. Tripod supply pre-packed salad punnets and other items on a weekly basis to the company, and Ruffo describes his company's relationship with Aussie Farmers Direct as "very, very good."

"It would be good if there were a few more people around like them," says Ruffo. "Even if you have new varieties, they are willing to give them a go and get them out there into the general public and try new products. Everything we grow, they'll have a go at it."

#### Competition

As the amount of Australian consumers using such services continues to grow, so too does the number of companies offering the model. Aussie Farmers Direct may represent perhaps the most relevant and nationally successful example, but it is now joined in the marketplace by a host of like-minded alternatives.

Braeden Lord, however, says he is "philosophical" about the emergence of other companies mirroring the Aussie Farmers model.

"Being in retail for 20-odd years, the introduction of a bit of competition builds a strong awareness and builds a really good presence in peoples' minds about the service," says Lord.

#### Who offers the service?\*

##### **Aussie Farmers Direct [National]**

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

##### **SydneyFresh [NSW]**

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

##### **Fruitastic [VIC]**

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

##### **Market Fresh Fruit and Veg [NSW]**

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

##### **Farmhouse Direct [National]**

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

##### **Fruit en route [SA]**

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

##### **Nelson's Fresh Express [SA]**

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

##### **Fresh on the move [QLD]**

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

\* More options may be available in your local area.



## The supermarkets

A host of reasons can be drawn on as to why companies operating under the farm direct delivery model will never legitimately challenge the major supermarkets for market share. For one, both Woolworths and Coles offer home delivery services of their own, while there will always be general purpose items that farm direct companies are not able to offer. That does not, however, represent a particular concern for Aussie Farmers Direct and Braeden Lord.

"It is not really in our charter to rival the supermarkets and we really prefer to not be directly compared to them, because we do see ourselves in a very different market," says Lord.

"If we can encourage enough customers and continue to satisfy our existing customers with great quality vegetables, then we are very confident that we then become another good source of supply for our growers."

Lord does believe though that services such as Aussie Farmers Direct offer a viable alternative for growers to the frequently volatile world of supplying to supermarkets.

"The reliance, either from a growing or food manufacturing perspective, on the major Australian supermarkets is fraught with danger for these guys. Having a credible third option is something that is driving us to push harder and grow further as a business."



Aussie Farmers Direct CEO, Braeden Lord.

“If we can encourage enough customers and continue to satisfy our existing customers with great quality vegetables, then we are very confident that we then become another good source of supply for our growers.”

- Aussie Farmers Direct CEO, Braeden Lord.





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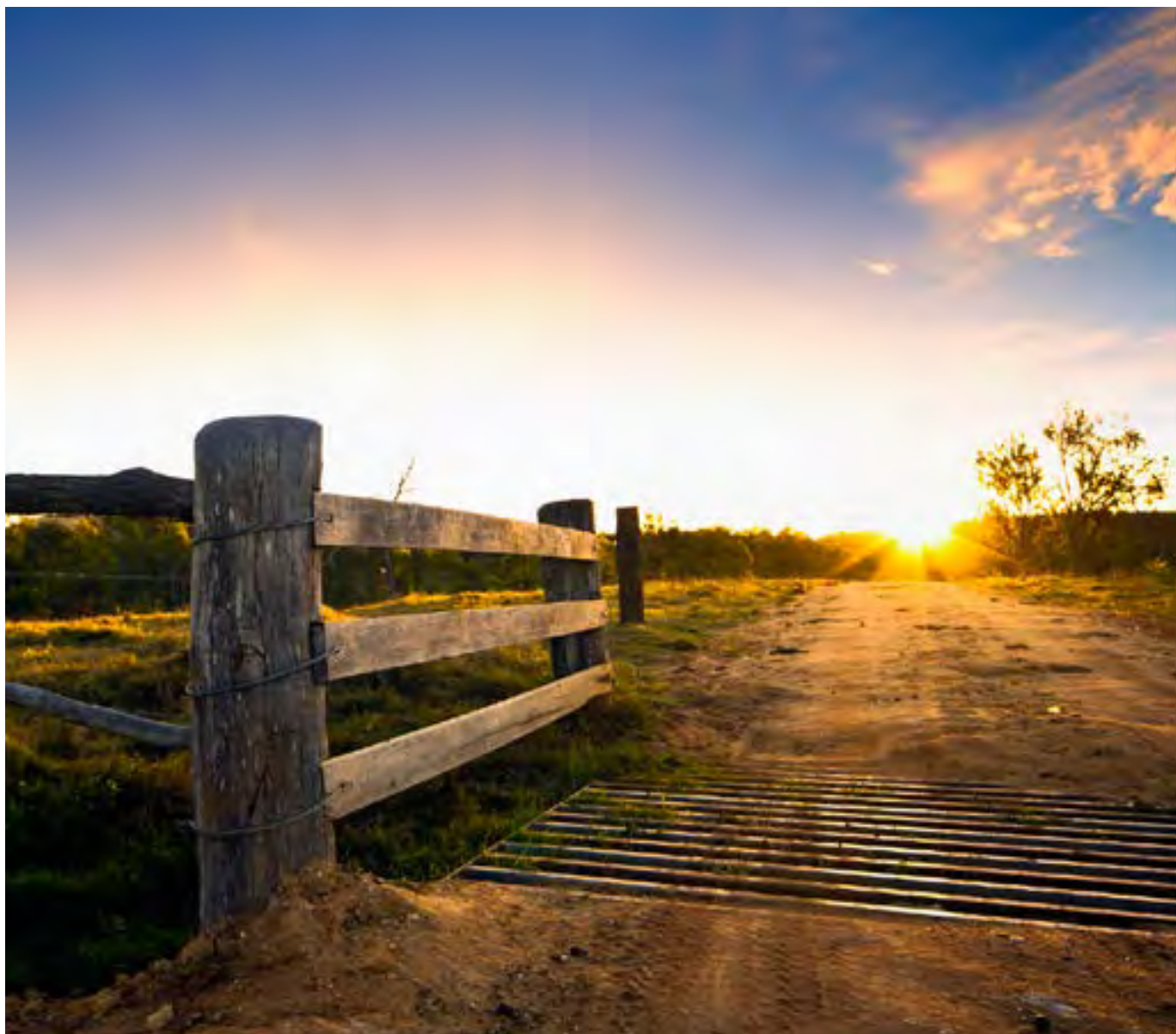
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## Belting out a new registration

Bayer CropScience's BELT 480 SC Insecticide has recently been registered for use across a broad range of crops. BELT is used as a control for various chewing (lepidopteran) pests, including Diamondback Moth and Cabbage White butterfly. Previously, it had only been registered for use on brassica vegetables, brassica leafy vegetables (field only), fruiting vegetables (excluding cucurbits and sweet corn), leafy vegetables (field only) and potatoes. Its registration now extends to some minor crops among a host of others.

AUSVEG National Marketing Manager, Simon Coburn, said the registration represented a successful collaboration between industry bodies.

"This is a development that growers and industry have specifically been working towards," said Mr Coburn.

"It is just what the Strategic Investment Plan has been seeking to achieve and serves to validate the work of Horticulture Australia Limited, AUSVEG and its partners."

Product Manager from Bayer CropScience, Lachlan Bird, echoed Mr Coburn's sentiments.

"Our thanks go to all involved in managing this relationship and the negotiations that were necessary to ensure industry support for the funding that was required to progress the project," said Mr Bird.

"The registration of BELT in minor crops provides the various industries with a long-term

management tool for the control of key lepidopteran pests, rather than reliance on short-term permits."

The new registration means BELT is now able to be used in protected cropping

environments for brassica leafy vegetables and leafy vegetables. Its impact on most beneficial is rated as 'soft,' allowing it to be used within Integrated Pest Management systems.

