

vegetables

australia

September/October 2012

**Joerg
Ellmanns**

**An eye for
the industry**

**Senator John
Madigan**

Vocal point

Kim Martin

**Fostering the future
of Frais Farms**

Paul Howes

**Honing in on
horticulture**

**The most widely distributed
magazine in horticulture**



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vegetables australia

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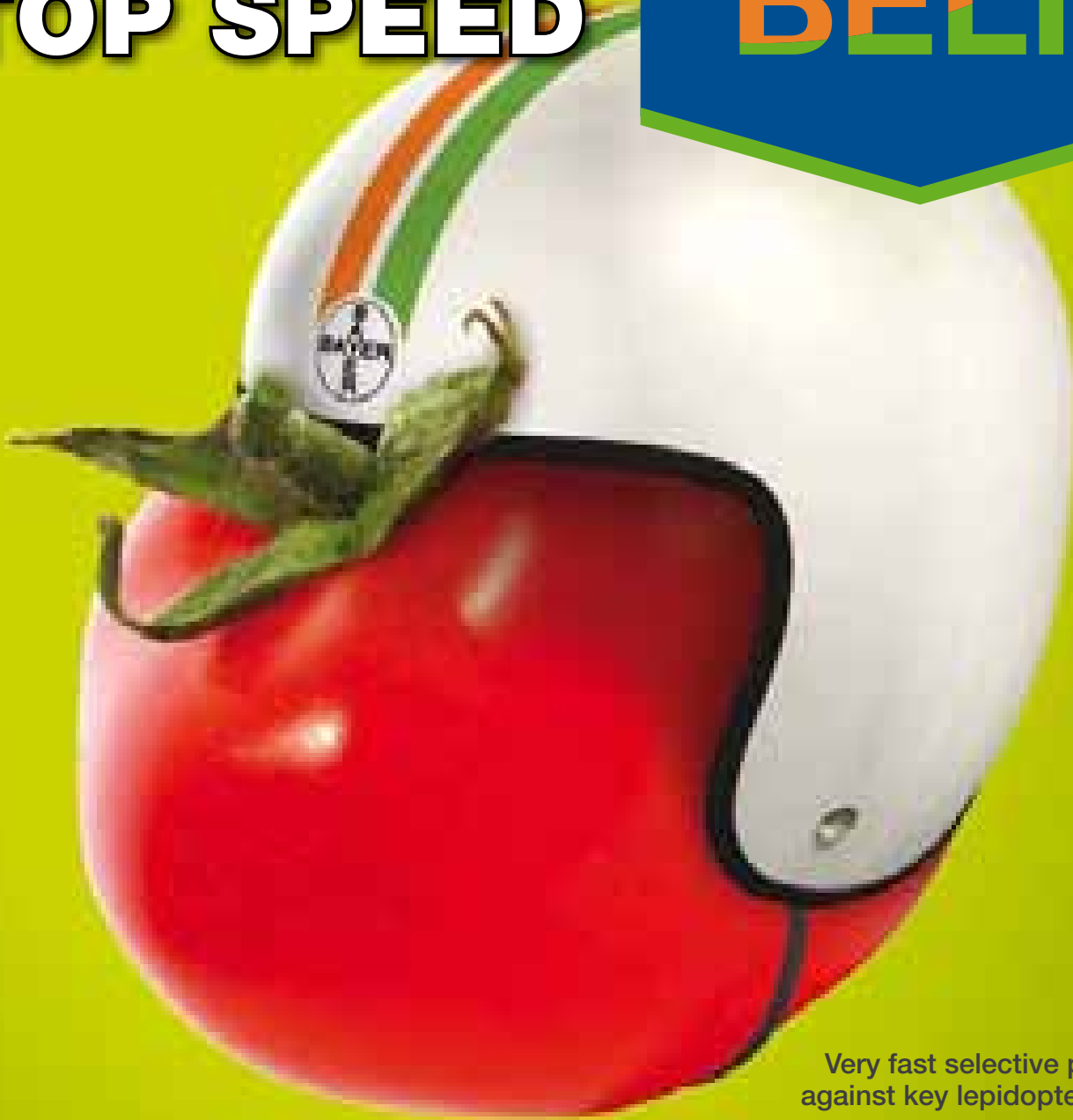
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John Brent

AUSVEG Chairman

After immense frustration and extensive lobbying on the part of AUSVEG, it was with a sense of relief that we saw the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) extend the consultation period relating to the proposed Biosecurity Amendment Bill 2012. Biosecurity is of great significance to our industry, and the implications of any changes in legislation will be felt not only by those in the vegetable industry, but the broader Australian public. It was vital that DAFF responded to AUSVEG's concerns surrounding the inadequate period given to provide feedback, particularly given three of the chapters had yet to be released only days before the consultation period was due to close. Frankly, the previous timeframe was unacceptable. The newly announced consultation period sees the

time for submissions extended until 30 days after receipt of the final chapters of the Bill.

Biosecurity is a national imperative and needs to be given the parliamentary recognition and concern it deserves. The willingness of some in Canberra to approve the importation of fresh potatoes from New Zealand speaks to the fact that we as a country appear to have some way to go in understanding and appreciating its importance. AUSVEG has been extremely vocal on the issue, stressing how catastrophic the consequences could be if *Liberibacter*, or the 'Zebra Chip' disease, was to reach Australian shores as a result of the market access request from New Zealand being approved. There appears to be increasing concern and support in the public domain, the media, and from a wide range of political representatives

around the country. We hope that this potentially disastrous market access request will be rejected as soon as possible and the outdated review from 2009 revisited.

