

INNOVATION SPECIAL

vegetables

australia

March/April 2012



John Brent

Advocacy for
the industry

**Chef Andrew
McConnell**

Sourcing success

Bryony Hackett

Breaking the
glasshouse ceiling

Brian Meakins

A legacy of innovation

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vegetables australia

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FRONT COVER:

John Brent

Photograph by William Long

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JOHN DEERE

John Brent AUSVEG Chairman

A few high profile news stories affecting the vegetable industry have made for a somewhat turbulent start to 2012. Growers throughout the country would have observed, with some consternation, the decision of one of the country's main supermarket chains to reduce the price of its vegetables by up to 50 per cent. Certainly, there is a short-term appeal for consumers, but the country as a whole needs to properly reflect on how and why these price cuts are being made. AUSVEG was highly active in the media in the days surrounding the announcement, stressing how imperative it is that growers do not bear the brunt of these radical decreases in cost. The future sustainability

of our industry depends on it, and AUSVEG will continue to speak up to ensure that growers are adequately represented on the matter.

It was similarly disheartening to see the recent developments with SP Exports. A pioneer in the tomato industry and horticulture in general, the company's downfall can in part be linked to the unsustainable prices supermarkets have set for their consumers and the subsequent expectations that come with those low prices. Given the size and past stature of the company, I understand if their demise has further fuelled concern for smaller scale members of our industry. It is, however, extremely difficult for growers to speak openly

about the conditions under which they are placed and their arrangements with the supermarkets.

In brighter news, the 2012 AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence is just around the corner. The strong number of delegate registrations and wide array of attractions on offer suggest this year will be the most successful Convention to date. I strongly encourage anyone who has not yet registered to do so and take advantage of the 'early bird' rates, as it is the one event on the horticultural calendar not to be missed. I look forward to seeing you all in Hobart in May.




John Brent
Chairman
AUSVEG

Richard Mulcahy AUSVEG Chief Executive Officer

The month of January saw myself, the AUSVEG Chairman, Jeff McSpedden and the Vegetable Industry Services Manager from Horticulture Australia recruiting candidates nationally for positions on the Vegetable Working and Advisory Groups, and on the Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) where applications were being called for in Victoria and Queensland. The call for expressions of interest saw an abundance of high quality candidates, and we as a panel were left with some extremely difficult decisions. The volume of qualified individuals whose applications were unsuccessful only serves, however, to speak to the strength of our industry. I am thrilled to welcome aboard the new members of the Working and Advisory Groups, and would like to pay particular mention to

the respective Chairs of each group. They include Mr Roger Turner, Mr Danny De Ieso, Mrs Maureen Dobra, Mr Andrew Meurant, Mr Peter Dal Santo, Mr Andrew Craigie, Mr Mike Keller, Dr John Lovett and Mr Anthony Brandsema.

The Vegetable IAC also welcomed aboard two new members. Mr Robert Hinrichsen from Queensland, and Mr John Said from Victoria. I look forward to the contributions the range of new appointments will offer our industry.

Throughout February, AUSVEG received an array of invaluable feedback on the Vegetable Industry Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) White Paper. The Paper was subject to greater levels of consultation than any other document of its type in horticulture. The development of the SIP has

been ongoing since 2010, and the final strategic plan will be presented in May at the 2012 AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence in Hobart.

Finally, I am pleased to see the first of *Vegetable Australia's* biosecurity series with Dr Kevin Clayton-Greene feature in this edition of the magazine. Biosecurity is a matter of national importance and is relevant to all members of our industry. Dr Clayton-Greene was recently appointed to a part-time consultative role with AUSVEG to assist the industry by attending meetings and providing advice on the broad range of biosecurity issues that confront it. I am sure that Dr Clayton-Greene's discussion of biosecurity over the coming issues will prove to be a valuable resource for growers.




Richard J Mulcahy
Chief Executive Officer
AUSVEG

Editorial

This edition of *Vegetables Australia* draws focus to some of the projects and individuals leading the field in innovation. The vegetable industry is constantly forced to adapt and advance itself, so it is fitting that we reflect on a few of the more interesting examples occurring throughout the country and around the world.

The cover feature sees AUSVEG Chairman and Mayor of the Scenic Rim Regional Council Queensland, Mr John Brent, sit down for an extended interview with *Vegetables Australia* (page 12). Mr Brent, who has had a distinguished career in local government and as a vegetable grower, offers an invaluable insight into some of the issues affecting the industry and its growers, his time at AUSVEG and his family's long horticultural history.

New South Wales-based grower Bryony Hackett is also featured in this issue (page 26).

A self-described "late bloomer to horticulture," Ms Hackett is quickly making up for lost time and is determined to further herself as a grower and member of our industry.

In light of the growing trend of high profile restaurants sourcing vegetables directly from growers, *Vegetables Australia* speaks to decorated Melbourne chef Andrew McConnell about the considerations he faces

when purchasing his produce (page 22).

Keeping with the theme of innovation within our industry, *Vegetables Australia* visited South Australian horseradish grower Brian Meakins (page 30). Newman's Horseradish, a brand that has been in the Meakins family for over 60 years, is harvested, processed, bottled and distributed all from the one location. The example

of Mr Meakins and his product highlight how ingenuity and value-adding can be achieved within the confines of small-scale growing operations.

The success of an innovative vegetable campaign is also covered in 'Salad Initiative Seals Second Spot' (page 35). The Program, which took out second place for industry innovation at an awards ceremony in Berlin, is aimed at fostering a communal love of salads, with the ultimate goal of increasing vegetable consumption.

Elsewhere, Scott Samwell is profiled in this edition's Young Grower Feature (page 18), economist Ian James provides an informative economic snapshot of the vegetable industry (page 44) and Dr Kevin Clayton-Greene provides a fascinating introduction to the field of biosecurity (page 17).



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Bryony Hackett

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John Brent

Advocacy for the industry - pg 12

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Veggie bites

Facts & figures...

46%

Veginsights reports that 46% of households made less than four food buying trips per week between October and December 2011.

\$1.806 billion

The total retail vegetable sales for all fresh, frozen and canned vegetables in the final quarter of 2011, as reported in Veginsights.

70,000

The amount of tonnes of fresh vegetables sold during the last quarter of 2011 to the foodservices sector, according to Freshlogic.



16%

Canned vegetables accounted for 16% of all vegetable advertising in the last quarter of 2011, as reported by Veginsights.



5,500

The number of hectares carrots were sown upon in 2009-10, as reported by the Australian Bureau Statistics.



\$32.10

The amount spent by the average household per week on fresh fruit and vegetables in the fourth quarter of 2011 (up on \$29.75 the previous quarter), as recorded by Freshlogic.



50%

In January, supermarket chain Coles controversially pledged to cut the cost of fruit and vegetables by up to 50%.



Tesco tests prudent packaging

INNOVATION SPECIAL



UK supermarket giant looking to a more sustainable packaging future.

Supermarket chain Tesco has begun trialling new packaging that claims to significantly preserve the freshness of fruit and vegetables.

The UK retailer will trial the packaging on avocados and tomatoes in the hopes that it could drastically reduce food wastage.

"The packaging is a major breakthrough in the fight to

combat food waste and could save the fresh produce industry tens of millions of pounds each year," said Tesco spokesperson and vegetable technologist Steve Deeble.

The packaging was developed by UK-based research firm It's Fresh Ltd. It contains an internal strip that absorbs ethylene, a natural plant hormone that accelerates ripening in fruit and subsequently causes it to

turn mouldy. The absorption strip, whose developers argue is 100 times more effective than any other existing equivalent, measures 8cm by 4.5cm, but does not affect the recyclability of the package.

"We have already trialled the packaging in a storage environment and all the signs are there that this could be one of the most significant

developments in packaging for many years," said Mr Deeble.

Tesco purports that the packaging could lead to a potential wastage saving of 350,000 packs of avocado and 1.6 million packs of tomatoes. If the trial is successful, the new packaging will be implemented on a wide range of fruit and vegetables.

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		RUTHERGLEN	02 6032 9533	SOUTH AUSTRALIA	
NSW		SALE	03 5144 2988	BORDERTOWN	08 8752 0099
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YENDA	02 6968 1268			NARACOORTE	08 8762 0266
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Launching a fresh future



The Adelaide Produce Market has unveiled two enormous additions to its vast operational site.

The Governor of South Australia, His Excellency Rear Admiral Kevin Scarce was present to officially launch the market's newly constructed northern and southern square canopies.

"I wish the Adelaide Produce Market a very prosperous future

and am delighted to declare the [new canopies] open," said Mr Scarce.

Speaking to a large congregation of local ministers and members of the fruit and vegetable industries, Adelaide Produce Market Chairman David Schirripa described the launch

as a significant development for the state.

"Covering the market square is crucial to the success of this place," said Mr Schirripa.

The new canopies, constructed in just six months, have extended the roof space of the site to almost 70,000

Australian Burst of Freshness Program' Callum Hann, was in attendance to help celebrate the launch, preparing two dishes for the morning crowd using locally sourced ingredients.

Speaking to *Vegetables Australia* magazine, Mr Hann said he was extremely



His Excellency Rear Admiral Kevin Scarce.



MasterChef 2010 contestant Callum Hann.



Adelaide Produce Market Marketing and Business Development Manager Julian Carbone.

square metres. The \$5 million project will protect the market's produce from the elements and now stands as one of the largest undercover markets in the country. The two roofing structures are designed to capture and store rainwater through a sophisticated catchment and piping network.

As part of the project, the site's bitumen will also be rejuvenated.

Former MasterChef contestant and ambassador for the 'South

impressed by the new canopies.

"It's great to be here and see it all. It's enormous," he said.

"I'm really interested from an engineering point of view, because before MasterChef I was doing Mechanical Engineering at University. It's quite an incredible engineering feat."

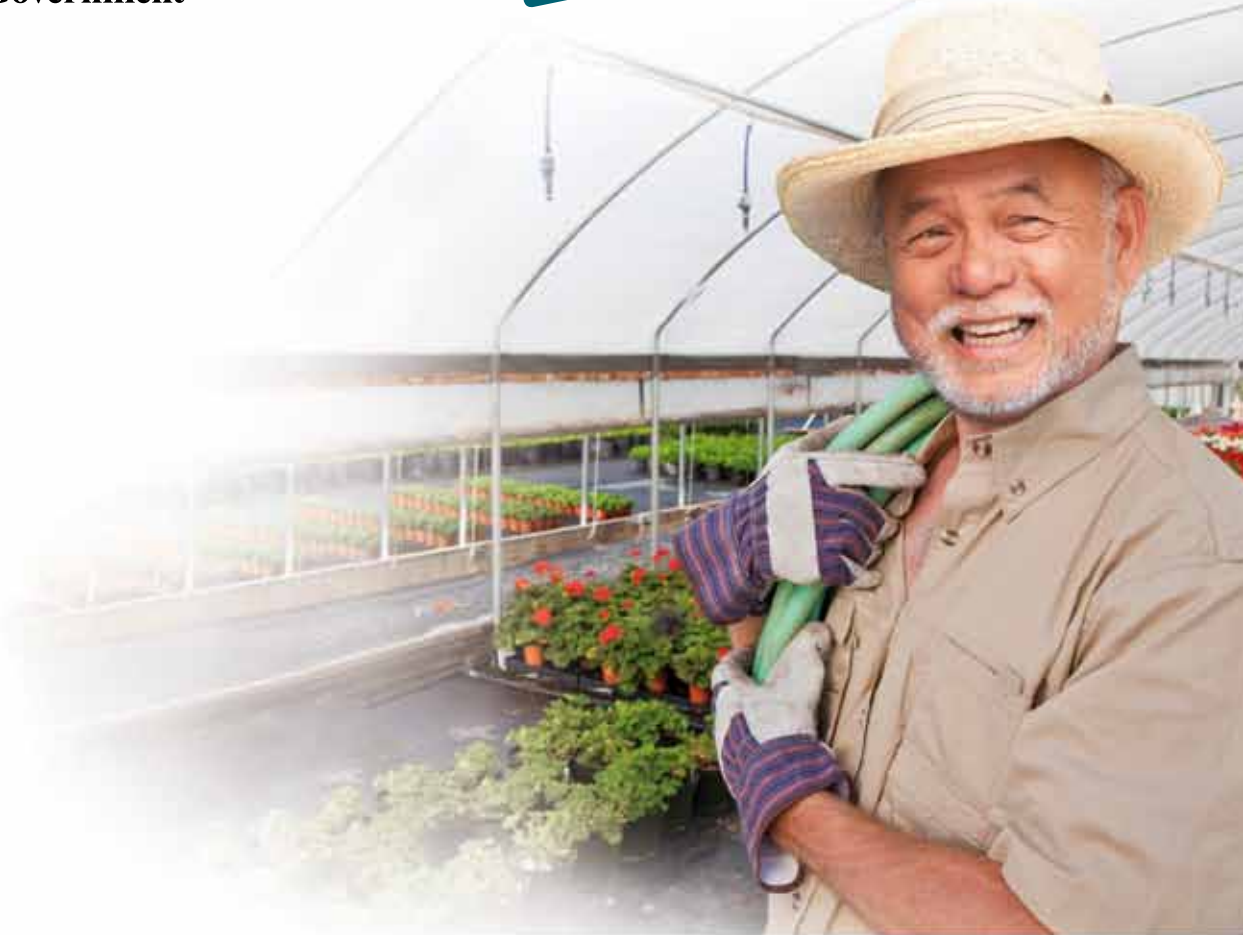
Mr Hann will be returning once again to the 2012 AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence.