### A full list of the new crops and pests that have been added to the BELT label can be found below:

- Cucurbits (including cucumbers, melons, pumpkin, squash, zucchini) in field and protected cropping systems - Heliiothis, Cucumber Moth
- Chia - Heliiothis
- Herbs in field and protected cropping systems - Diamondback Moth, Cabbage White butterfly, Cluster Caterpillar, Heliiothis
- Root and tuber vegetables - Diamondback Moth, Cabbage White butterfly, Cluster Caterpillar, Potato moth (tomato leafminer), Heliiothis
- Stalk and stem vegetables - Heliiothis

## Minor-use permits

Permit Number	Permit Description (pesticide/crop/pest)	Date Issued	Expiry Date	Comments
PER12998	Amistar Fungicide / Cucumber (greenhouse) / Alternaria Leaf Spot ( <i>Alternaria cucumerina</i> )	30-Nov-12	30-Sep-14	Issued for all states (excl Vic). APVMA requires residue data in greenhouse. cucumber x 3 trials for renewal.
PER13176	Shin Etsu MD Carmenta Pheromone / Persimmons / Clearwing Persimmon Borer	30-Nov-12	30-Sep-15	Issued for all states.
PER13382	Durivo (chlorantraniliprole + thiamethoxam) / Nursery stock / various insect pests	28-Aug-12	31-May-15	Issued for all states (excl Vic).
PER13394	Fluazifop / Shallots, Spring onions, Leeks, Garlic, Parsnips & Sweet potato / Grass weeds	4-Dec-12	30-Sep-15	Issued for all states (excl Vic). APVMA requires residue data in leek x 2 trials and sweet potato x 2 trials for renewal.
PER13566	Methomyl / Tomatoes & Capsicums / Fruit Fly	7-Dec-12	30-May-14	Issued for Bowen and Gumlu Qld growing districts.
PER13567	Bifenthrin / Tomatoes & Capsicums / Fruit Fly	7-Dec-12	31-May-14	Issued for Bowen and Gumlu Qld growing districts.
PER13627	Score Foliar Fungicide (difenoconazole) / Celery / Cercospora Leaf Spot & Septoria Spots	29-Nov-12	31-Dec-15	Issued for all states (excl Vic). APVMA requires the use registered.
PER13671	Bulldock 25 EC / Papaya / Fruit-spotting bug and the Banana-spotting bug	28-Nov-12	31-Oct-17	Issued for NSW, NT, Qld and WA. APVMA requires residue data in papaya x 1-2 trial for renewal.
PER13760	Dimethoate / Cut flowers & ornamentals / Spiraling Whitefly	1-Dec-12	30-Nov-13	Issued for Qld only.
PER13808	Lebaycid Insecticide (Fenthion) / Avocado & Mango (post-harvest) / Queensland Fruit Fly	7-Dec-12	30-Oct-13	Issued for NSW, NT and Qld.
PER13860	Lebaycid (fenthion) / Chilli peppers / Fruit Fly	7-Dec-12	30-Oct-13	Issued for all states.
PER13879	Phosphorus acid (foliar application) / Macadamia trees / Phytophthora trunk canker	4-Dec-12	30-Sep-17	Issued for NSW, Qld and WA.

These permits have had their additional data requirements changed. Full details of all permits are available on the APVMA website: [www.apvma.gov.au/permits](http://www.apvma.gov.au/permits)

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# Scott Huf: Pushing for a collaborative future

DuPont Australia and New Zealand Business Director, Scott Huf, speaks about some of the key issues in horticulture and why industry leaders need to collaborate in order to work towards a better future.

**Q: What role does DuPont hold for Australian growers and the industry as a whole in 2013?**

I think our role is to collaborate with our customers to bring new and innovative technology to the marketplace with unique modes of action, to benefit Australian vegetable farmers. We continue to launch new brands into the market space. We have existing

strong brands like DuPont™ Coragen® insecticide and this year we have launched DuPont™ Fontelis® fungicide and in 2013 we will launch DuPont™ Benevia® insecticide.

**Q: The shortage of skilled workers is a recurring issue in Australian agriculture. Nobody really has one definitive answer as to how it can be addressed,**

**but what do you see as some of the ways in which industry can at least build towards getting more students back into Agricultural Sciences degrees, to stop the decline and actually see numbers start going the other way?**

In the larger metropolitan cities, students don't understand that there are great career

opportunities in agriculture. It is not publicised, it is not promoted enough. So, I think there is a great opportunity for the industry to unite and collaborate to fund an education campaign, basically a marketing campaign, into primary schools and high schools on the critical role agriculture plays in society and the opportunity to make a difference through participation.



The Agribusiness Leaders Panel at the 2012 AUSVEG National Convention [L-R] DuPont Crop Protection Australia New Zealand Business Director, Scott Huf, Elders Chief Executive Officer, Malcolm Jackman, former Managing Director of Bayer CropScience, Joerg Ellmanns, Syngenta head of vegetables, Australia, Andrew Simeonidis and Horticulture Australia Chief Executive Officer, John Lloyd.

There are great career opportunities on offer and it is an industry that is growing.

**Q: It seems that from the outside, the industry is perhaps not viewed as being as diverse as it really is?**

I think that the challenge for the industry, and we haven't done enough of this, is to recruit and market ourselves because at the end of the day, it is like any other brand. The agriculture industry must market itself as a

brand, and unless we do that, we won't start to see the influx of graduates choosing agriculture as a career.

**Q: Would you like to see more assistance from government on the matter, or is it ultimately industry's responsibility?**

I think government does play a role in some part. At the end of the day though, it must come back to the industry. It is a competitive environment and as an industry, [we] must take

ownership for the skills shortage and that's probably the primary focus.

**Q: As a member of the CropLife Australia board, what do you hope to achieve through that avenue?**

CropLife is the peak industry body that represents the plant science industry. We work with multiple stakeholders to promote agricultural technology in the context of sustainable development.

CropLife is committed to Safety, Stewardship and Quality that helps farmers produce safe, high quality, affordable and abundant food and fibre.

**Q: 2012 was obviously a tough year for vegetable growers. Do you still find a receptive market place for DuPont and its products?**

Absolutely. There is still a great need for new technology in the market place. We always get a great reception from the vegetable industry. We continue to launch new brands into the market space and through our collaboration with customers, we continue to play our part in providing access to technology that allows [growers] to produce high quality product.

**Q: What are you most proud to have overseen and been involved with during your time at DuPont?**

From my perspective, it is great working for a company with strong core values associated with safety, ethics, environmental stewardship and respect for each other. DuPont is concerned about improving the global wellbeing of society and continues to develop technology in this area. We are certainly proud to be a company that is over 200 years old and through collaboration and inclusive innovation, we continue to bring new technology across the market space to benefit Australian vegetable farmers.



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# Go-kart Grand Prix for young growers

The 2013 AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence will play host to one of the more exhilarating event's in the program's history. Dow AgroSciences will once again sponsor the young grower event, which will take attendees on a NextGen Grand Prix. Registered participants will be transported from Jupiters Gold Coast at 2pm on Saturday, June 1 to a go-karting track for an exciting afternoon of high speeds and sharp turns.

The event is an opportunity for young growers from around the country to meet and socialise, with registration limited to

those 35 years and under. It forms part of AUSVEG and Dow AgroSciences' continued emphasis on fostering and encouraging young members of the vegetable industry. Speaking to *Vegetables Australia*, Dow AgroSciences' Horticulture Business Manager, John Gilmour, said that young people hold a critical role in the future of the industry.

"We strongly believe that if Australian horticulture is to effectively compete in the global marketplace, we need the best and brightest of the younger generation to drive it into the future," said Mr Gilmour. "We are proud to be associated with

programs that encourage the next generation to play their part and to be trained and educated to the highest level."

The 'Young Grower of the Year' award will be announced on the Saturday at the Gala Dinner following the event. Past winner Michael Vorrasi spoke recently to *Vegetables Australia* and said receiving the award in Hobart was significant for both himself and his family's business.

"Winning the award has opened up a lot of new channels for me to expand our business. It has helped to develop new relationships, which have in turn led to new ideas and new


innovations," said Mr Vorrasi.

"It was great to receive recognition not only for myself but for all people involved in our business. It has given me further motivation to continue growing our business and strive for further excellence."

Registration is required to attend the NextGen Grand Prix, and spaces are strictly limited.



For more information  
Simon Coburn  
AUSVEG National  
Marketing Manager  
Telephone: (03) 9822 0388  
Email: [convention@ausveg.com.au](mailto:convention@ausveg.com.au)



## Women in Hort to cruise the Coast

The 'Women in Horticulture' event will return to the 2013 AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence, in its most spectacular incarnation yet.

The 2012 event at MONA served as one of the centrepieces for last year's Convention, with Greens Senator Christine Milne delivering a keynote address from within the

acclaimed museum's grounds.

In 2013, attendees will be taken on a breathtaking yacht cruise of the Gold Coast Harbour. After receiving Champagne on arrival, attendees will have the opportunity to network and hear from high-profile industry speakers while taking in the surrounding Surfers Paradise skyline. As in 2012, the 'Women

in Horticulture' event is once again proudly presented by Steritech.

Taking place on Saturday, June 1, the event celebrates and promotes the role of women in the industry. It is accompanied by the keenly contested 'Women in Horticulture' Award, the winner of which will be revealed at the Gala Dinner following the event.

Nominations for the Awards for Excellence are now open, and growers are encouraged to think about those around them who are deserving of nomination.



To make a nomination for the awards, visit:  
[www.ausveg.com.au/  
events/convention](http://www.ausveg.com.au/events/convention)



## A taste of Morocco

For one night only, Jupiters Gold Coast will be transformed at the 2013 National Convention to resemble the famed Rick's Cafe from the movie *Casablanca* for the DuPont Moroccan-themed night.

The Friday evening of the Convention program will see delegates enter an enchanting environment that replicates

one of cinema's most iconic locations.

The event follows in the footsteps of the 2012 DuPont Historic Pub Night, which took in several of Hobart's oldest taverns. It offers delegates the chance to relax, get to know one another and network after a full day of speaker sessions and trade show displays.

## Register now

Registrations for the 2013 National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence are open, but accommodation is limited - so book now. Early-bird registration rates will also be closing soon. Registrations and flight bookings can be made online via: [www.ausveg.com.au/convention](http://www.ausveg.com.au/convention)



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# Calcium uptake in plants



with Rohan Davies

Incitec Pivot Fertilisers' Technical Agronomist, Rohan Davies, discusses the role of calcium in crops.

## Question: Why do vegetables need calcium?

Plants take up calcium in the ionic form (Ca<sup>2+</sup>) and it plays a role in two main areas in the plant:

- Membrane and cell wall by maintaining structural integrity;
- Activating plant enzymes and phytohormones that control plant functions from cell division, cell elongation and nutrient uptake to changes in cell status to lessen the impact of environmental and disease stresses.

Calcium uptake by plants is not as efficient as for other plant nutrients. Uptake occurs just behind the root tip, and internal movement is restricted to young roots only, due to an extra layer of cellulose in older root tissues, which prevents the transfer of calcium.

Consequently, anything that affects new root growth may prevent calcium uptake and induce a deficiency. Factors affecting root growth include adverse weather conditions such as drought, low temperatures, poor soil aeration and water logging.

Uptake of calcium is passively coupled with water movement, so transpiration (or water movement) is critical to ensuring adequate calcium uptake.

Consequently, anything that affects water movement rates in the plant may prevent calcium uptake and induce a

Table 1: Calcium related plant disorders.

Disease	Crop
Bitter Pit	Apples
Blossom End Rot	Capsicums and Tomatoes
Blackheart	Celery
Cavity Spot	Carrots
Club Root	Brassicas
Fusarium Wilt	Tomatoes
Erwinia	Potatoes
Root Rot	Cucumbers

Source: Datnof, L.E., Wade, E.H and Huber, D.M. (2007). *Mineral Nutrition and Plant Disease*. The American Phytopathological Society. Minnesota.

deficiency. Factors such as soil salinity levels, humidity, light levels and multiple nutrient sinks within a plant can affect water movement.

For example, high humidity environments, like those that develop in a lettuce head or below an enclosed canopy, can reduce water movement rates and increase tip burn injury - irrespective of the soil calcium status<sup>1</sup>.

Deficiency symptoms tend to be seen in the younger leaves because of low mobility of calcium within the plant. Most of the calcium stored in the plant is found in the older leaf tissues. Adequate calcium helps delay leaf senescence and slows down or prevents leaf and fruit fall.

Rapidly expanding leaves and other

organs, such as fruit that do not transpire freely, may have their growth demands for calcium outstrip supply, which may induce deficiency symptoms.

Many crops, such as apples and potatoes, have a narrow window for calcium uptake. Ninety per cent of the calcium taken up by potato tubers or apple fruit occurs within a four to six-week period after bloom for apples or during budding for potatoes<sup>2</sup>.

In summary, calcium-induced deficiencies can be alleviated by applying a readily available source of plant available calcium, either via the soil or foliar (e.g. EASY Cal®). Insoluble forms of calcium (e.g. lime) may not provide adequate calcium nutrition.

Use of tolerant cultivars, slowing plant growth rates, lower light and mitigation of other environmental conditions such as water logging are also good options in reducing calcium deficiency issues.

### References:

1. Langhans, R. W and Tibbitts, T.W.(1997) *Plant Growth Chamber Handbook*. North Central Research Publication No. 340. Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station Special Report No 99. Iowa State University. 133-141.
2. Easterwood, G.W. (2002). *Calcium's role in plant nutrition*. *Fluid Journal*.



Please send your soil nutrition questions to *Vegetables Australia*.  
Email: [info@ausveg.com.au](mailto:info@ausveg.com.au)  
Phone: (03) 9822 0388



# Country of Origin Labelling: are we there yet?

With the recent introduction of a new food labelling Bill into the Senate and House of Representatives, many in the industry are hoping the proposed new rules will aid consumers in supporting Australian growers and products. Leader of the Australian Greens, Senator Christine Milne, discusses why the Greens have championed the issue of clearer food labelling and the potential benefits this would hold for industry, writes Caitlin Rodé.

Country of Origin Labelling has entangled members of the horticulture industry, consumers and policy makers in a carousel of debate for some time. Many in the industry question how consumers can buy and support local producers, if they cannot tell domestic and imported products apart in a simple and clear-cut way. 'Made in Australia', 'Product of Australia' and 'Grown in Australia' labels all purport local origins, however some require only a percentage of local ingredients to qualify. With the results of several

recent consumer studies and a comprehensive independent review illuminating the need to make Country of Origin Labelling clearer, the bolstering of origin labelling through legislative reform is a welcome initiative.

Australian Greens Leader, Senator Christine Milne and Deputy Leader of the Greens, Adam Bandt, introduced a new food labelling Bill into the House of Representatives and the Senate on 17 September 2012. The Competition and Consumer Amendment to Australian Food Labelling Bill requires that labels state where food is actually

grown or produced, rather than only placing emphasis on where it is packaged or processed.

"Australians want to know where their food is from, they don't want it treated like any other good or service. It's got to be labelled based on thresholds of local content," says Senator Milne.

"In that proposed new section, it stipulates that for packaged and processed foods, a minimum of 90 per cent by dry weight of the ingredients must be of Australian origin to be able to claim 'Made from Australian Ingredients.' So the

key change proposed here is for processed food. Additionally, such processed food wouldn't be able to claim 'Made in Australia.' That claim under the Act is all about where the costs of manufacturing the food have been incurred. If 51% or more of those costs have been incurred in Australia, a processed food at the moment can say 'Made in Australia,' regardless of where the food was grown."

In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation



Leader of the Greens,  
Senator Christine Milne.



Ministerial Council stated that former Australian Health Minister, Dr Neal Blewett AC, would lead an Independent Panel for the comprehensive Review of Food Labelling Law and Policy. Termed 'The Blewett Review,' the investigation saw the 2011 release of a final report, Labelling Logic, with key recommendations for Country of Origin Food Labelling. Recommendations within the report placed emphasis on key areas including erasing public confusion over the 'Made in Australia' claim. With the needs of industry and consumers now substantiated through the extensive information and recommendations released, the Greens have driven the Bill in the hopes of implementing change in the food industry to erase the ambiguity surrounding food labelling.

Many would argue though that there has been a strong preference from consumers to buy Australian food products for many years. The pertinent question seems to be: why has it taken until now to initiate a reform to food labelling legislation? Senator Milne acknowledges that food labelling in Australia is complex and as a result, trying to initiate reform to give Australians the information they want all too often ends up in the 'too hard basket' - or parked with the Council of Australian Governments which

seems to be where complex policy problems often go to die.

"I also think that governments have been far too swayed by some vested interests, arguing that Australians only care about food price; and that label changes are therefore an unnecessary cost to business

possible and must happen. We know that if we wait, this issue will remain unresolved...this has been dragging on for years."

The Greens have been criticised in some quarters for rushing the amendment and not consulting appropriately with the Commonwealth, with particular

when purchasing food. It is a sentiment reinforced by AUSVEG Chairman, John Brent.

"Industry and consumers alike have been calling for improvements to these laws for a number of years now. To finally see action on this issue is incredibly encouraging," says Mr Brent.

"Consumers deserve the right to easily distinguish what country the food that they purchase has come from, so if endorsed by Parliament, these laws will represent a great win for Australian grocery buyers and food producers alike."

Senator Milne says that she hopes the Bill will create a more even playing field for Australian producers, where consumers can clearly differentiate between local and imported product.

"We are actively seeking feedback on the Bill, including any ways to improve it, because the Greens are keen to broker a real solution here. Country of Origin Labelling reform has simply taken too long; it's time to resolve it and support Australian farmers."