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Advocacy for the industry

AUSVEG Chairman, Mayor of the Scenic Rim Regional Council and Director of Bunny Bite Foods, John Brent, has shaped a long and respected career in local government and the horticulture industry. Mr Brent spoke with Caitlin Rodé about his passion for rural and regional communities, his political and industry experiences over the past forty years, and his thoughts on the future of the industry.

Continuing a family farming legacy in Queensland's south-east and campaigning for the rights of Australian vegetable growers, John Brent has developed a successful career in both local politics and the horticulture sector. With a strong passion for furthering research and development and advocating on behalf of Australian growers, Mr Brent's path towards working within the industry has been in the making for over 150 years.

With his family's vegetable production dating back to the 1860s, Mr Brent comes from a long line of Australian growers. He appears every bit the walking embodiment of a typical Australian grower himself – welcoming and pragmatic. A tour of Mr Brent's Scenic Rim Regional Council chambers provides an insight into a remarkable career in the sector. A photo mounted above his desk of his family property points to a childhood surrounded by the agriculture industry.

"I remember, very clearly, sitting on a little T20 Ferguson tractor, which was around about a 1950s tractor. I was five or six driving for my dad who was picking up pumpkins in the field," Mr Brent said.

The value of history and the lessons of the past are not lost on Mr Brent.

"I have a passion for historical values. We need to know and understand what the pioneering families endured when they first settled here," he said.

With an extensive career as a leader in the horticulture sector, Mr Brent has been involved with regional communities for much of his 36 years working in local government. Elected

as Mayor of the Boonah Shire in 1994, the local government amalgamations in 2008 saw Mr Brent appointed as Mayor of the Scenic Rim Regional Council. It was the influence and encouragement of others though, that first prompted Mr Brent to enter politics.



“ There’s a lot of hurt at the grower level in Australia and consumers are very much taken up with what value they can get for their food dollar. ”

"I came here, heaven help, in 1976 as a 26-year-old. I can say that it was at the instigation of a number of the pioneering families who suggested that I try to put young views forward on behalf of the community."

Having received support throughout his early schooling

leaders, we need organisational leaders, and we need political leaders. Equally, I believe it is important to encourage the current generation within the horticulture industry, and give them the confidence to be successful advocates for our industry," he said.

Traceability in the sector

The issue of country of origin labelling in Australia is of paramount concern to Mr Brent.

"Recently, I was travelling on an Australian airline and was served a meal accompanied by some Norwegian butter and Turkish dried apricots. It was rather disheartening to be provided with food that was manufactured in another country. While it was labelled that way, it is important that we give people a choice."

"It appears that there is bipartisan support for a position to correctly label product, and before I exit the field of leadership in horticulture, I'd like to see a substantial program in place to clearly identify Australian product so that the consumer has that choice. We're not forcing that on the consumer; we have many reasons to believe why they should buy Australian, but I want to make sure that they are provided with the knowledge as to what they are buying. Ambiguity must be removed."

Price wars on produce in retail giants have caused havoc for growers in recent months. While these wars have promoted the purchase and consumption of fresh vegetables by the consumer, many in the industry are concerned about the long-term sustainability of the growing community, something that Mr Brent recognises.

"There's a lot of hurt at the grower level in Australia and consumers are very much taken up with what value they can get for their food dollar," said Mr Brent.

"I don't believe that price plays the part that the supermarkets would have us believe. I believe strongly that supermarkets have certainly contributed to the promotion of fresh vegetables and fruit, but then devalue it by reducing prices, which in my view, in no way adds to the value that vegetables provide not only in our diet but in return to regional communities in Australia."

"It's a sad position. I'd ask the supermarket chains to justify

years from members of the community, fellow farming families and a supportive high school English teacher, Mr Brent recognised the importance of encouraging the younger generation. He would like to see young people continue to become involved in the industry.

"I believe in empowering young people, and I must say that I'm very supportive of the young leaders' initiative that we do through AUSVEG. Everyone's view is of value. I like to hear all sorts of views, have them in the ring, and talk about what's the best way forward. We need leaders in this country. We need industry



and quantify how sales have increased in the reduction of prices. I would contend that it could bring about a minimal increase in sales volumes, however, in actual fact it suggests to consumers that vegetables are disposable," he said.

Urging the vegetable growing community to strengthen collective efforts to respond to industry issues, Mr Brent asserted that long-term sustainability should be at the forefront of everyone's mind.

"I'm concerned about the impact of a carbon tax on the cost of production. While I'm not going to argue about the merits or shortcomings of a carbon tax, I will make clear the cost to our horticulture industry, and to the wider consumer community. A major question is whether a

easier path for all of horticulture moving forward," he said.

Supporting growers on a national level

Having served on a number of boards throughout his extensive career, including as a Director for the Queensland State horticulture body, Growcom, Mr Brent's appointment as Chairman of National Peak Industry Body AUSVEG in 2008 presented some challenges.

"While there was great energy towards lifting the profile of the vegetable industry and the potato industry, we weren't able to get the right mix of energy to achieve that. I still pay tribute to the early workers in the organisation."

"As a result of getting a team of directors together with



“ I’m hoping that even as tough as it is out there right now, that there is an easier path for all of horticulture moving forward. ”

carbon tax will ultimately allow more processed product into the country."

"What I think is important in this country is to ensure we continue to maintain clean and green quality produce, at the same time as being able to maintain a growth in volume and margin. I'm hoping that even as tough as it is out there right now, that there is an

a competent and talented administrative body, we've been able to achieve great things. If I look at our national conventions, at the first one when I was Chair there were about 200 attendees. This has increased to 600, then to 1000 in 2011. That is a measurement of success in itself. But the greatest success to me will be when I see that vibrancy very much transposed

into the long-term sustainability of our industry. My focus now is to maximise returns to growers," said Mr Brent.

While admitting that there were initial difficulties to overcome with industry-owned organisation Horticulture Australia Limited, Mr Brent said that the relationship which had been forged over the past several years had proved to be positive and encouraging for future dealings.

"Our relationship with Horticulture Australia had been damaged for all sorts of reasons. But we've seized the agenda, we've heard the message from growers, we managed to corral what we thought was a strategic vision, and then enacted that vision to what we thought our grower community was looking for."

"We are far closer to achieving a better deal than we ever thought. Aided by strong strategic partnerships with key players in the industry, our role now is one of encouraging our governments to look positively on the massive contribution to jobs and economic growth made by the veggie industry," he said.

Mr Brent credited much of the increase in awareness of issues facing the industry - on a political and commercial level - to the vibrant and dedicated young team working at AUSVEG, led by CEO Richard Mulcahy.

"I'm very much a believer in a team approach, and this

is a team approach. With the selection of our current CEO, the dynamic young people involved in the organisation of AUSVEG, and their commitment and capacity with new ideas, there is a new vision and vigour. We are very fortunate to have Richard Mulcahy leading AUSVEG. He is an experienced CEO who has driven the promotion of our industry so much further than I could ever have imagined."

Future opportunities in the industry

Mr Brent expressed his optimism for the coming years in horticulture, and discussed what he would like to see in the near future for AUSVEG and for Australian growers.

"I'd like to see more participating growers. There are many opportunities for growers to participate, whether it's in our Industry Advisory Committees or Working Groups, or as Directors on our Board, and we truly need to get younger people into the organisation," he said.

"I hope when I leave, we will have a great balance of youth and experience within the senior roles of the organisation, to continue to further the good work being done. Right now has never been a tougher point in our rural sector right across the industry. If we can succeed and progress now, it says something for what we can do when times ease up, which they surely will."

GROW YOUR INDUSTRY!

Notice of Vegetable Levy Payers' Meetings

AUSVEG is hosting a number of Vegetable Levy Payers' meetings around Australia, to provide growers with an opportunity to see where and how R&D levy funds are being invested on their behalf.

Details for the meetings are below. Food and refreshments will be provided.

YES I _____

 (Name)
 of _____

 (Address)

will attend the meeting indicated below (please tick).

I can be contacted on: _____

 (Phone) (Email)

- Monday 19 March** - Cobbitty, NSW
 Plant Breeding Institute - 107 Cobbitty Road, Cobbitty 5.00pm - 7.00pm
- Tuesday 20 March** - Bundaberg, QLD
 Bundaberg Enterprise Centre - Cnr Quay and Tantitha Streets, Bundaberg 6.00pm - 8.00pm
- Wednesday 21 March** - Gatton, QLD
 Gatton Research Station - Warrego Highway (opposite University of Queensland), Gatton 6.00pm - 8.00pm
- Monday 26 March** - Darwin, NT
 Darwin Convention Centre - Stokes Hill Road, Darwin
 Tropical Pests & Diseases Seminar for Levy Payers 10am - 7.30pm
- Tuesday 27 March** - Bowen, QLD
 Bowen RSL - 38 Williams Street, Bowen 6.00pm - 8.00pm
- Monday 2 April** - Wanneroo, WA
 Wanneroo Golf Club, Cnr Old Yanchep Road and Flynn Drive, Neerabup 6:00pm - 7:30pm
 Followed by a free-for-growers EnviroVeg dinner: 7:30pm - 9:30pm
- Tuesday 3 April** - Werribee, VIC
 Italian Sports Club - 601 Heaths Road, Werribee 6.00pm - 8.00pm
- Wednesday 4 April** - Devonport, TAS
 Argosy Hotel - 221 Tarleton Street, East Devonport 6.00pm - 8.00pm



To RSVP please call AUSVEG on 03 9822 0388. Alternatively, please fax or email this completed slip to AUSVEG on 03 9822 0688 or info@ausveg.com.au.

- Annual Levy Payer meeting in conjunction with the 2012 AUSVEG National Convention**
Saturday 12 May - Hobart, TAS
 Wrest Point Hotel Casino 2.30pm - 3.00pm

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Biosecurity brief

Dr Kevin Clayton-Greene



In the first of *Vegetables Australia's* recurring series on biosecurity, AUSVEG's biosecurity advisor, Dr Kevin Clayton-Greene, introduces the subject of biosecurity and how it affects our industry.

What is biosecurity? What does it mean?

From the point-of-view of the industry, it's got a lot of components. Most people would associate biosecurity with pests and diseases, which is what it is basically concerned with. But it covers not only stuff coming into Australia, but also our relationships with exports out of Australia. It covers introductions of new and exotic pests, but it also has connotations within Australia, because there's various state quarantine issues. So there's pre-border biosecurity and then post-entry, which is when stuff is actually in the country. It's a two-way process.

One of the key things that we have to be able to do in this world is trade, and biosecurity is a key part of that - to be able to trade without compromising a country's biosecurity status. Australia has been isolated for a very long time and fortunately doesn't have the pests and diseases that the rest of the world does. That's why biosecurity is important.

Why is it important to the individual grower?

If there is a pest or an incursion, or a fungal disease that establishes itself, they can potentially have the ability to devastate an industry. We've

seen that recently in New Zealand with tomato/potato *psyllid*. We've seen the affect other diseases are having in other sectors of the industry recently. Some of these issues can be dealt with by breeding, some of them can be dealt with by pest management, but all of them ultimately cost a lot of money. So it's pretty important that the industry is represented at the table where decisions are made.

What does your role with AUSVEG involve?

I've been commissioned by AUSVEG to take over the role of overseeing what's happening in biosecurity in general. What that means is when there is an incursion, there's usually a series of national teleconferences. I'm there to represent the industry and AUSVEG's approach to that as to how things should be managed, to make sure that some of the recommendations, that come from people who aren't necessarily involved with the industry on a day-to-day basis, actually make sense from an industry and management point-of-view. To feed information back to the industry about decisions that are made at various state and federal levels, that may have implications about funding for

growers.

What that means is that, generally speaking, governments are trying to avoid spending money, so that means somebody is going to pay. That usually means the industry. How does industry pay? Through regulatory costs. So therefore it is in our interests to make sure we sit at those tables where these decisions are made, to make sure we're not being asked to shoulder a burden that we shouldn't be responsible for.

So I feed information back to AUSVEG, the peak industry body, who then decide on how we should respond to particular issues within the industry.

What are some of the biosecurity threats Australia faces?

Internally in Australia, there's a vast number of diseases, any of which could reap substantial havoc on the industry. Most industries don't have people dedicated to looking at biosecurity and the sort of issues that affect biosecurity. The vegetable industry now has one, myself, and the nursery industry has one. But most other industries typically only have one on a part-time basis, and it's usually part of the administrative executive officer's role. Put it this way, the potential to cause damage to the

vegetable industry, depending on the crops or pest, could run into the hundreds, perhaps even thousands of millions of dollars. It's an enormous issue. So you have to look at the sort of issues that flow on from that, making sure the industry is aware of what's being done, and what are the risks.