“Country of Origin Labelling reform has simply taken too long; it's time to resolve it and support Australian farmers.”

and a waste of time," says Senator Milne.

"This ignores the evidence that Australians very much do want to know where their food comes from, and over half say they choose local products when they can identify them to support local growers. It's a challenge to come up with labelling that clearly identifies Australian grown food, as well as processed food that is made locally here, but we think it's

mention of how the legislation will affect the processing sector. However, the introduction of the Bill has been supported by leading players in Australian agribusiness including Elders Chief Executive Officer, Malcolm Jackman. Mr Jackman said the legislative improvements around Country of Origin Labelling are important for Australian food producers, and will provide consumers with the ability to make more informed choices



For more information on  
Country of Origin Labelling  
visit:

[www.accc.gov.au](http://www.accc.gov.au)

[www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)

# Striving to find a spinach solution

Rachel Williams talks to ISS Institute International Fellowship winner Stuart Grigg about spinach and working on overcoming some of the challenges of growing the leafy vegetable.

Stuart Grigg may have worked with roses, tobacco and hops, but it is clear where his passion lies.

"Spinach keeps everyone in the industry challenged - there is a high demand on the grower, agronomist and whole production chain. It is much sexier!" says Grigg.

The ISS Institute International Fellowship winner and University of Melbourne graduate has been in the leafy vegetable industry for 10 years after stints in the aforementioned fields, and evidently thrives on the challenges it brings. The biggest of those facing spinach growers is damping-off, a disease that causes root rotting, mostly at or below ground level. The disease has been identified as the result of plant colonisation of many different soil-borne fungi, including *Rhizoctonia*, *Pythium*, *Phytophthora* and *Fusarium* species.

Given some yield losses are in

the vicinity of 50 per cent during high pressure periods, such as hot temperatures and elevated humidity, the cost to the grower can be significant - understood to be hundreds of thousands of dollars across the country. Demand for an answer to fix the problem is high.

"Damping off not only causes major issues for growers; the disease has an impact on product shelf life and consumer satisfaction. These impacts on the product presentation place limitations on the potential growth of the category," says Grigg.

In early 2012, a group of growers, service providers and processors formed a Leafy Vegetables Working Group to focus on industry-specific issues. He received support from growers, major salad processors and AUSVEG to apply for the fellowship.

Grigg says that the recent recommendation from the USA is for a four-year soil rotation

with the crop; advice that he believes is "totally unrealistic," given some growers can produce three crops of spinach in one year in rotation with other crops.

"In theory, growers could produce as many as six or seven crops of baby spinach on the one paddock per year, however, this is not common industry practice," he explains.

"In Australia, a crop of spinach only takes 21 days in the middle of summer and 11 weeks in winter, so if you had to wait four years for a rotation, there is physically not enough ground to be able to do it."

So, for the man who travels up to 2000km a week from his Ballan-base in Victoria to visit farmers as an independent agronomist, Grigg is soon to travel 17,000km to Europe on a quest to find a better solution.

As part of his ISS Institute International Fellowship, awarded at the Agrifood Skills Australia National Conference

in October 2012, Grigg will investigate all causes of damping-off, including the biological, agronomic and climatic impacts, as well as cultural impacts, such as paddock hygiene and seed sowing depths.

The 36-year-old father of two will attend the annual international varietal field days in the Netherlands to investigate alternative disease-resistant varieties. He will also meet with spinach breeders and seed companies.

"I plan to travel to the USA and Europe next September, so it will allow me to see what is happening internationally because there is not a lot of information domestically," says Grigg.

"Everyone has some understanding, but no-one has studied it in-depth."

He will develop a list of best practice management guidelines for damping-off control, which will be distributed to Australian growers - from Western Australia right through to southern Tasmania - by January, 2014.

Grigg hopes to start seeing real improvements in crop yields, enabling growers to improve efficiencies and business profitability, within weeks of the release of his Fellowship written report.

"I am a very result-driven person. I am not interested in coming up with areas for more study. I want to find a solution - pure and simple," he says.

"The beauty of spinach production in January and February, when my research paper is going to be released, is that it is a 20-28 day crop so that information I produce will be available by then, so it really could be having an impact within a month."



“ I am a very result-driven person. I am not interested in coming up with areas for more study. I want to find a solution - pure and simple. ”



Agronomist Stuart Grigg.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

- Stuart Grigg was awarded an ISS Institute International Fellowship at the Agrifood Skills Australia National Conference in October.
- He will investigate all causes of damping-off in spinach, which can damage up to 50 per cent of crops in high pressure periods.
- Grigg believes a USA recommendation for a four-year crop rotation with spinach is unrealistic in Australia. He will provide alternative recommendations to deal with the issue.



Stuart Grigg  
Stuart Grigg Ag-Hort  
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## EnviroVeg Committee meets

to discuss future direction of EnviroVeg Program

The EnviroVeg Committee met on Monday 29 October to discuss a number of issues critical to the development of the Program.

Of particular note was the growth of the Program, with EnviroVeg recently surpassing 350 members. The Committee discussed strategies to use the Program as a tool to ensure that the perspectives of vegetable growers were considered

by decision-makers and the community. In particular, ensuring greater recognition of the environmental credentials of Australian vegetable growers was identified as a priority area for the industry over the coming year.

A key decision of the meeting was to endorse a potential new scheme whereby growers would be able to have environmental aspects of their business formally



The EnviroVeg Committee meets in Melbourne.

verified and acknowledged. AUSVEG is now looking at options as to how to progress this as an optional program for vegetable growers looking to move from self assessments to a higher level of accreditation. AUSVEG thanks all members of the Committee who have given

their time to EnviroVeg in our record-breaking year.



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## The next frontier for protected cropping

Dubai-based company Agricel has recently developed a farming system that uses a film-like material called hydromembrane to grow plants, instead of soil or other mediums. The company claims their technology is able to save around 90 per cent of water and 80 per cent of fertiliser use in comparison to conventional field growing.

In film farming, crops are cultivated in a hydromembrane

made of water-soluble polymer and hydrogel, which absorbs and holds plant nutrients. A key benefit of this approach, says Agricel, is that pathogens and bacteria are unable to penetrate the hydromembrane around the plant, making film farming resistant to bacteria and viruses without the need for pesticides.

The Gulf States are expected to be considerable innovators in the area of dry-land farming moving into the future, with

Governments such as Qatar setting food security goals to decrease reliance on imported food. The Qatari Government has developed its National Food Security Programme to increase its domestic production of food through innovative technologies which are able to produce greater yields in arid environments. As such, the Gulf States can be expected to produce further innovations in the near future. With Australian

growers often battling the challenges of droughts, these technologies have significant potential within the Australian industry.



For further information on film farming:  
[www.agricel.com](http://www.agricel.com)  
For further information on the Qatar National Food Security Programme:  
[www.qnfsp.gov.qa](http://www.qnfsp.gov.qa)