Unlike in animals, many plants come from the same family. So an issue in one plant, may be an issue for something else. Let's take the nightshade family; there's a whole range of crops - potatoes, tomatoes, capsicums, eggplant, tamarillos - that are all members of the nightshade family or *Solanaceae*. Also, *Solanaceae* form a key part of nursery crops and ornamentals, and they are also weeds. Some of these can be host to some fairly nasty diseases. Even if the host where it is found might not be particularly important, there is still the potential to devastate other sectors of the industry. So it's pretty important that the industry stays abreast of what's happening in these things, so it can be alert and make sure that the right contingency plans are put in place, should there be an incursion.

For more information:
Email: info@ausveg.com.au
Project Number: VG11013

Name: Scott Samwell

Age: 38

Location: Mount Barker, Adelaide Hills

Works: Samwell & Sons

Grows: Brussels sprouts, cabbage, hay and beef cattle



Q&A Young grower feature

Future of the family

Scott Samwell has achieved a significant amount in his career to date. Still in his thirties, Scott oversees his family's third generation farm. His ability and potential were recognised last year when he was awarded the 2011 Nuffield Australia scholarship. A passionate member of the industry, Scott continues to further his family's vegetable growing operations and build towards a bright future.



Mount Barker, Adelaide Hills,
South Australia

How did you first get involved in the vegetable industry?

Our family has been involved in growing vegetables for around 50 years. I am the third generation, so I've been involved all my life in the industry in some form or another. I officially started in the business in 1996 after doing an Environmental Science degree.

What is your role on the farm?

My role would be similar to that of a Managing Director. That means I handle all the growing of our products, which involves variety selections, nutrient management, pest control, weed management, harvesting as well as quality control, labour operations and anything and everything in between. There are four, soon to be five, Samwell men in the business and it is very much a team effort. The job needs to be done so we all work together to make it happen. We are certainly not too hung up on titles and such things.

Describe your average day on the farm.

The day's program will be determined whether we are in a planting or harvesting phase. Generally, it will involve getting all the crews going in the morning, whether for harvesting, which is either done by hand, or machine or, alternatively, planting. Harvesting for us is from early December through to late August or early September for sprouts and all year round for cabbage. Planting for sprouts is from July through to February and again all year round for cabbage. Once things are up and running, I will get



my jobs done, which involve fertilising, maturity assessments, fixing problems, arranging forthcoming season plantings, coordinating new projects, managing spraying and irrigation programs and working out the harvest programs. As any grower knows, there are always things to be done and it is very much full bore most of the time.

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

I get immense satisfaction from growing a quality product. It is very rewarding to walk a field of sprouts or cabbage and see uniformity in product size and bush height, good colour and no pest or disease problems. The challenge is to get this right as much as possible. Sometimes it doesn't always work, however it is fantastic when it does!

What are the biggest challenges you face as a grower?

Good quality labour, increasing labour costs and increasing

input costs. Unfortunately these costs are not being offset with better farm-gate prices. However, what these costs are causing us to do is to be smarter about how we grow. It makes us more efficient so that all the inputs we use can be utilised by the plant. I certainly do not want to apply fertiliser to my field and then over-irrigate, causing it to run off and be lost, or spray when there are no pests to control. It is important to make all the inputs count, whether fertilisers, chemicals, labour etc.

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

What we do is not just a job; it is a lifestyle. Agricultural knowledge has increased so much in our game and this certainly requires young people to learn about these things and then bring them into the industry. Our work environment requires many skills from agronomy, people management

through to engineering skills. I feel young people need to see that it is an exciting sector to be in, with great opportunities if one is willing to work and learn. Maybe there needs to be a better link between educational institutes and actual farms/market gardens. This would give better insight to the opportunities on offer.

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

I have never given this serious thought. I am doing what I love, but if I couldn't do this, I would be outdoors in some capacity.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Hopefully 10 years wiser! The fourth generation will be up and coming by then, so I would like to see our business still going strong, producing good quality food in a sustainable way so that it can continue providing the lifestyle and working opportunities that I have enjoyed.



Fighting the fear of fruit fly

A major study has recommended measures for capsicum growers in Queensland's Bowen and Gumlu regions to better protect their \$130 million export industry. By working co-operatively to standardise field-spraying practices and pack house checking systems, it is believed that the Queensland fruit fly can be more effectively controlled, writes Karen Shaw.



The five year study, *Alternative fruit fly control and market access for capsicums and tomatoes*, examined the incidence and control methods of Queensland fruit flies *Bactrocera tryoni* and *B. neohumeralis* in Bowen and Gumlu - areas that supply 60 per cent of the nation's capsicums through domestic and international export markets.

Growers were concerned about effects on the industry of recent restrictions on the use of insecticide dimethoate, specifically on edible peel produce, and an Australian Pesticides and Veterinary

Medicines Authority review of fenthion. Current quarantine export regulations for domestic and New Zealand capsicum markets require growers to treat the fruit with these insecticides pre or post-harvest

The project, funded by HAL using the National Vegetable Levy, voluntary contributions from industry and matched funds from the Australian Government, was initially commissioned to find alternatives to the insecticides dimethoate and fenthion, in addition to compiling firm data about fruit fly and its prevalence in the region's crops.

Project leader Dr Siva

Subramanian is pleased to report, however, that the study found very little evidence of fruit fly in harvested capsicum grown under commercial practices in the region.

"This means the growers are already doing a really good job," said Dr Subramanian.

"We need to [capitalise] on this and standardise on-farm spraying and post-harvest practices across the board and keep monitoring for the pest."

The first phase of the study involved understanding the spray regimes and practices farmers already use on crops for control of other pests, such as whitefly, heliothis, aphids, thrips

and mites.

"We talked to growers and recorded their on-farm practices and found most were using two insecticides that are highly effective at controlling all problematic pests, including fruit fly," he said.

"Growers should continue using these insecticides, but to further enhance the efficiency of spray programs they should work co-operatively."

Growers are also encouraged to standardise current pack house practices of sorting and grading fruit.

Another major component of the study was to learn more about the level of fruit fly infestation on fruit at harvest. For Dr Subramanian and his team, this involved collecting and analysing 29,381 capsicums from pack houses and fields across the region at harvest between April and November.

The sampling results over three consecutive seasons showed the risk of fruit fly was very minimal.

"We found only one fruit fly infested fruit, and that was in November 2007 - toward the very end of the season," said Dr Subramanian.

"These results show there is a really small risk of infestation in November, which is when growers need to be extra vigilant about field hygiene, removing



Photographs by Dr Siva Subramanian

any rotten fruit and maintaining spray regimes.”

Dr Subramaniam recommended that the industry look further at the sustainability of establishing a seasonal region growing window for capsicums between March to August, when crops were the least vulnerable to fruit fly.

study demonstrated that capsicums harvested from March to November in the Bowen district had little risk of fruit fly infestation and could therefore be considered for interstate markets with no dimethoate treatment in the pack house.

He said the published study

“ Growers are already doing a really good job... We need to [capitalise] on this and standardise on-farm spraying and post-harvest practices across the board. ”

The study also examined the prevalence of fruit fly in the surrounding environment. Some 70 cue-lure traps were set up in the district on capsicum and tomato farms, river banks and in surrounding natural vegetation. Every fortnight during a forty month period, the traps were monitored, flies counted and results noted.

The trap catches showed seasonal patterns of fruit fly activity, with low numbers during the autumn and winter months, rising slightly in spring and peaking in summer. Fruit fly numbers were higher in traps on river banks and surrounding vegetation and low on the farms where terrain was more open.

The results showed that there were virtually no fruit flies from March to August/September in crops, and the traps set in natural vegetation along the river banks only collected one or two.

“It was only towards November that fruit fly numbers started to increase in the farming areas,” said Dr Subramaniam.

He reiterated that this was when capsicum growers needed to take extra care with crop hygiene.

“Farmers need to regularly slash finished crops, and plough in any rotten fruit, as well as continue with their regular spraying regime,” he said.


Dr Subramaniam says the

would provide a much needed guide into understanding fruit fly that could be adapted to other areas in Australia or overseas where it was also a pest.

THE BOTTOM LINE

A major study into fruit fly control in the capsicum growing areas of Bowen and Gumlu has recommended that growers:

- Work together to standardise current spray application programs and pack house sorting systems.
- Be vigilant about crop hygiene, removing rotten fruit from the paddock, particularly towards the end of the season.
- Remove alternative host crops from surrounding paddocks that are potential wild hosts to the fruit fly.

 For more information:

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Queensland
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qld.gov.au
Project number: VG06028



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Sourcing success

A select group of high profile restaurants are beginning to source their vegetables direct from local growers. Decorated chef Andrew McConnell and asparagus grower Trevor Courtney talk to Jeremy Story Carter about building a mutually beneficial relationship.

Sunlight lash a handful of post-work drinkers on a Fitzroy footpath, who occupy several basic wooden tables and chairs. With grime and graffiti coating their surrounds and two enormous housing commission flats in full view only 100 metres away, there is little to suggest that they are positioned outside of one of Melbourne's best restaurants. Push upon the large glass doors of Cutler & Co. though and things start to make sense.

Immediately you are greeted by a smartly dressed and effortlessly casual maître de, who shows you to your table and asks what you are drinking. A low hum of conversation from the restaurant's typically relaxed clientele flows throughout the sleek but understated interior. Polished wooden tables are

smattered about the vast dining space, whose monochrome furnishings are overlooked by a large exposed brick wall. When a stunningly arranged dish of raw and cooked asparagus, cracked wheat pilaf, goat's curd and barberries is placed before you, it is understandable if your thoughts are far from a farm in Koo Wee Rup. Yet that's exactly where the dish's centrepiece is sourced from. Head chef and owner of Cutler and Co., Andrew McConnell,

forms part of a new generation of high profile chefs who choose to source their vegetables,

where possible, directly from local growers.

As one of the country's best chefs, the decisions Mr McConnell makes affect all three of his Melbourne restaurants (he also owns the award-winning Cumulus

Inc. and the recently opened Golden Fields). It is therefore refreshing to hear how passionate and committed he is to fostering working relationships with growers.

"I have been working with

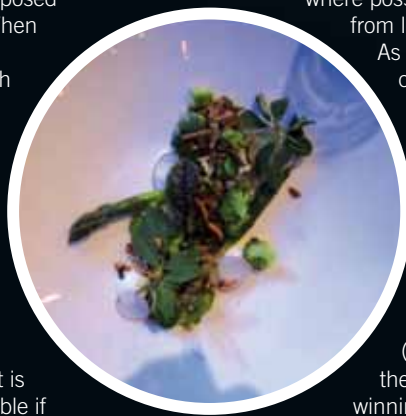
some growers for over 10 years," says Mr McConnell.

"I think now these farmers are accessible to us, and there's a lot of farmers who are receptive to chefs, to working with chefs and maybe listening to what they need."

As a chef whose restaurants pride themselves on the seasonality of their dishes, it is less a case of dictating to growers what vegetables to supply and more about listening to the best they have to offer.

"Often it's not us being able to select [what produce]," says Mr McConnell.

"It's a matter of keeping a close, constant dialogue with the growers and farmers as to what's growing and what's coming up. How long they think it's going to be, a few weeks or months in advance of a dish, so that when the produce does



arrive in the restaurant, we've got a few ideas to work within."

Over in south-eastern Victoria at Bridge Farm in Koo Wee Rup, second-generation asparagus grower Trevor Courtney, whose asparagus is featured on the plates of McConnell's restaurants, welcomes that connection.

"He's been fantastic to work with, he's really knowledgeable and in tune with growers, and just a very nice guy to deal with. There's a synergy and a sort of mutual respect, and you don't get that when you don't sell it yourself," says Mr Courtney.

"At farmers' markets you get some of that, but with these restauranteurs you get even more of it because you understand their love and passion of food... They have an affinity with you and they know what you've got."

Bridge Farm have been supplying asparagus to McConnell for three years now, preparing each batch under highly specialised and tailored conditions.

"We do a specific grade for the restaurant, it's a medium grade they like," says Mr Courtney.

"We pick asparagus sticks with nice, tight heads."



Inside Cutler & Co.



“ If you care about cooking, you care about where your produce comes from and who it's produced by. ”

understanding about what goes into the produce every day."

Mr Courtney is similarly positive about the opportunity to work with Mr McConnell and his team of chefs.

"We really can't thank him enough, because Andrew was the first that gave us the opportunity, and then we spread to a few more [high-end restaurants]," he says.

"We've never forgotten his introduction to us at the market and how we got involved, because a lot of restauranteurs don't get out or take the time to get out to meet local growers."

As someone who puts a significant level of care into his work, Mr Courtney says he garners a great sense of satisfaction knowing that his produce is treated so well, and especially enjoys seeing it presented in its final incarnation.

"When you see Andrew's cooking and his new recipe book, and you see your asparagus in there, it is very fulfilling."

As for Mr McConnell, it's the type of relationship he hopes to continue to build and will remain a key component of all his restaurants.

"It's something I've always been interested in and it's something I'm always looking to expand within the business," he says.

"I like to think that the guys who I work with really care about cooking. And if you care about cooking, you care about where your produce comes from and who it's produced by."

"We cut in the night so the asparagus is fresh - so we cut under torchlight. We gather in the crop before the sun hits the crop and deteriorates the product. Then we wash and process it in our shed, and then we deliver it to Andrew the next day so it's nice and fresh and has a good shelf life."

The two met informally at a Collingwood Children's Farm farmers' market, and quickly established a mutually beneficial relationship. For Andrew McConnell and his restaurants, it means getting the freshest possible produce delivered direct to his door.

"It's great for us, because we get the produce that has been picked the day before," he says.

"It doesn't have to be in a cold store, it doesn't have to go through a wholesale market, it hasn't had to go through a reseller before it comes to us. It's been touched by one person and washed by one person - the farmer - who sees it from seed to our kitchen backdoor. The product is better for it, but it's actually great for us as chefs to have a connection and

Chef Andrew McConnell



Sustainable IPM:

The key to modern-day farming

IPM may be the way of the future for most growers, but it brings with it a whole new range of considerations.

Growers are finding modern day pest and disease management increasingly challenging. The overuse of older chemistries and the introduction of more stringent regulations year after year have resulted in fewer available options, more pest resistance and a greater responsibility to tackle pests and disease strategically.

In the face of this, as well as growing environmental and economic pressure, sustainable farming is accepted as critical to maintaining the viability of individual farms and the industry as a whole, both locally and globally.

One way of farming more sustainably is to incorporate Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques into the farming system, which involves combining targeted chemical, biological and cultural methods. The added benefits of this approach to pest control should be to maintain the effectiveness, as well as the longevity, of the chemistries that remain.

As more IPM techniques are applied in crops and

regions across the country, greater investment in research, development and support for growers will be required to augment this growth.

Dr Maria Teresa Almanza, a global product specialist from Bayer CropScience, leads the worldwide field testing of new active ingredients for the positioning of IPM-compatible products. According to Dr Almanza, this support comes in the form of ongoing, sustainable innovation and research and development coupled with technical assistance and education.

"Technological and commercial expertise impose a duty on suppliers to contribute directly to the sustainable development of Australian agriculture," said Dr Almanza.

"We're leveraging Australian-based research and development and globally acquired insights from our network of affiliate suppliers, agronomists and consultants to ensure growers are well-equipped to implement effective IPM systems."

IPM-compatible insecticides

are a prerequisite for efficient, sustainable IPM systems, but growers must be highly selective to ensure the sustainable use of chemical control options and protect against resistance.

"To combat resistance, it's important to have an integrated, three-pronged approach - incorporating chemical, as well as cultural and biological control, to protect the viability of Australian agriculture," Dr Almanza explained.

While cultural control is largely the responsibility of growers through farm management practices, the onus is on suppliers to provide product variety and ensure products work hand in hand to help maintain a productive and healthy ecosystem, including soil, in the long-term.

When it comes to biological control, there is uncertainty among Australian agriculture about the use of beneficial insects, but Dan Papacek from Bugs for Bugs says that people are beginning to change their attitudes.

"Almost every day, we're getting more interest from growers realising there are alternatives and seeking solutions that are sustainable," he said.

"There are no hard and fast rules, but if you can establish biological control agents early on in the crop cycle when pest pressure is low and try and get them to build up in the pest population before the pests become a real problem, you've got a better chance of getting the results you want."

Traditional suppliers are working with beneficial insectaries and IPM consultants to construct programs and facilitate information flow regarding best practice around IPM. Yet growers should also

be encouraged to push for on-farm demonstration trials, field days and workshops to help understand how to implement IPM into their overall approach. "IPM is in the best interests of growers, suppliers and industry alike," said Dr Almanza.

The good news is that if growers are unable to adapt current farming practices to incorporate an entirely integrated pest management approach, it is possible to take steps in the right direction by incrementally tweaking one or more of the three tactics.

Eventually IPM will become a necessary rather than merely a discretionary option. Consultants, growers and suppliers will need to continue to work together to find the right balance of chemical, cultural and biological tools to protect against resistance and ensure the longevity of the industry, and shelve the "spray and pray" approach for good.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a key option for sustainable farming.
- IPM implements chemical, biological and cultural methods to greater enhance the effectiveness and longevity of pesticide use.
- Suppliers must ensure there is an adequate and appropriate range of products for growers to choose from to suit their own needs and circumstances.

 For more information on IPM visit www.goodbugs.org.au



Michael Ficarra, Rob Wheatley (Grape Exchange) and Ed Carlton (Bugs for Bugs) examining insects and mites under the microscope.


 INNOVATION SPECIAL

Back to the future

A high-tech approach to harvesting could help Japan move forward following the devastation of 2011.

The Japanese Government has announced an ambitious agricultural project that includes the production of a robotic harvester, designed to function unmanned.

The highly experimental 'Dream Project' will be conducted on approximately 618 acres in Northern Japan; an area ravaged by ecological disaster in March 2011.

The project is aimed at rejuvenating the area, using unmanned tractors and a sophisticated LED light system to harvest vegetables, rice and

soybeans among other produce.

The concept also intends for the carbon dioxide emissions produced by the harvesters to be reconditioned and channelled back into the ground to aid the fertilisation process.

Research on the four billion Yen (approximately AUD \$47 million) project will commence later this year.

The 2011 Japanese tsunami had a crippling effect on the north of Japan, killing more than 19,000 people and covering the land in oil, salt and debris. Before the 'Dream Project' is

able to commence in the Miyagi Prefecture, that salt residue will need to be cleared.

In addition to government funding, major private companies such as Panasonic, Fujitsu and Sharp will contribute to the project.

It is hoped the 'Dream Project' will help to restore confidence in the nation's agricultural resources, following the highly publicised reactor meltdowns that occurred subsequent to the tsunami.



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Breaking the glasshouse ceiling

Bryony Hackett's success in the glasshouses of Guyra have seen her recognised as a future leader in the industry.



So often in horticulture, we're met with stories of long family lineages. Of second, third and fourth generation growers, born and raised on the land. That isn't Bryony Hackett's story. In fact, it wasn't until after she had started a family that she began to pursue a career in horticulture. Yet while it may not follow the archetypal path, her story nonetheless speaks to the opportunities available to those in the industry who strive hard enough for success.

Having grown up in a "typical, white-collar family" in suburban Melbourne, Ms Hackett relished vacations to Lake Eildon, Bonnie Doon and Yarrawonga, and kept a lifelong love of animals and the outdoors.

"I always had a secret love of horses and animals in general. So I was always dreaming as a child of being a farmer or being involved in agriculture somehow."

A self-confessed "late bloomer" to horticulture, it took until her thirties for Ms Hackett to actively follow her deep-seeded interest.

"I had my child and I was an at-home mum for quite a few years. I got to about 30-years old and it dawned on me that I hadn't really achieved anything that I wanted to do in my life in terms of my career," she says.

"So I decided that I would go and do what I always wanted to do in my heart [and] enrol as a mature-age student in a

Bachelor of Agriculture at the University of New England in Armidale (New South Wales)."

Those studies began to open her eyes to the possibilities of a career in horticulture. In spite of her passion for animals, she soon joined Blush Tomatoes (part of the Costa Group) as a crop worker in Guyra, New South Wales. It was an experience, she admits, that was initially something of an eye-opener.

"I got the job here, and I never knew that the glasshouse industry, particularly on this scale, ever really existed," she says.

"When I got here, I was just blown away. It's a state-of-the-art facility. I started working here

and I just really enjoyed the crop work, and started to see how this could be relevant to what I had learnt at university."

Having entered the horticultural workforce at such a late stage, Ms Hackett appears determined to make up for lost time. Her talents have quickly been recognised, and after undertaking a supervisory role, she now forms part of the management and growing team at Blush Tomatoes.

"My job daily is to oversee the staff as the crop work manager, and also assist the senior grower in growing the crops. So both growing and labour management," says Ms Hackett.

"The whole facility is 20 hectares in total. We have over



750,000 tomato plants, and that's divided up into two 10 hectare glasshouses. I work in one of those glasshouses, with at least 60 staff."

Ms Hackett's achievements have not, however, been limited purely to the confines of the glasshouse. In late 2011, she graduated from the HAL-funded *Growing Leaders* program, something she credits with improving herself as an individual and day-to-day manager of people.

"It gave me a platform on how I could become a female leader in the industry," she says.

"It also gave me a chance to network with other people in the industry and learn about their challenges... [and] to network with some really good mentors that are high up in the industry. [There were] avenues that I really hadn't considered, and there was nowhere else that I could have learnt any of that

stuff. It was excellent, I really got a lot out of it."

It's clear when speaking to Ms Hackett that, despite her achievements, she is constantly endeavouring to improve and advance herself within the industry. Asked if she's

being really supportive and recognising that the industry is a little imbalanced... even the fact that AUSVEG are now giving out a 'Women in Horticulture' award at the Convention."

"Let's face it, we've got a female Prime Minister, we've

40-60, and that's in agriculture, so there's definitely women in the industry, and I can see it growing."

Looking to the future, Ms Hackett hopes she can continue to grow as a leader and actively encourage others to pursue a career in the industry.

"I would like to see us attracting workers to horticulture, and certainly getting the word out that there are such things as the glasshouse industry," she says.

"It's not just driving a tractor in the potato paddock, there is money and there is science and there are some really progressive things going on in horticulture that perhaps aren't known about by uni students or anyone on the outside; certainly I didn't know before I entered the industry."

For now though, Ms Hackett is most content to build her career within the Costa Group, and still derives a great sense of fulfilment from being out on site, amongst the crops.

"I'm happiest out in the glasshouse in the sunshine with a huge yield for the week," she says.

"It gives me satisfaction when I can see other people enjoying what they are doing and asking questions and generally caring about what they're doing."

"I'm a labour manager, so it's really good when you get employees who are interested in what they're doing, they're asking you questions, and they're responsive. When the morale of the people is good, everything seems to be good. I just think if you give people something to belong to, they will give back tenfold, and that really makes me happy."

“ I think if you give people something to belong to, they will give back tenfold. ”

encountered any challenges specific to being a woman in horticulture, Ms Hackett instead talks passionately about the opportunities available to anyone willing to take them.

"I think the opportunities *are* there for women. Certainly people like HAL and AUSVEG and other organisations are

got females running the banks, we've got a female president of the National Farmers Federation in New South Wales. I think the door is really open, they've just got to put their hand up to take it."

"Certainly I know through my classes in university, the male-to-female ratio would be



Photographs by Rachel Meszaros



Discussing better business

The Innoveg *Talking Business* program continues with its aim of assisting and informing the decision-making process for growers.

Dr Anne-Maree Boland from the RM Consulting Group has overseen the *Talking Business* program, which forms part of the Vegetable Industry Development Program (VIDP). She says it is important to recognise the choices facing growers around the country.

“We’re trying to help them with their decision-making, recognising that every decision that a grower makes can be quite complex,” says Dr Boland.

“[*Talking Business*] is just providing them with some tools to help consider those decisions, so that they can also talk to others in the family and their bank manager, to help them through the process.”

The program has so far produced a number of business cases and case studies, including the lettuce planter business case featured in the

January/February 2012 edition of *Vegetables Australia*. Each is developed through research and consultation with growers around Australia.

“There’s been a number of visits to the states to talk to different growers, to find out what are the things that keep them awake at night. What are the big business decisions that they have to make?” says Dr Boland.

“From that, we’ve developed four different business cases, and several case studies. The case studies are more generic and are just a checklist to consider when making a big decision. The business cases have actual numbers and a simple spreadsheet that growers can put their own numbers into to work out what the scenario would be for them.”

The focus of the program is to

stimulate thought and dialogue amongst growers and not, necessarily, determine what decisions they should make.

“The whole premise behind the program was getting people to talk about the numbers. Growers are very comfortable talking about the new spray they are using or the production side of things, but getting them to talk about the business side of things is a bit harder,” says Dr Boland.

“It’s not about the tools giving the final answers, but it’s about getting the group to throw up different questions and discuss different possibilities. Say if the value of your crop has halved, would that impact on whether you harvested it or not? Those sort of questions.”

The final cases are then presented to advisors within the states, who relay the tools to

their grower groups. Dr Boland says that, in spite of some logistical difficulties getting the information across to growers, the general reaction to the program has been positive.

“We probably got the best feedback from the advisors,” says Dr Boland.

“They’re saying ‘I’ve used the tool with my growers and they’ve asked this, this and this’. But that’s just the advisor level and we’re only just scratching the tip of the iceberg. There’s more advisors we want to get the message out to, so that’s the next step.”

i For more information on the *Talking Business* program:
Anne-Maree Boland
Telephone: (03) 9882 2670
Email: anne-mareeb@rmcg.com.au

Minor-use permits

Permit Number	Permit Description (pesticide/crop/pest)	Date Issued	Expiry Date	States Covered
PER13123	Amistar (azoxystrobin) / brassicas leafy veges, brassicas, beans / various diseases	2-Feb-12	30-Sep-12	Valid for all states (other than Vic)
PER13253	Maldison / table grapes / Fruit fly	31-Jan-12	31-May-14	Valid for all states (other than Vic)
PER13254	Dimethoate (pre-harvest) / chilli peppers / Fruit fly	2-Feb-12	5-Oct-12	Valid for all states
PER13267	Insegar (fenoxycarb) / olive / scale	23-Jan-12	31-Mar-14	Valid for all states (other than Vic)
PER13286	Success Neo (spinetoram) / pistachio / Carob moth	27-Jan-12	31-Jun-13	Emergency permit. For use in all states. APVMA required residue data for renewal. Permit was not issued in almonds
PER13290	Blueberries, bilberries & other Vaccinium sp. / dimethoate / fruit fly	2-Feb-12	5-Oct-12	Valid for all states

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



A legacy of innovation

For over six decades, the Meakins family have served as a shining example of innovation within the industry, in the process making Newman's Horseradish one of the most successful products of its type.