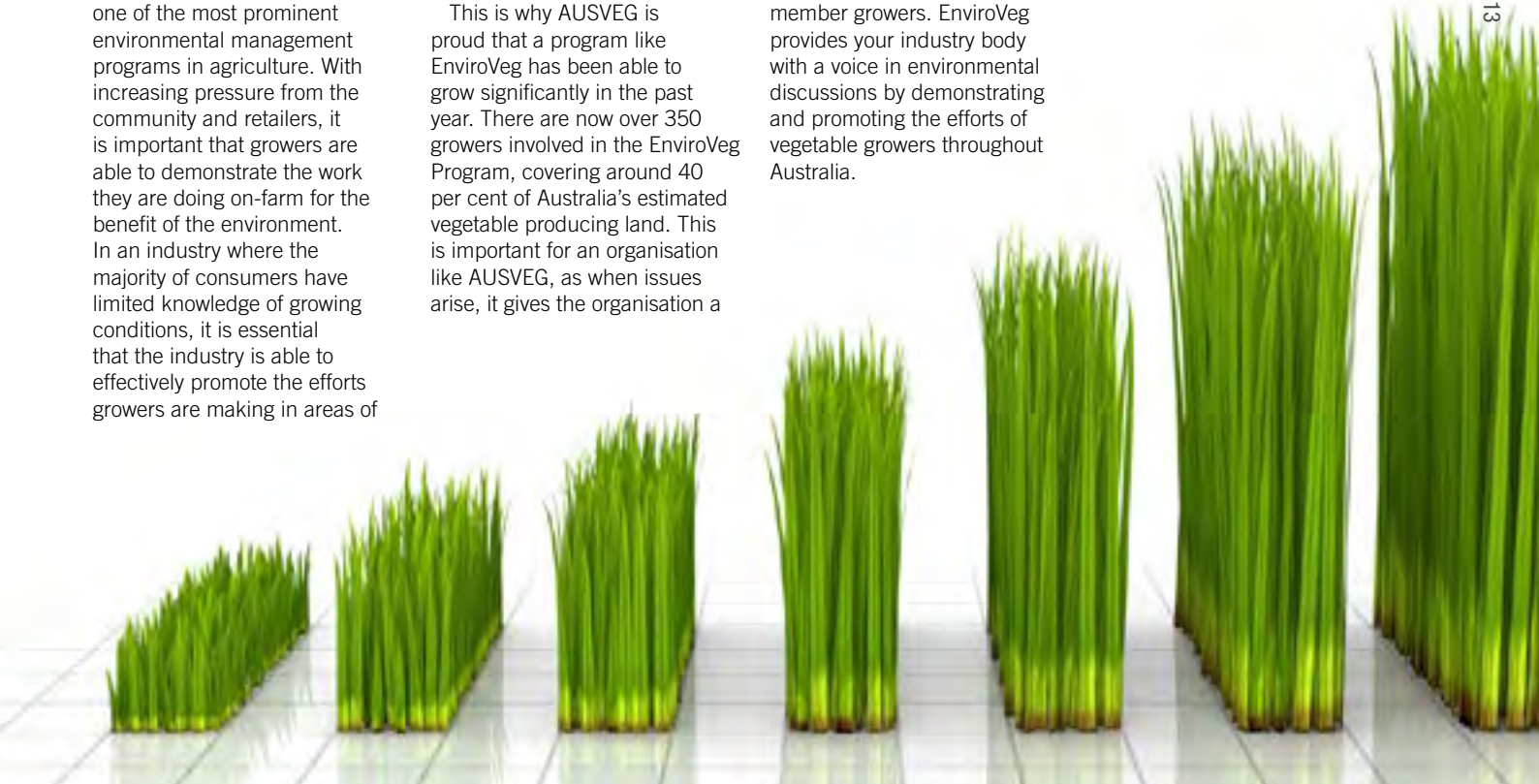
# More growers, more hectares - a record year for EnviroVeg

2012 was a record year as EnviroVeg grew to become one of the most prominent environmental management programs in agriculture. With increasing pressure from the community and retailers, it is important that growers are able to demonstrate the work they are doing on-farm for the benefit of the environment. In an industry where the majority of consumers have limited knowledge of growing conditions, it is essential that the industry is able to effectively promote the efforts growers are making in areas of

environmental importance, such as water management.

This is why AUSVEG is proud that a program like EnviroVeg has been able to grow significantly in the past year. There are now over 350 growers involved in the EnviroVeg Program, covering around 40 per cent of Australia's estimated vegetable producing land. This is important for an organisation like AUSVEG, as when issues arise, it gives the organisation a

way to respond with quantifiable statistics on the initiatives of our member growers. EnviroVeg provides your industry body with a voice in environmental discussions by demonstrating and promoting the efforts of vegetable growers throughout Australia.



## New soil app for growers

The latest CSIRO Soil Application for assistance in managing soil nutrition on-farm is now available for iPad download. The new application allows growers to learn about soil types on their property and view maps, photographs, satellite images, tables and graphs of data about nearby soils.

The purpose of the application is to allow farmers throughout Australia to access

data from the Australian Soil Resource Information System and APSoil databases while out in the field. The data has multiple uses in areas such as planning new blocks or even identifying soil properties of land earmarked for purchase. You can download the app in the Apple app store.



Website: [www.csiro.au](http://www.csiro.au)



## Small acreage, big gains

Long-time Virginia greenhouse grower **Phuong Vo** has overcome poor soil to establish a thriving vegetable farm on the Northern Adelaide Plains, writes **Jordan Brooke-Barnett**.

**P**huong Vo has been on his patch in Virginia since 1989, growing eggplants and zucchinis in 36 greenhouses on 1.5 hectares in Virginia, South Australia. About five years into his operation, Phuong Vo was having significant problems with his soil, particularly its salinity. Operating on a small acreage, it was essential to restore the land and ensure that it was productive and economically-sustainable over the long-term.

"In 1989 I got this place, but from 1991-1995, I couldn't grow anything. The people before me, they killed the soil," says Phuong Vo.

One of his key traits in helping to overcome such challenges has been a willingness to seek out expertise to improve his growing operation over the years. Ongoing involvement with South Australian Government agronomists and an open-mindedness to trial new approaches to growing have set him in good stead to secure the ongoing productive capacity of his land.

"Up until 1996, I learned a little bit and was able to improve things. In early 2000 I found out about compost and got people to come and help me. I learned a lot and now I have a very good crop," he says.

"At first I didn't know much about compost, but since I have been using it I have been very happy."

In getting in touch with his local NRM body, Phuong Vo has been able to access expertise from extension officers in areas such as soil management and IPM. This, says Phuong Vo, has been essential in improving the productivity of his farm. In fact, many of Phuong Vo's neighbours have come to visit the farm to see first-hand what he has been able to achieve.

"Early, when I had poor soil, nobody thought I was a good

grower, but now that I have good soil and a good crop, people come to see the farm and look at what I'm doing."

At any given time in the crop cycle, Phuong Vo keeps at least a third of his land fallow to provide enough time for it to recover between crops. In addition, he is experimenting with a number of different cover crops including barley and sorghum.

Phuong Vo is currently looking into implementing IPM in his greenhouses, but by operating on small acreages, the actions of neighbours' spraying can easily undo the good work in establishing beneficials.

"I know how to control IPM in the greenhouses and have people I can call if I need extra help."

Central to Phuong Vo's strategy to combat salinity has been to use compost over other additives such as chicken manure, which have a high sodium content. Growers would normally need to use excess water on the crops to leech the soil when applying these products, but since his transition to compost use, he has been able to save on water. An added benefit is the good soil structure achieved through management of crop rotations, further increasing the efficiency of water use. Phuong Vo estimates he has been able to cut his use of water from 10,000 to 7,000 kilolitres per annum, with estimated savings of around \$9,000 in water and energy used to pump from on-site bores.

Additionally, increased use of soil tests will allow Phuong Vo to better monitor salinity levels and any other nutritional issues with his crops. Operating on limited acreage, it is essential that Phuong Vo is able to achieve not just high yields, but a good quality crop that he can market

at a premium.

With good crops, Phuong Vo is becoming a leader on the Adelaide Plains and shows how small acreages and greenhouse operations can be sustainably managed without overworking the soil. With less land to work with, he must be very careful of ensuring he does not replicate the soil issues experienced in the early 1990s.

"I take soil tests about four or five times a year to make sure there are no troubles with the soil."

As a smaller operator, Phuong Vo needs to be mindful of the efficiency of his operation to ensure that only the optimal amount of inputs are used to secure a good crop. Due to his adoption of improved practices

over the years, he has been able to achieve around a 25% increase in yield, 50% decrease in the cost of inputs in moving from just using fertiliser to incorporating use of compost in his operation, as well as decreasing issues caused by salinity.

"For me, with one and a half hectares, I can guarantee I save around \$7000 in fertiliser a year."

As a result, Phuong Vo is now a shining example of sustainable greenhouse production on the Adelaide plains. As he continues to learn and use the expertise available in the region through avenues such as a local NRM body, further improvements will continue to be made to his operation.



Photographs by Andrew Beveridge.







Chinese agricultural delegates observe the AUSVEG presentation.

## Foreign correspondence

A delegation of Chinese agriculturists travelled to Australia in late December, meeting with AUSVEG while in Melbourne.

AUSVEG Communications and Public Affairs Manager, William Churchill, National Marketing Manager, Simon Coburn and Manager of Industry Development and Communications, Andrew White, each delivered presentations pertaining to the local vegetable

industry and the efforts of Australian growers to export to Asia.

Mr Ma Jinyuan, Member of the Guyuan Committee of Nigxia Hui Autonomous Region, thanked AUSVEG for their hospitality, presenting the organisation with a Chinese gift as a token of thanks.

The travelling party also included representatives from Nigxia Hui's Foreign Affairs Bureau and Department of

Science and Technology.

In August and September of 2012, AUSVEG led a tour of young growers through China, Hong Kong and Vietnam. While growing conditions differ greatly in those countries, the tour was said to be particularly informative for participants.

Andrew White said that while Chinese vegetable imports continue to pose a competitive threat to Australian growers, meetings were of benefit to the

local industry.