Brian Meakins admits that horseradish is far from a staple of most Australian diets.

"When bills come in, it's the first thing that gets the flick. We know that, it's part of life and we're used to it."

As the owner of Newman's Horseradish in Langhorne Creek, South Australia, this has merely meant that Mr Meakins, and his father before him, have had to constantly remain innovative to ensure the success of their business.

The most remarkable thing about the Meakins family is therefore not that they have operated as horseradish growers for 64 years, or that they produce a product that is known and sold right across the state of South Australia. It is that, in contrast to industry norms, Brian Meakins oversees every aspect of production of the horseradish; from planting and harvesting through to the bottling and marketing of the final product.

"We're just about the only

ones doing it," says Brian Meakins.

"I did a tour to America last year and even over there, no one does it like we do here. They have growers, who then sell it to a packing shed. The packing shed sells it to the

to be picked, it is gathered using a converted potato harvester. It is then put through a washer in singular pieces, which simultaneously pumps fresh water in and rotates dirty water out. After an hour, Mr Meakins says it should be "absolutely

a food stabiliser to prevent separation, before it is bottled and sealed on site.

"All the equipment is quite old," Mr Meakins confesses.

"My dad bought the bottling machine in 1974. It was manual, but we've now made it automatic. The mincer I bought 28 years ago, and it still runs beautifully. That's partly because we only run it one day a week - some butchers run it every day. The capping machine is also 40-50 years old."

In spite of the age of the machinery, Mr Meakins says that he is well-equipped to deal with the ever-increasing demand for his product.

"With the orders that are starting to come in from interstate, we will probably double our number of days in the production section. We can double, triple, quadruple without ever spending one dollar on equipment. None of this has to change."

In keeping all aspects of production on-site, Mr Meakins

“ The best part of this little set up is that... we can get the horseradish out of the ground and into the bottle by the end of the day. That's how fresh we can make it. ”

manufacturer, the manufacturer only part makes it and then they sell it on to someone else who sells the finished product- it's quite amazing. I do the whole lot."

Once the horseradish is ready

snow white- exactly how you want it."

It is then weighed, before being ground through an old butcher's mincer. The minced horseradish is combined with condensed milk, vinegar and

is able to maximise on the profit, as well as the freshness of the final product.

"The best part of this little setup is that if we really have to, we can get the horseradish out of the ground and into the bottle by the end of the day. That's how fresh we can make it, if we really have to," says Mr Meakins.

"That's something other companies just can't do, because most of them buy from a grower, so it could be a couple of days before they get it. Then it's got to fit in with the production that they're doing, so it might just be sitting around for a week in a cool room before it gets processed. Not that that's really going to do it a lot of harm, but you have to see the benefits of having it done straight away."

Newman's Horseradish is now the only product of its type sold

to hotels and restaurants within South Australia; an impressive feat, given the competition faced from chains such as Heinz and MasterFoods. Mr Meakins also supplies directly to the major supermarkets, and is beginning to work with agents in other states to help distribute his product, something he cites as an important step for the company.

"When we first started with a new agent in Queensland, he asked me to come up and meet a few of the chefs up there. So I did, and they were just blown away that this is what we were doing. That we aren't part of a big business, we are just a small family operation. They just loved it."

The continued success of Newman's Horseradish has also garnered a healthy level of media attention, with the ABC's *Landline* program and

Channel Nine's *Postcards* both filming significant pieces on the business. This has, in turn, increased public awareness and interest in the farm; something Mr Meakins has sought to capitalise on with the development of an impressive cellar door shop front.

"The cellar door has been great. People like to pick and choose, so that's why we went down that path. These caravanners come out here saying 'we saw you on *Landline* and had to come here'."

The Langhorne Creek site also houses a vineyard, producing wine that is similarly available for tasting and purchasing at the cellar door. It is managed by John Glaetzer, one of the country's most decorated winemakers, who has in excess of 35 years' experience with Wolf Blass Wines. While it is an aspect of the business that

he has less involvement with, Mr Meakins still oversees and regularly visits the production site.

"The winery part is growing," says Mr Meakins.

"In a way, it has given us a bit of a new lease on life; something new and interesting to keep involved with."

"We wouldn't have done it without the horseradish. A lot of people stop here because of the horseradish and stay to have a look and buy the wine. Pretty much everyone who comes to Langhorne Creek comes here."

These developments have helped the onsite component of Newman's Horseradish mirror the success it has achieved offsite. All of which serves to position Mr Meakins and Newman's Horseradish as an ideal model of how profitable innovation can be achieved within the industry.



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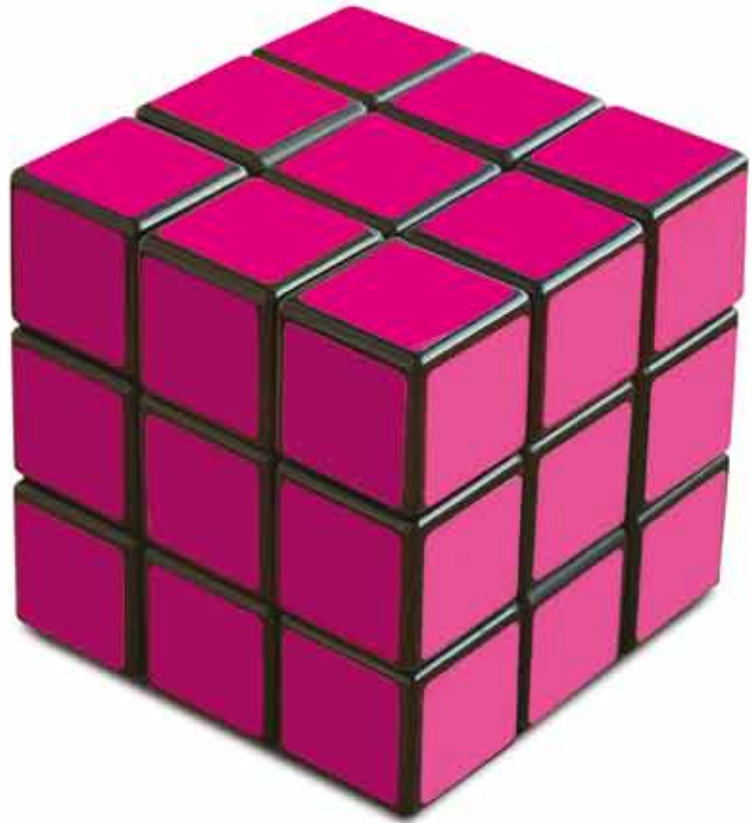
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Soil organic matter

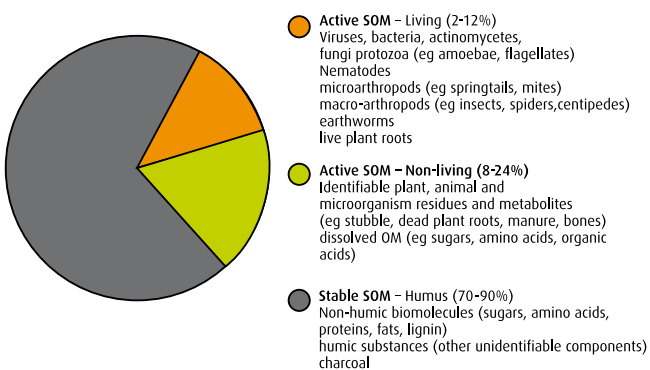
Rohan Davies, Technical Agronomist - Horticulture at Incitec Pivot Fertilisers discusses soil health and organic matter.

Question: What are the advantages of good soil organic matter levels?

Soil organic matter (SOM) can be defined as all materials of biological origin found in soils, irrespective of origin or state of decomposition (Baldoock & Skjemstad 1999).

SOM is essentially broken into three pools; active living (2-12%) e.g. soil microorganisms and living plant roots; active non-living (8-24%) e.g. breaking down roots and bugs; and stable (70-90%) e.g. humus.

Figure 1. Soil organic matter components and proportions.



Source: Gregorich et al 1997.

SOM is an important driver for overall soil health and plant productivity. Namely:

- It buffers against rapid changes in salinity, sodicity and pH. It also reduces the overall effects of sodicity and increases the Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC) of the soil.
- It acts as a stabilising agent for soil aggregates, thereby decreasing the propensity for soil erosion and improving water infiltration and water holding capacity.
- It supplies plant nutrients and energy/nutrients for micro-organisms.
- It moderates extreme soil temperatures.

Question: What are the factors affecting SOM levels?

The total amount of SOM that can be stored in the soil is predominately determined by the soil's inherent properties of texture and mineralogy.

SOM is in a constant state of flux, with the amount of SOM found

in soils at any given time determined by the input of SOM being greater than the amount of SOM that is exiting the system. This balance varies greatly, but is mostly attributed to factors such as climatic conditions and land use/management.

Climatic conditions, such as rainfall and temperature, influence SOM by determining the amount of biological biomass that can be produced. For example, the amount of rainfall will dictate which crops and pastures are grown, the number of crops that are grown and their yields, thereby influencing how much biomass can be produced. Irrigation can override the limitations of low rainfall or drought conditions and can also influence SOM levels.

Land use/management influences SOM in a number of ways:

- Organic material can be imported from off-site (e.g. animal manures or composts), thereby potentially increasing SOM levels.
- The use of fertilisers (organic and inorganic) can increase productivity, resulting in the return of more organic residues to the soil.
- SOM (as humus) contains nitrogen, phosphorus and sulphur, which can become available to plants through mineralisation of SOM. Failure to replace removal of these nutrients may result in the run down of SOM.
- Management can also influence the capacity of plant production and therefore biomass produced, by impacting on the physical, chemical and biological activity of soil. For example, cultivation may enhance the breakdown of SOM, or the prevention of soil erosion may limit the off-site export of SOM. Another example is the use of fallowing, which limits biomass production and therefore limits inputs of SOM, leading to a decline.
- The type of crop, how often it is grown and how its residue is managed will also impact on the SOM levels.

Because SOM is an important driver for overall soil health and many of the requirements for maximum plant productivity, it is wise to be aware of what affects SOM levels and where possible, work to increase SOM.

Soil nutrition questions

Please send your soil nutrition questions to *Vegetables Australia*.

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Phone: (03) 9822 0388

Salad initiative seals second spot

The 'Love My Salad' vegetable campaign, conceived in Australia and picked up across the world, has taken out second place in the 2012 Fruit Logistica Innovation Award in Berlin.

'Love My Salad' seeks to harness a collective love and passion of salads through social networks, as a means of increasing vegetable consumption.

The concept for the campaign was devised in Daylesford, Victoria, by two employees of seed producers Rijk Zwaan.

Speaking to *Vegetables Australia*, Manager of Sales for Rijk Zwaan Australia, Steven Roberts, is quick to stress the greater importance of the project.

"It's a community," said Mr Roberts.

"We just see ourselves as an initiator, or a supporter, but we don't actually promote [the company] at all on it."

'Love My Salad' is comprised of a website and a rapidly

growing Facebook page, where growers, chefs and members of the public can share their stories, recipes and enthusiasm for salads. It was developed, Mr Roberts said, following a disheartening realisation.

"It actually came about towards the end of 2009 in Australia, when we discovered that unfortunately people hate vegetables," said Mr Roberts.

"If you do a search on the internet, there's 25 million results about people who hate vegetables. There's even a Facebook page with people saying all sorts of things - 'vegetables are disgusting' and so forth."

"We've had all these great campaigns and spent all this money as an industry, but it really hasn't changed- vegetable

consumption hasn't really increased."

The ultimate aim of the project was to counteract such pockets of social negativity surrounding vegetable consumption, and instead divert the focus to something far more positive.

"The whole fundamental is that we believe we can increase consumption of vegetables by people sharing fun, joy and vitality, rather than it being a negative thing of 'oh I've got to eat my vegetables'."

The idea for 'Love My Salad' was initially contained within the company's Australian offices, but soon spread throughout Europe with a series of high profile events. Having garnered attention at the awards, Mr Roberts hopes the campaign can continue to grow and gain

momentum.

"We don't want to be just garnish. If our whole salad industry becomes just garnish, then we're not doing what we should be," he said.

"We really want to contribute to health of the public and obesity issues of the world, but without going down that hardline path. Instead, try to do it in a sharing and inspiring way. That's all nice philosophy, but after going to Berlin, I really believe this might make a difference."

For more information:
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 Manager- Sales, Rijk Zwaan
 Australia
 Telephone: (02) 4959 4855
 Email: sroberts@rijkszwaan.com.au
 www.lovemysalad.com

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Firm foundations

In a region not known for vegetable production, South Australian grower Graeme Pitchford has battled sandy soils and limited water access to turn a patch of cattle grazing land into a thriving vegetable operation. Attuned to the environment and focussed on the ongoing health of the land, he speaks to Environment Coordinator Jordan Brooke-Barnett about the challenges and successes along the way.

Photographs by Andrew Beveridge



Graeme Pitchford is an embodiment of persistence. A first generation grower and son of an accountant, he decided as a young boy that he wanted to be a vegetable grower.

“I started out 22 years ago with around 10 hectares and employing a couple of mates. Later on, Dad got involved and helped to grow it into more of a business operation.”

Many people are born into a life on the land, but for Graeme

hectares at Currency Creek near Goolwa SA. With land not traditionally conducive to growing vegetables, Graeme is the only vegetable grower in the area. He has faced a number of challenges to turn what was grazing land into a viable and sustainable vegetable farm.

Moving his growing operation from Echunga with rich clay loam soil to the sandy soil at Currency Creek required a lot of work. Nutrient holding capacity

“We constantly have to monitor the new system to find the right balance.”



Pitchford, it has been a lifelong passion. Without the inheritance of generational expertise or the years of work in cultivating and developing the land, Graeme did it himself and committed to learning as much about the industry as possible.

Starting out in Echunga, he soon outgrew the property that was limited by the fact that he could only grow for seven months of the year.

Growth in the business required access to more land and water, so he moved to a larger property of 150

of the soil at the new property was low and depleted of organic matter.

“When we came to our Currency Creek property we were told that the soil was never going to hold any nutrients. Over the years, we have tested the soil and plant tissue on a regular basis to make sure we are always aware of what we need to put on.”

Graeme is conscious of a balanced application of fertiliser and soil nutrient management to achieve better production and ensure the continuous improvement of the soil.

“Over the last 10 years, we have experienced improved production from the land and improved the organic matter and nutrient levels in our soil. The place has changed over the years as we developed a program of crop rotations to increase organic matter.”

Property planning and ongoing development continues to be a priority for the Pitchfords. Natural windbreaks and biodiversity corridors have been maintained to both preserve beneficials and native wildlife and protect the sandy

topsoil from the elements. Creek areas and waterways on the property have been maintained and allowed to regenerate after years of grazing. All this reflects the effort and determination of Graeme to develop a sustainable growing operation in a challenging environment.

At Pitchford Produce, sustainable development is closely connected to the growth of the business, with ongoing careful nutrition of soil and sustainable water use essential to securing productivity. In their time at Currency Creek, the



business has grown from 10 to over 35 employees, producing 3000 boxes of broccolini and 30,000 heads of lettuce a week.

With a commitment to soil and water management, Graeme is working to improve productivity and future access to the natural resources required to ensure the profitability of operations in the future. The success and growth of Pitchford Produce has, however, presented its own challenges, with water use an ongoing concern.

"We have two bores on the property, with limited supply due to their capacity and government regulations on water use in the region."

Ensuring the continued growth in the business has required careful planning and investments in water efficiency. This has seen Pitchford Produce recently adopt a drip irrigation system.

"We constantly have to monitor the new system to find the right balance, so I have a couple of soil moisture probes down to help control the watering. I am noticing a definite



saving watering the younger plants, with the half grown to mature plants using similar to my previous system."

Such continuous monitoring through soil probes and testing is helping to refine the process.

"We are currently working to reduce our water use further with the system as we learn more about the system. Since switching over, I am learning more about how to increase the water holding capacity of the soil so we can retain more of it in

the rootzone."

"One of the best investments I have made on the property is an irrigation controller," said Mr Pitchford.

"This allows me to save time turning the irrigation on and off manually and set irrigation through the night when the power is cheaper and there is less evaporation."

Graeme also uses the system for fertiliser application, allowing for controlled application more regularly on the sandy soils,

which prevents over-application and run-off into nearby waterways.

Over time, Graeme Pitchford hopes to further reduce the amount of synthetic fertiliser used in his operation and grow crops using less chemicals where possible. To do this, he is working to build up organic matter and beneficial microbial activity in his soils to increase their nutrient and water holding capacities.

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Rooftop farming future for Big Apple

New York City may be known as a concrete jungle, but researchers from the University of Columbia have argued that there is a potential 3,200 acres of arable land on rooftops throughout the city.

The University of Columbia's Urban Design Lab has investigated the potential of establishing urban and rooftop farmland in central New York City, to supplement existing supplies and shorten the supply chain to feed its ever-growing populace. Effectively using the urban space would ensure

that food production areas are located close to populations and help conserve fuel and electricity use in the supply-chain.

The move could potentially lead to greater efficiencies in energy and transport of fuels, and serves as a future model for food production in major

centres, according to the University's researchers.

Other benefits include assistance with the insulation of buildings to preserve energy and providing employment in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

In recent years, New York has seen a number of smaller, community-based farms spring

up across the skyline. Projects such as the Eagle Street Rooftop Farm in Brooklyn and the commercial-scale Brooklyn Grange are pushing the boundaries of rooftop farming, proving that these farms can be feasible, albeit smaller scale, operations.

With continued growth in urban centres worldwide, urban farming could potentially be implemented on a large scale in the future.



The report can be downloaded at www.urbandesignlab.columbia.edu

EnviroVeg info session

EnviroVeg information sessions have commenced for 2012, offering the opportunity for Australian growers to hear from leading industry speakers.

In the coming months, AUSVEG Environment Coordinator Jordan Brooke-Barnett will be visiting regions throughout Australia to talk on a range of environmental issues of interest and relevance to growers.

The recent information session in Virginia, South Australia, received a strong turnout, with local growers having the opportunity to hear an exceptional line-up of speakers. Coles Head of Quality, Policy and Governance, Ms Jackie Healing, was on hand to talk about quality

and sustainability initiatives at the major retailer and answer questions from growers. In addition, Mr Julian Carbone of the Adelaide Produce Market updated growers on the current market conditions and trends at South Australia's centre for vegetable distribution.

"As part of the EnviroVeg Program, AUSVEG is committed to offering opportunities for our growers to benefit from the expertise of leading industry figures and hear about how to easily and effectively implement environmental practices on their properties," said AUSVEG

Environment Coordinator Mr Jordan Brooke-Barnett.

"As many of our growers are very busy, especially during the summer seasons, we have ensured that we bring the events to regions throughout Australia so growers can benefit from hearing from some of the industry's most prominent thinkers."

With an exciting forward schedule of events for the year, AUSVEG will be bringing EnviroVeg information sessions to a number of locations over the coming months, including in Bathurst at the Bathurst

RSL on 23 March starting at 6.00pm. Vegetable growers are encouraged to register their interest for these events and sign up to the AUSVEG weekly email update for information about upcoming events by emailing info@ausveg.com.au.

For more information on the EnviroVeg Program or to register for the EnviroVeg Seminar in Bathurst Contact:
Jordan Brooke-Barnett
AUSVEG Environment Coordinator
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Advancing Australia at AgriPro Asia

For the second year running, AUSVEG has showcased the strong and prosperous vegetable and potato industries of Australia to the world, by taking part in the 2011 AgriPro Asia Conference in Hong Kong.



AUSVEG Director Paul Bogdanich and AUSVEG Senior Communications Officer Courtney Burger attended the three-day AgriPro Asia conference, in addition to fronting a booth dedicated to promoting the Australian vegetable and potato sectors to the Asian market.

Recognising the importance of Australia within the global horticulture industry, Mr Bogdanich was invited to give a speech to discuss the ways Australian horticulture is advancing, not only with regards to technology but also in production and quality.

"The Australian vegetable and potato industries are some of the most advanced agricultural industries in the world, and this is due in part to our Research and Development levy," said Mr Bogdanich.

"As Australian produce is of an incredibly high standard, and produced in a highly efficient fashion, this provides Australian growers with opportunities

to provide for growing global markets."

"China is another of these nations which is becoming increasingly developed, and the Australian vegetable and potato growing industries can see many great opportunities to supply produce to the growing Chinese middle class," he said.

International networking has the dual role of remaining informed about what is happening internationally in order to bring back knowledge to share with the local industry. It also provides a platform to promote the Australian industry to key players from across the globe.

AgriPro Asia provided an invaluable opportunity for networking with international leaders within agriculture and endorsing the Australian vegetable and potato industries as a viable option to source some of the world's freshest and highest quality produce.

Australia currently has a Free Trade Agreement in conjunction

with New Zealand for the countries of ASEAN - Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The agreement is considered Australia's most ambitious trade deal so far. It marks a step forward in Australian international trade relations and heralds the potential for further growth of Australia within the wider Asian region.

Leading vegetable industry economist and *Vegetables Australia* columnist Ian James also spoke at the conference,

outlining the strong economic contribution of the Australian vegetable sector. Mr James stated that the gross value of production in 2011 was just over USD\$3 billion, with the volume of production close to 3.5 million tonnes.

The enthusiasm and overwhelming praise shown by international industry leaders towards the Australian vegetable and potato industries is a credit to all growers of this nation and AUSVEG looks forward to promoting the Australian market to the world again at AgriPro Asia 2012.



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Chemical security: *have your say*

Industry and members of the community have until 30 March 2012 to comment on measures designed to reduce the risks of common chemicals getting into the wrong hands and being used to make homemade bombs.

There are literally tens of thousands of chemicals used daily in Australia for commercial and household purposes. There are over 400,000 chemical-based products on the market, which are used by some 570,000 workplaces and millions of Australian consumers.

The vast majority of these chemical products have important and legitimate uses. In the wrong hands, however, some chemicals can be used to make lethal weapons.

Terrorism remains a significant threat to Western societies, including Australia. While terrorists use a wide-range of weapons to pursue their objectives, the ease of availability of chemicals in Australia makes homemade explosives an ideal weapon.

In 2011, we saw the devastating effects of precursor chemicals when a homemade explosive device was detonated in Oslo, Norway, killing eight people and injuring 90. That

bomb was created using chemical materials that are readily available in Australia, including fertiliser, nitromethane and aluminium.

So far, Australia has been fortunate in not having experienced a direct terrorist attack on its own soil. However, Australia has still been impacted significantly through terrorism incidents worldwide, many of which involved chemical explosives.

Australia's threat level remains at 'medium,' which means authorities believe a terrorist attack could occur. This ongoing concern has driven governments and industry to work together to determine practical ways of minimising the risk of chemicals being misused by terrorists to make homemade explosives.

Part of this work is a Regulation Impact Statement (RIS), that weighs up the costs and benefits of a number of different policy options, including a targeted awareness

campaign, codes of practice and supply-chain regulation.

Stakeholders have an important opportunity to help shape government policy on this issue by commenting on the RIS. In particular, this is your chance to put forward your views and comment on issues such as cost, effectiveness and likely uptake of a range of measures. These include: employee and contractor checking, inventory and consignment control, security during transport and storage and point-of-sale procedures.

The Attorney-General's Department (AGD) is particularly interested in receiving input from businesses that manufacture, handle or use any products that contain the following chemicals:

- Hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2).
- Ammonium perchlorate (NH_4ClO_4).
- Sodium chlorate ($NaClO_3$)
- Sodium nitrate ($NaNO_3$)
- Nitric acid (HNO_3)
- Potassium nitrate (KNO_3)

- Potassium chlorate ($KClO_3$)
- Nitromethane (CH_3NO_2)
- Sodium perchlorate ($NaClO_4$)
- Sodium azide (NaN_3)
- Potassium perchlorate ($KClO_4$)

Comments and input received during the consultation process will inform the final 'Decision RIS', including the recommended course of action.

This article was contributed by the Attorney-General's Department.

i For more information: The public consultation period commenced on 3 February and ends on 30 March 2012. To obtain a copy of the Consultation RIS and to find out how to make a submission, please refer to the Attorney-General's Department (AGD) Chemical Security program. Website: www.chemicalsecurity.gov.au/RIS or contact AGD on Telephone: (02) 6141 2925 or (02) 6141 3012.



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Ask the industry

with Scott Mathew

Scott Mathew, Technical Services Lead at Syngenta, discusses soil-borne diseases and how they can be managed.

Question: Why is it that sometimes we see soil-borne diseases and other times we don't see them?

Soil-borne diseases can exist in the soil for long periods of time without causing an outbreak of disease in plants. Disease outbreaks are generally either caused by an increase in the population of the disease, or by an increase in the susceptibility of the plant. The population of the disease is dependent on whether the soil conditions are favourable for its growth and survival. These conditions are related to:

- Soil pH.
- Soil water content.
- Oxygen level.
- Nutrient level.
- The activities of other soil organisms.

Question: How, or why, do diseases attack some of our plantings?

To enter a plant root, the bacteria or fungi must first be present in the rhizosphere of the plant. The disease then attaches to the root surface of the plant if it is susceptible to infection, most likely by the use of hair-like structures, and enters the root. Some diseases enter through areas that have been damaged (e.g. by insects or other diseases etc). Some fungi and bacteria can produce enzymes that dissolve the chemical compounds that make up the cell wall.

Question: What soil-borne diseases are the most common?

The most common soil-borne diseases in horticulture include pre and post-emergence damping-off (commonly *Fusarium*, *Pythium* and *Rhizoctonia* species) and root rot (for example *Phytophthora*).

Rhizoctonia root rot (*Rhizoctonia solani*) infection occurs in warm to hot temperatures and only requires moderate moisture levels. The fungus is found in all natural soils and can survive for indefinite periods, either in the soil or on host plants. Infected plants often have slightly sunken lesions on the stem at, or below, the soil line.

Pythium Root Rot (*Pythium spp*) is similar to Rhizoctonia. It is extremely common and widespread in soil and can be characterised by a soft rot of the stem, with white, fluffy fungal growth at or above ground level. *Pythium* is encouraged by excessive moisture but once established, can remain viable even when soil conditions change.