"It is important for our industry to have healthy, positive relationships with other countries," said Mr White.

"By establishing these connections, we are also able to glean greater insights about our neighbouring region and ultimately, pass that information on to growers."

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## Ask the industry



with Scott Mathew

Scott Mathew, Technical Services Lead at Syngenta, explains about Silverleaf whitefly (SLW) and the best ways to monitor and treat it.

**Question: Silverleaf whitefly (SLW) can be a real problem at times. Why do populations seem to explode out of nowhere in the spring/summer time?**

Female SLW randomly lay between 50 and 300 eggs (the average being around 160). It generally takes between 18-28 days for the life cycle from egg to adult in the warmer weather conditions of spring/summer, and as long as 30 to 48 days in the cooler conditions of winter. Also, the number of eggs produced by each female peaks in warm weather and can reach 300 eggs per adult female SLW. For example, in Queensland, SLW can complete between 8-12 generations in a year.

**Question: What is the best way to monitor for SLW?**

Regular monitoring of your crops should form the basis of deciding how and when to apply control measures. When monitoring, you should pay particular attention to the undersides of the younger leaves where the adults tend to congregate and lay eggs, while larger nymphs are usually most noticeable on older leaves.

Monitoring for adult SLW should be

conducted early morning (generally between 7am and 9am). Yellow sticky traps are useful for monitoring whitefly adult movement or dispersal, especially the movement of SLW from mature or older neighbouring crops and host weeds. Adult numbers on the traps will give an early warning of population increases within crops, and an indication of the need for regular monitoring.

**Question: Quite often, due to time constraints, I let the weeds get away from me around my crops. Can this lead to higher SLW numbers?**

Weeds around the crop or greenhouse can provide a continuous source of hosts for SLW. Whether they are commercial crops, weeds, abandoned crops or volunteer plants, they can be a major contributing factor to a severe SLW problem.

Reducing any SLW hosts around your crop is a valuable tool growers can use to help reduce the population of SLW that can migrate and infect your crop. Managing these sources of SLW infestations may ultimately reduce the number of sprays that are needed over the season to control whitefly.

Some of the more common weed species found to be major sources of SLW include: sow thistle, bladder ketmia, bell vine, burr gherkin and star burr. Milk or sow thistle is regarded as the most suitable weed host for whitefly and can be found in the major vegetable production areas throughout Australia.

**Question: What are some of the things I should consider when using chemical control options for SLW**

Due to the fact that SLW adults generally feed and lay their eggs on the lower surface of leaves, a large proportion of these eggs and nymphs are easily protected from contact insecticides and a systemic/translaminar or vapour active chemical may provide a better control option.

Using a spray program that is based on monitoring, using action thresholds and correctly calibrated spray equipment will help you to get the most out of insecticide applications and help to reduce the development of resistance.

Selecting the correct insecticides and applying them at the appropriate time is critical to achieve good SLW management. All insecticides vary in their efficacy on the adult and immature stages of SLW and should be selected according to where they have the greatest level of control. For example, CHESS® (APVMA Minor Use Permit: PER13111) is approved for SLW control and is a translaminar insecticide that is active on the adult SLW only, whereas Admiral insecticide is also a translaminar product that is active on the eggs and nymphs of SLW.

*Chemical registrations and APVMA permits for SLW control do not apply to all vegetable crops. Users must check the label for registration or permit status of the insecticides before use on a specific crop.*

**Q** For more information or to ask a question, please contact your local Syngenta Territory Manager, the Syngenta Advice Line on 1800 067 108, visit [www.syngenta.com.au](http://www.syngenta.com.au) or email [Vegetables.Australia:info@ausveg.com.au](mailto:Vegetables.Australia:info@ausveg.com.au). Please note that your questions may be published.

A cabbage farm in northern Israel.



Lauren Winterbottom

## Investigating innovation in Italy and Israel

The inaugural AUSVEG Women in Horticulture Grower Study Tour took in Israel and Italy over 12 eventful days, writes Lauren Winterbottom.

In the early hours of a November morning, nine female vegetable growers touched down in Rome to begin their 12-day tour of Italy and Israel. The tour aimed to both promote and further the role of women within a historically male-dominated industry and in the process, unearth new and innovative ideas from across Europe and the Middle East. The tour was funded by HAL using the National Vegetable Levy, voluntary contributions and matched funds from the Australian Government.

On entering Bologna, one of the first observations of the group was the volume of farming

land located close to the city centre. Owned by the council, the land acts as large-scale community gardens, with local residents allocated plots to tend.

Following a brief rest, the tour visited major baby-leaf producer Ortoromi. Growers were amazed at the scale of production and surprised to learn that owner Elio Polosin is not, and has never been, a grower. The company was born after Mr Polosin, a former vegetable wholesaler, noticed a gap in the market that could be filled with pre-packaged vegetables and salads. The company now has several successful product lines. Tour participants were

impressed with the variety of products being produced, especially in the ready-made salads range. After viewing the processing facilities, the group were shown Ortoromi's largest greenhouse facility, which spans approximately 28 hectares. Each greenhouse tunnel can produce eight crop rotations a year and this enables Ortoromi to continue producing throughout winter, when it is too cold to grow in the open fields.

The tour group next met with staff at Cora Seeds, where they were treated to a presentation on the growth of the young company. Established in 2006, Cora Seeds already

distributes worldwide. The company works directly with growers to produce new varieties that display qualities attractive to the end consumer. The company advertises its product in consumer magazines, something rarely seen in Australia. The ads are aimed at the end consumer and encourage shoppers to purchase fruit and vegetables that are of the varieties that Cora Seeds produces and promote the products as being superior due to nutritional content or flavour.

The following days saw participants attend EIMA International, Europe's largest



**1.** Tour participants at the EIMA International exhibition in Bologna.

**2.** Growers observing crops in northern Israel.

**3.** Participants at one of the greenhouse facilities at Ortoromi.

**4.** Tour participants with Dani Harari and Anna Wood at Makhteshim Agan headquarters in Airport City.

agricultural machinery show. With more than 1,700 exhibitors from around the world, the expo was spread across 18 halls and growers were able to view the very latest in tractors, planters and harvesters among a variety of other machinery. While not all the machinery was aimed at vegetable growers, the group was able to make a range of contacts and gather information on new and emerging technology.

The group's last day in Italy was spent touring with Luca Casotto from Hortech, who showed participants around the farms of his clients. Hortech is a machinery company specialising in harvesting machines, and the growers were able to see how the machinery worked, as well as viewing several farming operations. Unfortunately, the weather prevented seeing some of the operations, yet the group was able to benefit by speaking to the growers and asking about their own experiences. Mr Casotto also

gave participants a tour of his factory where the machinery is custom-built for each individual farmer. Extremely hands-on, Mr Casotto also travels to each farm to explain how the machinery works to ensure that the grower knows exactly how to use it.

After a day of travel, growers arrived in Israel and specifically, Tel Aviv, where they met with two major locally-based agricultural companies, as well as visiting farms in the north of the country.

Participants were first given a tour of Netafim's kibbutz Magal site, where the focus in the experimental greenhouses is on finding irrigation solutions for developing countries. These affordable options allow small-scale farmers to produce enough to support their families and communities, and Netafim is committed to working alongside organisations such as the United Nations to ensure everyone has access to this technology. The group was also given a presentation

where some newer and more innovative irrigation uses were explained.

That afternoon, participants were met by Dani Harari, Senior Vice President of Global Strategy and Innovation at Makhteshim Agan. Mr Harari provided participants with a background of agriculture in Israel and also commented on the level of innovation present within the industry. Amazingly, the country's main vegetable producing region is in the Arava Desert, where there is sometimes zero rainfall in a year. Growers were also given an insight into the future strategy for the company, which involves looking at hybrid products to make the most of available compounds and active ingredients.

The following day, growers visited several farms and were guided by Uri Naamati from the Israeli Field Crop Growers Association. Mr Naamati visited Australia earlier in 2012 as part of a delegation from Israel

and was delighted to show the group around. Participants visited a range of producers, including cabbage, broccoli, corn and carrot growers. The group was surprised to learn that farmers in Israel do not own their land, instead renting it off the government for 99 year periods. The group was also shown around Eden Experiment Station, where they were able to see the latest in greenhouse heating techniques being tested.

Overall, the tour provided an invaluable opportunity for female growers to network with one another, as well as learn how farming enterprises operate in both Europe and the Middle East.



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# Growing productivity

A newly developed on-farm program will help greenhouse vegetable growers improve their site's productivity, writes Karen Shaw.



An innovative new software program is set to provide Australian greenhouse vegetable growers with an easy-to-use computer package to benchmark data and improve production.

Titled Undercover Grower, the new computer management tool is scheduled for completion in mid-2014, although growers are being urged to attend software workshops and training during the next 12 months to familiarise themselves with the program. Interested growers will receive a copy of the software and the program will also be available online.

Greenhouse specialist and project leader, Jeremy Badgery-Parker, is excited by the program's potential. "It's an innovative management tool, farm records program and advisor all bundled into one new

package," said Mr Badgery-Parker.

The software program was developed through the national greenhouse industry business and productivity analysis system, and work on it began in 2009. The project was prompted by farmers' concerns relating to the lack of available production and economic data to benchmark their productivity.

The project has been funded by HAL using the National Vegetable Levy, voluntary contributions from industry and matched funds from the Australian Government.

Mr Badgery-Parker said most farm businesses struggled with the same issues - controlling costs and optimising productivity.

"My aim is to furnish Australian growers with tools, knowledge and skills to meet

the food and environmental demands of the future," he said. "Greenhouse and hydroponic horticulture will be a fundamental and increasingly significant component of that future."

## The program

Mr Badgery-Parker said a major advantage of the software program was that all growers, irrespective of computer skills, business knowledge, or farm management, could use it effectively.

"The program allows users to set up a 'virtual' copy of their farm. This includes structural details as well as machinery specifications. 'Costs' are captured whenever an 'object' is added to the farm and a series of 'tasks' is used to replicate real jobs that happen daily on the

property," Mr Badgery-Parker explained.

"Any variable within the farm can be plotted for analysis and comparison. Collected and pooled industry data helps where needed with benchmarking and there are also in-built graph and budget tools," he said.

"If a grower does not have information for all the data-entry boxes, then what are called default values are used. These are pre-entered and designed, but improve in accuracy as real data is inputted by the grower."

Mr Badgery-Parker said the user could allocate specific costs to particular crops or production areas.

"When overheads such as fuel and labour are incorporated, this provides a much clearer picture to calculate real costs."

While there are other software



Undercover Grower program in use on-farm.

programs on the market, this has been specifically developed for greenhouse vegetable growers.

"An important feature is that the user can create as many virtual 'production areas', such as greenhouses, paddocks or even dams as necessary to reflect their individual property.

Other virtual spaces manage other on-farm components. For example, the 'farm shed' would store equipment and machinery while fertilisers, nutrient recipes, irrigation plans and water sources are housed in what might be labelled the 'fertiliser and irrigation shed', he said.

"Everything on the 'virtual

farm' and every task can be saved and retrieved according to where or what it is related to. If a heater is located in a greenhouse, the calculated heating and maintenance costs can be allocated to the relevant greenhouse. If the heater is moved to another greenhouse, the program can track its location over time and allocate costs accordingly."

Mr Badgery-Parker said the advantage of using the system was that it gave farmers real feedback on what was happening on their property. "Data entry becomes simple - even fun! If they don't have enough of their own data, growers can make use of collected industry figures," he said.

"Information is readily presented to the user so they can make comparisons, identify trends and detect potential issues before they become problems. It provides a way of benchmarking across areas within a single farm and across an industry."

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Undercover Grower is a new computer management tool for Australian greenhouse vegetable growers. Its key features include:

- A user-friendly icon-based interface that enables anyone to use the tool, no matter how computer literate.
- The user can add default values where they don't yet have the required data. These default values are pre-entered and designed to improve as real on-farm data becomes available.
- It features built-in budgets and graphs that allows growers to compare outcomes.



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Project number: VG08045

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## Horti Focus

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# Around the states

## Queensland



Now is a good opportunity to look back on some of the things Growcom's Land and Water team has achieved during the course of the year.

The Australian Government Reef Rescue program under Caring for Our Country has powered through stages 4 and 5. Grower participation and uptake of incentives in horticulture have been overwhelming across the Reef catchments. As a result, we can clearly state to the Australian Government that interest remains high and the program should continue for the positive results it is achieving. With the bulk of available funding dollars committed, Growcom staff will

now finish auditing growers, delivering any outstanding training and completing an evaluation process.

To date, Growcom has assisted approximately 320 horticulture growers to access funding. To achieve this, we have engaged 600 individual enterprises across approximately 1000 interactions.

Grower investment in direct relationship to incentives provided has remained steady at \$1.80 for every incentive dollar available to horticulture. However, the investment in nutrient, sediment and chemical management practice changes have not stopped there. Through a survey conducted by Growcom this time last year, 84 per cent of Reef Rescue-funded growers have voluntarily invested making further changes, which will have significant flow-on effects to reef water quality outcomes, regional economies and grower production values.

During the course of Reef Rescue, there has been significant investment in

research and development. Information is now available on the website [www.reefrescueresearch.com.au](http://www.reefrescueresearch.com.au).

Growcom, along with Reef partners, has worked towards establishing Reef Rescue 2 and we look forward to an announcement before Christmas.

Water use efficiency and energy efficiency remain topical in an economic climate where growers are experiencing increased costs for both consumables. Findings from work conducted by the Land and Water team highlight that irrigators still have improvements to make, regardless of age of equipment. It's great to see irrigators advance their levels of technology and application systems.

Both Queensland state government programs (SEQIF and RWUEI stage 4) are funded through to June 2013 and Growcom will endeavour to continue these programs because of the benefits they are achieving.

Energy costs for all are set

to skyrocket in coming years and Growcom would like to thank those growers who have contributed their farm business information to allow us to provide a submission opposed to the Queensland Competition Authority's (QCA) Electricity Tariff Price Path Determination.

At the time of writing, we are seeking an extended transition period. Growcom, together with other peak bodies, has also commenced discussing the need to establish a new irrigation tariff with Mark McArdle, Minister for Energy and Water Supply and QCA. A new tariff needs to be fairly costed and structured whilst meeting the needs of horticulture irrigators and constraints within the supply network.

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## New South Wales



With the NSW Government announcing cuts to extension staff, NSW Farmers has opposed the reductions as being short sighted and threatening a smooth introduction of Local Land Services (LLS). The cuts reduce the front line horticulture extension positions from 32 District Horticulturalists to just six Horticultural Development Officers positions, and only three Advisory Officers allocated to horticulture created in the draft organisational chart for LLS.

NSW Farmers is concerned

that at this level of resource allocated to horticultural extension, NSW will struggle to meet its commitments to industry in the Horticulture RDE Framework. This is unacceptable treatment of a billion dollar plus NSW industry, and will threaten the ability of the horticulture sector to improve the quality and efficiency of production; which is crucial to the ability of NSW's horticulture producers to take advantage of the high value export markets developing in Asia.

NSW Farmers remains committed to seeing the proposed LLS model be successful in its aim of bringing farmers to the centre of the delivery of local services. We have been provided with representation upon LLS reference group, which we will use to ensure the best interests of our members, and

have established a taskforce to develop and refine our input into the development of the LLS. We have, and will continue to, consistently pursue outcomes that will benefit our members and prevent government shifting cost onto farmers. Our objective is that the LLS must be part of an overarching government commitment and strategy to grow NSW's agricultural and horticultural industries.

NSW Farmers has been monitoring the proposals to deregulate the controls that manage Queensland fruit fly (Qff) populations in NSW and Victoria. Similar to NSW Farmers position on pest animals and weeds, we believe that a coordinated, tenure blind approach is necessary to controlling horticultural pests such as Qff. As such, we are concerned that deregulation is likely to disadvantage NSW producers, compared to those

in other States.

We are currently working to ensure that the LLS will be able to deliver such a coordinated approach to the management of Qff, and other pests. However, with the announcement from the Victorian Government that they will continue to regulate movement of produce into the Melbourne market until at least July 2013, and with possible losses of overseas markets, more thought must be put into any transition to LLS before further deregulation.

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## Victoria



The majority of vegetable growers will have some form of farm trailer or towed implement around the farm. Many growers would have driven these implements down the road to get to their next paddock without even thinking twice about the minimum safety requirements when towing the piece of equipment in question. Most towed implements are designed for a specific task or operation within a paddock (no road users around) without needing to abide by road rules.

With the ever increasing number of road users and the faster pace that they appear to be driving, many of them are unaware of the dangers around farm machinery or trailers being towed on public thoroughfares. Road users are impatient and therefore take greater

risks when wanting to pass these slower moving pieces of machinery.

With this in mind, in October this year the Victorian Road Authority (VicRoads) produced a draft information bulletin outlining the minimum requirements for safe use of agricultural trailers.