Phytophthora root rot (*Phytophthora spp*) is generally associated with root rots of established plants, but is also involved in damping-off. *Phytophthora* enter the root tips and cause a water-soaked brown to black rot similar to *Pythium*.

Fusarium usually enters the plant through young roots and then grows into and up the water conducting vessels of the roots and stem. As the water conducting vessels are plugged and collapse, the



Scott Mathew, Technical Services Lead at Syngenta

water supply to the leaves is blocked. With a limited water supply, leaves begin to wilt on sunny days and recover at night. Wilting may first appear in the top of the plant or in the lower leaves. This process may continue until the entire plant is wilted, stunted or dead.

Question: How can I manage soil-borne diseases?

When considering control options for soil-borne diseases, it is important to remember that there are no simple answers and an integrated approach is required. Some good advice to follow includes:

- Plant material (cuttings, transplants, and seeds) should come from a reliable source.
- Tools or machinery should be sterilised before being used.
- Dispose of diseased plant material by burning or composting.
- Prevent temperature and moisture stress (high temperatures and low soil moisture predispose many plants to disease).
- Avoid excessive irrigation.
- Transplant during cool, moist weather when mild conditions are forecast for a period of time.
- Try to limit damage to the plant roots by digging or fertilising in hot, dry weather.

Ask the industry

If you have a question that you would like addressed, please call Syngenta on 1800 067 108 or email **Vegetables Australia**: info@ausveg.com.au
Please note that your questions may be published.

Vegetable industry: the facts

The economic sub-program of the Vegetable Industry Development Program (VIDP) provides a range of data on the vegetable industry's structure, production, exports, imports and financial performance, as well as research and analytical papers, which can be accessed through the AUSVEG website. This article, by industry economist Ian James, aims to inform by providing a snapshot of the vegetable industry.

The vegetable industry is big

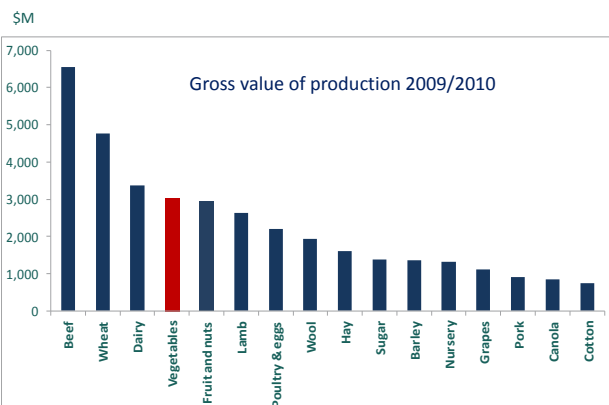
Vegetable growers need to sing it from the trees. The vegetable industry is a hugely significant part of Australian

sale) in 2009/10 was just over \$3 billion dollars. The vegetable industry was larger in value than the wool, lamb and poultry industries, more than double the size of the sugar industry and more than three times the size of the cotton industry.

lettuces. But did you know that vegetable growers produce around 45,000 tonnes of broccoli, 24,000 tonnes of zucchini, 20,000 tonnes of leafy Asian vegetables, 2,000 tonnes of parsley and 250 tonnes of okra?

and weakness of the industry. The strength is that growers' incomes are not as beholden to price movements in world markets. The weakness is that an important source of growth has not been used to expand sales. Growth in demand is limited to population growth, or the ability to lift per capita consumption - a difficult task.

Vegetables: fourth largest agriculture industry by value



Source: ABS 7503.0 Value of Australian Commodities Produced, Australia 2010

agriculture. Taking the latest figures published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the vegetable industry is, by value, Australia's fourth largest agricultural industry. The gross value of vegetable production (measured at the first point of

Diverse range of products

You name it, Australian vegetable growers grow it. In terms of volume, the largest tonnages of production are what you may suspect: potatoes, tomatoes, onions, carrots and

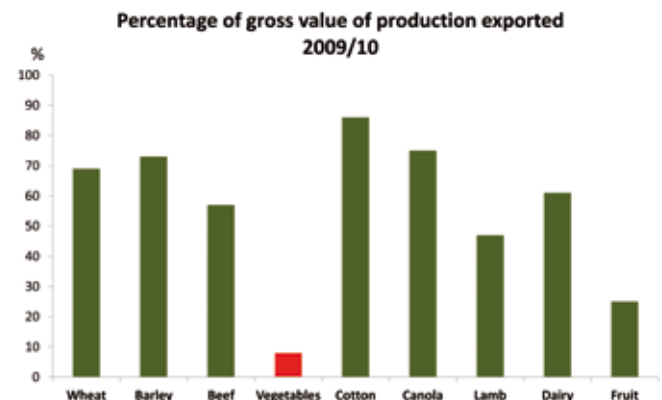
Industry is focused on domestic markets

Vegetables are mainly sold in domestic markets and, unlike other agricultural industries, the level of exports as a percentage of total production is low and has remained flat over recent years. This is both a strength

Some export success

Carrots are Australia's largest vegetable export and in the 12 months leading to November 2011, 66,781 tonnes were exported with a value of just

Vegetables low export propensity



Source: ABARES Australian Commodities Statistics 2010, Australian Commodities March Quarter 2010, vegetable industry data. Figures are approximate as exports may have been produced in previous years and stocked.

over \$50 million. The next four largest exports were onions, vegetable seeds for sowing, potatoes and asparagus. Carrot growers have been successful in expanding into markets in the Middle East to add to existing markets in Asia. Onions are predominately exported to Europe and Japan, while vegetable seeds are sold to a range of countries, with substantial two-way trade with the Netherlands. Potato exports are mainly to South Korea and Indonesia and 90 per cent of asparagus exports are to Japan.

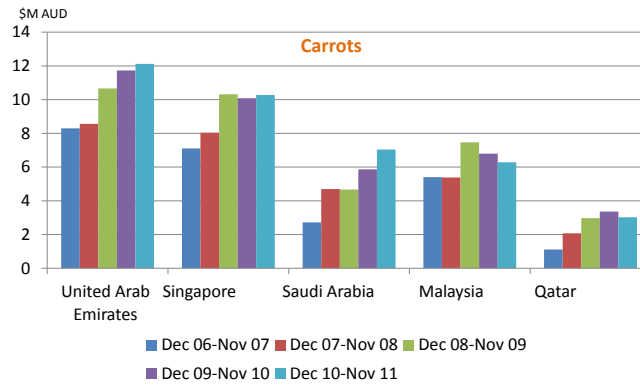
Contrast between the states

The vegetable industry, although geographically dispersed, has regional pockets where vegetable farms are concentrated. There are some differences in the structure of the vegetable industry between the Australian states. Queensland is the largest producing state. Growers in NSW are, on average, located on smaller vegetable farms and are less profitable. Concentrated as they are in the Sydney Basin though, the capital values of their farms are higher per hectare. South Australia has the highest proportion of undercover vegetable growers. Reflecting their historic distance from the large population centres, a high proportion of Tasmanian vegetable production is destined for the processing market and a higher proportion of vegetable production in Western Australia is exported. The Northern Territory produces a unique range of exotic Asian vegetables such as gourds, bitter melons, okra and snake beans.

Vegetables are fantastic value for money

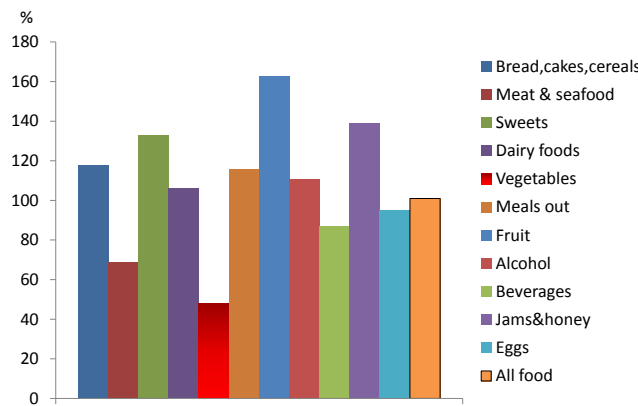
Price rises for vegetables at the retail level are always highlighted, but in actual fact, vegetable prices are dirt cheap. Vegetable price increases are usually due to catastrophic climatic events. Vegetable growers are quick to respond to price signals and supply shortages are quickly eliminated, often at the expense of vegetable grower profitability. This occurred in 2011, with vegetable prices falling progressively throughout the year following the price spike caused by flooding in Queensland and Victoria early in 2011. Vegetable prices were

Top five export destinations for largest vegetable export last five years



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics/ World Trade Atlas

% increase in retail prices of major food categories in the CPI September 1989 to December 2011



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistic 6401.0 - Consumer Price Index, Australia, Dec 2011

Business sustainability

Year	Vegetable growers with negative cash income %	Average cash income per farm \$	Vegetable growers with negative business profit %	Average profit per farm \$
2005-06	18	120,120	54	43,020
2006-07	17	165,210	59	79,940
2007-08	13	165,990	56	74,890
2008-09	12	154,390	55	59,350
2009-10	17	142,100	57	41,900

Source: ABARES -Annual Survey of Vegetable Farms

lower at the end of 2011 than they were at the close of 2010. Over the longer term, vegetable prices have lagged behind other food prices. Since vegetables were first measured

as a stand-alone category in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in September 1989, vegetable prices have risen at the retail level by 48 per cent. The overall index has risen 84 per cent and

the food component 101 per cent. Of all the major food sub components in the CPI, only poultry prices have risen less than vegetables.

Business sustainability

In any given year, a number of vegetable growers fail to produce a positive cash-flow, let alone earn a business profit (farm cash income - imputed grower and family labour - depreciation + stock changes). Graph 5 shows that in 2009/10, 17 per cent of growers failed to generate positive cash flow and 57 per cent failed to generate a business profit. Growers may move in and out of this situation due to uncontrollable circumstances such as weather.

Vegetable growers are becoming more specialised

Data is collected on the number of vegetables grown by each grower. Over the four year period to 2008-09, the number of growers specialising in producing one vegetable grew from 44 per cent to 55 per cent. In the most recent year for which data is available, only 9 per cent of growers grew more than four vegetables. Vegetable growers are tending to focus on a limited range of vegetables, concentrating resources and maximising economies of scale.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- The vegetable industry provides a substantial contribution to Australian agriculture.
- In 2011, carrots achieved an export value of \$50 million, the highest of any Australian vegetable.
- Statistics show that growers are increasingly becoming more specialised, limiting their production to one vegetable.

i For more information: Ian James is Project Leader of the Vegetable Industry Developments Program's Economic Sub-Program. There is a wealth of information on the vegetable industry and more detail can be found on the AUSVEG website. Website: www.ausveg.com.au/resources/industrystatistics.htm.



John Deere to deliver Convention display

The 2012 AUSVEG National Convention will play host to an impressive display of machinery from John Deere.

With the AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence just around the corner, AUSVEG is thrilled to announce the continued involvement of John Deere.

The tractor icon will present an array of machinery for attendees to view and walk amongst at the 2012 Trade Show.

John Deere Tactical Segment Manager, Royce Bell, said the company was pleased to be

involved in the Convention once again.

“John Deere is proud to be a partner in attendance at the AUSVEG [2012 National Convention].”

Mr Bell said a sophisticated display of technology would be presented for attendees in Hobart.

“For this year’s event, we are focusing on our products and technology that can impact growers through machine, product, technology and dealer

support,” said Mr Bell.

“We will showcase new products and highlight the integration of new technology and software that can assist growers’ in-field applications.”

In the face of an ever-modernising industry, Mr Bell said that the display would point towards the future of farming machinery.

“This is beyond the traditional tractor application. Today’s vegetable and horticultural industry is more advanced

and business-driven than ever before, and the focus on innovation and productivity is evident,” he added.

AUSVEG National Marketing Manager Simon Coburn said he expected the display to be among the highlights of the Trade Show component of the Convention.

“We know growers always relish the opportunity to get up close and observe all the new machinery, and the large display from John Deere will offer them

“Growers always relish the opportunity to get up close and observe all the new machinery, and the large display from John Deere will offer them just that.”



just that,” said Mr Coburn.

“They’re not all just big toys to look at though - I’m sure a lot of growers will see real on-site applications for the machinery,” he added.

Mr Bell said the company was still finalising just what would be on display at the Trade Show,

but promised more would be revealed soon.

“Further information will be shared as we descend on Hobart in May,” said Mr Bell.

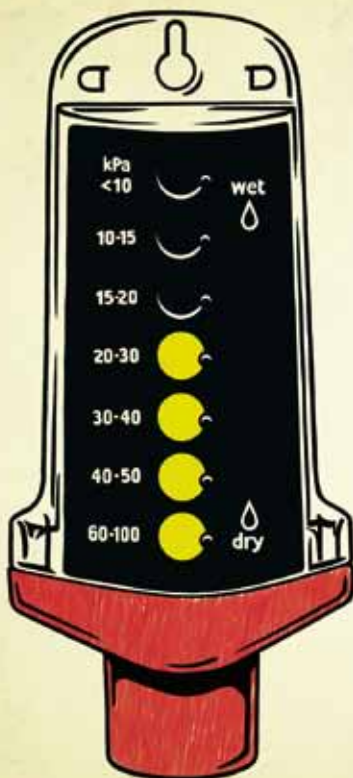
Delegate registrations are selling rapidly for the 2012 AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for

Excellence. The biggest event on the horticultural calendar takes place between May 10-12 in Hobart. For more information, visit the www.ausveg.com.au/convention or contact the team at AUSVEG.



For more information:

AUSVEG
Website: www.ausveg.com.au/convention
Telephone: (03) 9822 0388
Email: convention@ausveg.com.au



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Around the states

Victoria



There has been huge concern expressed over the recent price discounting by major supermarkets, with AUSVEG and state associations providing informed responses to the media.

Growers can no longer sustain below farm-gate prices and a short-term marketing ploy will not provide lasting confidence from consumers.

Work safety for farm employees has been openly discussed at last January's VGA Vic Executive Committee Meeting.

There is no doubt that technology advancement is enhancing communication within our industry.

Some aspects, however, are causing disquiet for growers. One distraction in particular comes from workers' mobile phones, which can increase the risk of on-farm injuries. The VGA Vic Executive Committee has strongly advised Victorian vegetable growers to include in their Farm Induction Session and Company Rules that mobile phones and other such devices must not be used during working shifts.

A meeting of growers and machinery engineers was held in January to provide positive input and guidelines for vegetable growers in relation to the worker safety issue of unmanned slow moving machinery. This meeting proved very effective, with all growers attending providing their

individual solutions of operations with remote controls, lanyards, emergency stop controls and kill switches as safeguards for employees.

Guidelines are now being drafted in a positive proactive action by the VGA Vic Executive Committee for general discussion with Worksafe.

Across-state workshops scheduled for March will include a presentation of the findings of the *Manual Handling Project Reference Group*, with Andrew Sullivan from Ballarat University. The project, conducted by the Victorian Farm Centre, has been gathering information and assessing solutions associated with planting, picking and packing in the vegetable industry.

The project has a clear objective to identify situations that are deemed as hazardous for manual handling operators, that would contribute to major

injury claims in the vegetable industry. VGA Vic has had three representatives on the reference group in reviewing possible solutions to provide practical outcomes to the problem.

Finally, the VGA Vic IDO team has recently welcomed John Runting, who replaces Slobodan Vujovic. After a two year part-time engagement, Slobodan has taken up a full time position with Compost Victoria.

John is covering the south east Victorian vegetable growing areas and can be contacted by mobile 0417 356 364 or at idoeast@vgavic.org.au.

Tony Imeson

VGA Victoria
Executive Officer
Phone: (03) 9687 4707
Fax: (03) 9687 4723
Email: contact@vgavic.org.au

Western Australia



It has been yet another busy period for vegetablesWA. On January 31, Coles made an announcement that they would be decreasing retail produce prices by up to 50 per cent nationally and by up to 30 per cent in Western Australia. Obviously, this is bad news for many growers if they are expected to absorb these reductions and the likely spill-over effects on other markets. The timing of the announcement was particularly disappointing

in Western Australia, given that it followed a heat wave which left a scarcity of produce, rather than the glut being experienced on the east coast.

As a result, the Executive Officer, Jim Turley, and Policy and Program Manager, John Shannon, have been very busy representing our growers in the media across the spectrum of print, radio and TV. This has included securing the front page of *The West Australian* newspaper and ongoing appearances on the ABC *Country Hour*.

vegetablesWA has also visited Canberra and met with a number of senior political figures to represent our growers on important issues such as this and the Horticulture Code of Conduct.

The 'Fresh From WA Farms' campaign in *The West Australian* also continues to

roll-out, covering off on an ever increasing range of vegetable lines with grower profiles, preparation tips and health messages.

The vegetablesWA Good Practice demonstration projects based in Carnarvon, the metropolitan region and the south west continue to score goals. Please contact us if you would like more information about the results or when the next information session may be held.

We are also delighted to announce that we have recruited an outstanding new Field Extension Officer to replace Charlotte Butler, who has followed her partner in moving to New Zealand. The new team member is Ms Sarah Houston. Sarah has had a successful career in agribusiness and finance at the National Australia Bank,

experience in international horticulture market research based in Berlin, as well as a degree with first class honours in horticulture, where she was a state finalist for a Rhodes Scholarship. Sarah also comes with a grower background as her family runs the well known Houston's Farms in Tasmania. We are looking forward to what vegetablesWA can continue to achieve with Sarah on board to assist our growers.

Jim Turley

vegetablesWA
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Email: pga-vga@vegetableswa.com.au

New South Wales



Well it seems that Coles can't start the year without controversy. Last year it was milk, this year it's "Down Down" campaign has moved on to fruit and vegies. NSW Farmers has expressed concern at what the impacts of a potential price war on fresh fruit and vegetables will be. We estimate that at the current wholesale price, Coles must be losing \$8 a tray, for instance, on its promotion on truss tomatoes. Even if Coles does not reduce the price it is paying for these tomatoes, the pressure on other retailers to match Coles' price must

eventually lead to reduced prices at the farm-gate.

In working towards its policy of greater transparency in the market, NSW Farmers has worked in collaboration with the *Horticulture Taskforce* to seek amendments to the *Horticulture Code of Conduct*, making a submission on the Hon Bob Katter MP's private member's bill to amend the Horticulture Code. Significantly, the submission outlined the need for the *Horticulture Code* to apply to all sales made by growers of horticultural produce. This seeks to correct the problem that the Code currently only applies to arrangements entered into from 15 December 2006. NSW Farmers is aware of too many experiences in the industry in which growers have been pressured into back-dated arrangements to avoid the requirements of the Code. This needs to be fixed.

The submission also calls for greater certainty in the sale of

produce by recommending that all arrangements for sales from growers explicitly state whether the sale is to a merchant, or otherwise as a placement with the wholesaler to act as an agent to on sell on behalf of the grower. Furthermore, NSW Farmers believes that the Code needs stronger dispute resolution procedures, and that the current mediation procedures need replacing with compulsory conciliation. NSW Farmers will be seeking to progress these views as 2012 continues.

The Federal Government's *Better Regulation of Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals* Policy has continued with a suite of proposed amendments to the AGVET code legislation being developed. NSW Farmers holds concerns as to whether these proposed reforms will increase the difficulty in obtaining regulatory approval for chemicals in horticultural crops, where the

minor use permit framework currently provides safe and effective access. NSW Farmers will be making a submission to the Government on the proposed reform.

NSW Farmers continues to collaborate with Horticulture Australia on the Vegetable Industry Development Program (VIDP). For the latest news please check our website: www.nswfarmers.org.au/policy_committees/horticulture.

Peter Darley

NSW Farmers' Association
Horticulture Committee
Chairman
Level 25, 66 Goulburn Street
Sydney, NSW 2000
Phone: (02) 8251 1804
Fax: (02) 8251 1750

Tasmania



Too often we take ourselves for granted. That is especially true of farmers. We tend to live in our own world and expect everyone else to understand the trials and tribulations of producing potatoes, growing grain, or raising cattle and sheep.

It doesn't happen like that. There is too much going on in the rest of the world for people to pay too much attention to things that don't impact on them directly and immediately. You can't therefore assume that everyone else understands your business. Certainly, you should not take it for granted that they are going to support your business come hell or high water. Communicating what you

do is something you have to work at constantly.

That is why we must make the most of the opportunity that this year, the 2012 *Australian Year of the Farmer*, provides to all of us. As an industry, we have many good stories to tell - and there is no better time to share these than now.

Black clouds have hovered over the world economy for the past three years now, since the start of the global financial crisis. We have seen lightning strikes in Greece and Italy to follow the meltdown in the USA. The Australian economy is not immune to what is happening. When Europe and the USA sneeze, we may also catch cold. The minerals boom has quarantined us so far, but that can be subject to 'boom or bust' cycles.

Tasmania has 3,500 farms that produce milk worth \$292 million, vegetables \$241 million, cattle and calves \$170 million, as well as a host of niche food, wine and fibre products. In 2012, the value of agricultural production at the farm-gate in this state is predicted to tip \$2 billion.

That is our contribution to a national industry that is

worth almost \$50 billion each year to the economy, or 12 per cent of gross domestic product. Nationally, agriculture supports the jobs of 1.6 million Australians in farming and related industries. That is, 17.2 per cent of the national workforce. Few people realise that more than half those jobs are in the cities, in industry sectors such as food retailing, accommodation, food processing, cafes and restaurants.

At the same time, we manage 61 per cent of the Australian landmass and we deliver significant environmental outcomes. The latest statistics show that farmers reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 40 per cent between 1990 and 2006.

Life wasn't meant to be easy - but few people know that Australian farmers are among the most self-sufficient in the world. On average, government support constitutes just four per cent of average farm income here, compared to 61 per cent in Norway, 23 per cent in the European Union, 17 per cent in Canada and nine per cent in the USA. In addition, that four per cent includes things such as the

diesel fuel rebate, which is not a subsidy at all, and exceptional circumstances assistance to farmers coping with extreme weather events.

We can crow for as long as we like about how good we are, but self praise is no recommendation and there is nothing like third-party endorsement. That's the aim of the 2012 *Australian Year of the Farmer* - to have all Australians recognise the important role farmers play in their everyday lives.

There used to be a bumper sticker around that said something like "thank a farmer for your next meal". That's the message we need to get across to everyone in this lucky country.

Jan Davis

Tasmanian Farmers & Graziers
Association Policy & Advocacy
Chief Executive Officer
Cnr Cimitiere and Charles
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Phone: (03) 6332 1800
Fax: (03) 6331 4344

Queensland



Growcom has welcomed the draft *Australian Dietary Guidelines* and the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating*, released by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), which highlight the scientific evidence of the health benefits of a diet rich in fruit and vegetables.

Growcom has long argued the benefits to Australians of increased consumption of fruit

and vegetables, to reduce the incidence of diseases such as cancer, diabetes and coronary heart disease.

The NHMRC report confirms that reductions in cardiovascular and cancer disease mortality in the population can be achieved, particularly with increased consumption of fruit and vegetables.

These health problems are costing the economy millions of dollars every year. It has been estimated that the health care cost of colorectal, breast, lung and prostate cancer, associated with low vegetable consumption, costs around \$58.8 million a year. The health care cost of breast and lung cancer associated with low fruit consumption is estimated at

\$29.4 million. Increasing fruit intake alone, by just one serve per day, would save the health system \$8.6 million a year in the cost of breast and lung cancer.

With a rising incidence of obesity, public health strategies to increase consumption of fruit and vegetables should be a priority for all Australian governments.

While the Go for 2&5® campaign was shown to be successful in lifting Queenslanders' consumption of fruit and vegetables in the short number of years in which it ran, the Queensland Government has shelved the Program.

Growcom urges major government investment in this Program (or a similar public health strategy) over a longer-

term.

With preventable, diet-related diseases taking up an increasing amount of the health budget and hospital beds, an investment in educating Queenslanders about a healthy diet will have a long-term pay off, in terms of a reduced burden on the health budget and healthier, fitter people in the workplace and our communities.

Alex Livingstone

Growcom
Chief Executive Officer
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Fax: (07) 3620 3880

South Australia



GrowSA has launched its new OH&S, induction and training record system called Farm Card during February, with two 2-day training sessions aimed at the long-term unemployed who have shown an interest in the Agri/Food sector.

At this stage, the participants have come through the Job Network systems here in

metropolitan Adelaide, but a further two courses are scheduled in both the Riverland and Murray Bridge regions beginning early March.

With the imminent introduction of national OH&S regulations, Farm Card provides valuable solutions for growers, processors and packers and helps manage these new requirements.

Farm Card is versatile and can provide a generic program for smaller employers, a tailored solution for larger employers and a benefit to proactive employees.

Farm Card provides a full database of training records for employees that can be accessed on a national

basis, and tracks currency of chemical handling, first aid and other compliance based qualifications.

All training within the Farm Card framework is industry based and can be tailored to fit specific needs. Employers have embraced the concept as it provides them with personnel that have been given a background to the industry. It also works as a vetting process for workers on their behalf.

As the industry body in South Australia, GrowSA knows and understands the needs of all sections of the industry, so employers can have the confidence that a potential employee presenting themselves with a Farm Card may be better

able to fulfil the requirements needed than one who has not been through the course.

Farm Card will also be available to existing workers who will find it a valuable tool if, and when, changing jobs, as their information will be available to potential employers Australia-wide.

Mike Redmond

Chief Executive Officer
Grow SA Ltd
Virginia SA 5120
Phone: (08) 8282 9200
Email: mike.redmond@growsa.com.au

Calendar of events

March 2012

23 March

EnviroVeg Seminar – Bathurst
Bathurst RSL Club, Bathurst NSW

For more information: AUSVEG

Phone: (03) 9822 0388 Email: info@ausveg.com.au

May 2012

10 - 12 May

2012 AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence
Wrest Point Casino Hotel, Hobart, Tasmania

For more information: AUSVEG

Phone: (03) 9822 0388 Email: convention@ausveg.com.au

October 2012

17 - 19 October

Eurofruit Congress Southern Hemisphere Conference
NH Lord Charles Hotel, Cape Town, South Africa

For more information: AUSVEG

Phone: (03) 9822 0388 Email: convention@ausveg.com.au

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