They are exempt from the requirement to be registered or meet the standards for registration, however, these expectations do not remove the obligation of the operator ensuring that the trailer, and any combination of vehicles it is part of, is safe and roadworthy.

Increased technology is now becoming an important tool in the successful operation and management of a vegetable farm. One of the latest being a webinar, which is simply a seminar held online using your iPad, laptop or office computer. Webinars allow you to view the guest speaker's presentation over the internet and to ask questions, make comments and share information with other participants.

The advantage of webinars is that you can log in at a time that is convenient for you and from practically anywhere. Many

organisations, consultants, advisors and government departments are offering webinars to interested parties to assist them in keeping up to date and doing it in a time effective way.

Webinars overcome many of the reasons a busy vegetable producer may give for not attending a seminar, no matter how good the presenter or how important or relevant the topic.

The Victorian Horticulture Information Network (HIN) has been instrumental in facilitating webinars with support from HAL and in cooperation with consultants who are experts in their fields. The Victorian DPI has conducted a series entitled *The DPI Climate Webinar Series*, which commenced in October this year and has expanded to discuss all aspects of climate, climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, and notably the detail of the various forecasting tools used in providing seasonal outlook reports.

The VGA Vic Executive Manager attended a Fresh Produce Safety Forum held in Sydney for representatives from all facets of the fresh produce industry, which included growers, facilitators,

auditor, retailers, researchers and government agencies from across Australia and New Zealand. Presenters from the USA outlined what actions had been taken since the major food safety outbreak of 2006 in America. The focus was food safety and how to protect Australia's reputation for producing affordable, nutritious and safe fresh produce. This project aims to increase the collaboration between stakeholders of the Australian fresh produce industry to provide a model for fresh produce safety by identifying a model and priorities for food research and extension in the Australian fresh produce industry. The calibre of speakers was outstanding, with a very strong message regarding the power of collaboration between industry sectors, and several priorities were identified for research.

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## Western Australia



vegetablesWA is pleased to have won recognition from the state government for the future development of horticulture precincts based around Myalup, Gingin and Manjimup. These will be important production areas as growers continue to expand their opportunities and provide food security for Western Australians.

Food security in a hungry world will only increase as a vital issue as populations continue to grow and traditional horticultural production areas are decommissioned through urban

encroachment. vegetablesWA recently made a submission in response to the National Food Plan Green Paper. Unfortunately, this document did not explore whether Australians are food secure in light of the likely scenario that several threats occur at once. For example, what exactly does happen if there is an incursion of Varroa Mite or Foot and Mouth Disease during a climate change induced drought with limited water resources and another round of the global financial crisis where capital markets have frozen up? It is also difficult to believe that the commercial viability of farmers has not been incorporated as a measure of our food security. These and other issues need to be addressed and measures put in place to protect growers and therefore our community into the future.

The vegetablesWA projects

continue to help growers. The IPM results as part of the South West Good Practice Project have been particularly impressive, as have the cover crops up in Carnarvon. We were particularly pleased with a turn up of approximately 40 growers at the recent irrigation workshop at Carabooda.

In other project news, a number of growers are hosting trials as part of the Stable Fly mitigation project. It is hoped that these will yield a non-chemical treatment to better control this problem for the community. The next iteration of the successful "Fresh from WA Farms" marketing has also begun to roll out.

The recent vegetablesWA AGM saw the introduction of some new growers to the Committee of Management; Dan Kuzmich and Paul Shain have both joined from Carnarvon and Tony Colotti has joined from

Gingin. Maureen Dobra was re-elected President and Ken Sue was elected Vice President. Anthony Marinovich retained his position as Treasurer. Maureen thanked outgoing committee members Paul Bogdanich, Malcolm Jones, Andrew Bogdanich and Rochelle Shain for their service.

As always, growers seeking any sort of assistance are urged to call the vegetablesWA office or your Field Extension Officer, Sarah Houston or Võ Thế Truỳnh.

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## South Australia



Grow SA has announced a *Horticulture Master Class*, which will commence in early 2013. With input from stakeholders and sector experts, the *Master Class* will work with up to 20 selected growers to help develop business strategies including:

- Expansion and Growth plans

- Family buy outs
- Enterprise restructure and relocation
- Diversification
- Value Adding
- Transition to Corporate or Family Corporate structures
- Funding options

Grow SA *Master Class* will involve experts from the banking, private equity, legal, accountancy, labour management and marketing sectors, who will work with participants in both group and one-on-one situations to develop strategies to address both common and specific

“business limiters” and plan the way forward for the business.

Growers interested in participating in *Master Class* should contact Grow SA in the New Year to ensure they are given the opportunity to participate as numbers will be strictly limited. *Master Class* is aimed at proactive growers who look forward to a profitable future in the industry.

Sector partners will also work with Grow SA prior to the commencement of *Master Class* to develop an industry business profile for horticulture in South Australia. This profile is aimed at identifying and further

understanding the “business of horticulture” within the state, along with its prospects, opportunities and limitations. The resultant profile will be utilised as a general reference point for *Master Class* along with previous blueprints and agronomic studies that have been completed.

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## Tasmania



The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) has just released its latest assessment of the state of agriculture in Tasmania. Largely, it does what you would expect it to do; it confirms what we suspected, but it puts numbers to the theories. Perhaps the most significant statistic is that Tasmanian farms have become more profitable than the national average.

Overall, we punch above our weight, just. Our farmers account for 3% of the nation's

agricultural production (\$1152 million in 2010/11) and we have 3% (3348) of the farms. Of those farms, 64% of them produce less than \$150,000 of commodities a year, but 15% produce more than \$500,000 a year.

Milk is king. It is worth \$312 million a year, which is more than a quarter of all agricultural production here. Tasmania accounts for 8% of national milk production. About 93% of that is used to manufacture cheese, butter and milk powders. Vegetables constitute 16%, cattle and calves also 16%, wool 8%, fruit nearly 8% and sheep and lambs 3.7%.

What does this mean in terms of money in the bank? The take home message is that over the last three years, things have got a lot better for the average Tasmanian farm, but they certainly needed to. In 2009/10, the average farm cash income was only \$53,240. In 2010/11 it was up to \$100,600. This year it is predicted to be \$105,000.

With that improvement in

cash income, the average profit has grown from just \$11,250 to \$54,000 last year and an estimated \$71,000 this year. Nationally, the current average is \$48,000. But, at the same time, average farm debt in Tasmania has grown in those three years from \$244,170 to \$291,200 to \$326,000.

I think that lends weight to the adage that to make more, you have to invest more. You would anticipate that the debt levels would increase in the next few years, particularly with so many farmers outlaying considerable sums to take advantage of the irrigation infrastructure. To improve farm productivity you have to invest your time and your capital.

The ABARES report, which is called *Commodity outlook and financial performance of key agricultural industries in Tasmania*, records the demise of one of our most valuable long-term crops: trees.

In 2006, it says, 6510 people were directly employed in forestry in Tasmania. In the next

five years it fell 47% to 3460 people. In Burnie the fall was dramatic, from 455 to 124.

The problem for plantations on private land is clear. In the five years to 2010/11, woodchip exports fell by 34%, to 1.5 million tonnes, but in the last 12 months they fell 75% to just 360,000 tonnes.

From all of that, you deduce that the future looks bright if you, as a Tasmanian farmer, look forward rather than back; look to new commodities, to new markets, and that you back your judgment through sound investment in infrastructure and the means of production.

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# CALENDAR



**30 May - 1 June 2013**

**AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence 2013**

**Where:** Jupiters Gold Coast, Queensland

**Further information:** AUSVEG (03) 9822 0388 or [convention@ausveg.com.au](mailto:convention@ausveg.com.au)

**1 June 2013**

**Annual Levy Payers Meeting**

**Where:** Jupiters Gold Coast, Queensland

**When:** Saturday 1 June, 2013 from 2.00-2.30pm

**Further information:** [info@ausveg.com.au](mailto:info@ausveg.com.au)

# Tri-Base Blue. It couldn't get any easier...



When you choose Tri-Base Blue you get the simplest most effective way to apply a copper fungicide in vegetables. Tri-Base Blue makes for the smoothest transition between mixing and spraying - it just doesn't get any easier! Once applied to the crop Tri-Base Blue provides a strong armour of copper protection against disease.

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## It's different.

To manage insecticide resistance you need a robust rotation plan that works every time. DuPont™ Avatar® insecticide works differently to other insecticides, which means it won't be a weak link in your rotation chain. So if you want a rotation plan you can crow about, use Avatar.® For more information call 1800 257 169.

*Delivering science to horticulture*

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