The significance of biosecurity is recognised by AUSVEG not only in its continued political advocacy, but also within this issue of *Vegetables Australia*. AUSVEG Biosecurity Advisor, Dr Kevin Clayton-Greene, offers another column in his 'Biosecurity Brief' series. Dr Clayton-Greene is an asset to the vegetable industry and has remained ever-present during biosecurity discussions with Plant Health Australia, DAFF and other government bodies that deal with plant health matters. On the same theme, Plant Health Australia's CEO, Mr Greg Fraser, contributes a guest column on the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed and how that figures in Australia's

biosecurity activities. Mr Fraser's input is of great value and helps to further the discussion surrounding biosecurity and its importance to the industry.



John Brent
Chairman
AUSVEG

Richard Mulcahy

AUSVEG Chief Executive Officer

Amid all the trials and challenges, the profile and significance of our industry continues to grow. The term 'country of origin labelling' is emerging more frequently in the public and the media. Consumers are starting to think about the ramifications of 'down, down, down' supermarket pricing. It is a difficult time for those in the vegetable industry, but AUSVEG is working hard to try and make a positive impact.

To help realise the industry's objectives in relation to the National Vegetable R&D Program and continue to drive the industry forward by investing in the areas of most need, a new Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) for the vegetable industry was approved by the Horticulture Australia Board in recent months, following several

rounds of national consultation with levy payers facilitated by AUSVEG. The plan has seen the development of three industry Design Teams, comprising growers and industry experts. The Design Teams replace the previous Working and Advisory Groups and will work to design projects that align with the three strategic priorities outlined in the plan - Consumer Alignment, Market and Value Chain Development and Farm Productivity, Resource Use and Management. They will develop projects that target the key R&D areas, to assist in improving the profitability of vegetable growers. The new process will enable a more targeted investment of Research and Development (R&D) funding, meaning projects will be better tailored towards levy payers'

and the national industry's requirements. It is vital that there is a cohesive vision and mechanism to properly support our nation's growers. Through the Design Teams, the objectives and ambition of the SIP can be implemented.

Within the new structure, service providers with specific skill sets will be contracted to carry out projects approved by the Design Teams. There is information contained within this edition of *Vegetables Australia* regarding the avenues through which interested parties can register their details with AUSVEG and HAL. I encourage any individual or organisation who believes they have skills in the three strategic priority areas to provide your details to AUSVEG.



Richard J Mulcahy
Chief Executive Officer
AUSVEG

Editorial

Key developments in Research and Development (R&D) and several high profile features are all present in this extensive edition of *Vegetables Australia*. 'An eye for the industry' (page 10) sees Bayer CropScience's Australian and New Zealand Managing Director, Joerg Ellmanns, speak in-depth about a host of issues affecting the vegetable industry and agriculture in general. Mr Ellmanns' wealth of experience, gained over many years in Australia and across Europe, make his views on the state of the industry, the current skills shortage and a range of other issues, extremely valuable.

Having launched the Australian Manufacturing and Farming Program (AMFP) on the lawns of Canberra (page 9), Senator John Madigan speaks to *Vegetables Australia* about his 'back to basics' approach and the need to get elected officials away from their desks

and out onto the farms and manufacturing sites that their decisions affect (page 25).

National Secretary for the Australian Workers Union and political provocateur, Paul Howes, also shares his opinions on the current climate of the industry, the damaging effect of the supermarket duopoly and the need to take up Asian export opportunities (page 54).

Detailed R&D updates come in the form of a new report surrounding powdery mildew and white blister (page 20); research that aims to benefit beetroot growers (page 15); and a developing project that seeks to unearth higher performing sweet potato varieties to meet market requirements (page 50).

Recent *MasterChef All-Stars* winner and good friend of AUSVEG, Callum Hann, takes time to speak about his efforts to teach a new generation of cooks (page



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Senator John Madigan

34), and established Victorian grower Kim Martin talks at length about his business and the way he has managed to limit his environmental impact (page 39). Elsewhere, Dr Kevin Clayton-Greene (page 17) and Plant Health Australia CEO, Greg Fraser (page 33), each contribute columns on the issue of biosecurity, and Grayson White is profiled in the 'Young grower feature' (page 18). Finally, industry economist Ian James dissects data from the 2011 agriculture census, with some interesting results (page 44).



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Grayson White



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Callum Hann



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Kim Martin

TOP SPEED

PROTECTION AGAINST POTATO MOTH



BELT

Joerg Ellmanns

An eye for the industry - pg 10



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Veggie bites

Facts & figures...

\$1.67 billion

The dollar value for all fresh, frozen and canned vegetables purchased during the first quarter of 2012 was \$1.67 billion, as recorded in Veginsights.

4.4%

Fruit and vegetable prices rose 4.4% in New Zealand during the month of July, reports Statistics New Zealand.

89%

The percentage of households who steamed, boiled, roasted or stir fried vegetables over the first quarter of 2012, as recorded in Veginsights.

40 grams

The amount of fat contained in McDonald's new \$7.95 McLamburger. AUSVEG campaigned strongly in the media for the introduction of a burger using 100% Australian vegetables.

20%

Veginsights reports that during the first three months of this year, 20% of Australian shoppers made more than 6 trips to supermarkets per week.

63%

In the first quarter of 2012, Veginsights reports that carrots were the most popular vegetable, purchased by 63% of households weekly.

90%

A survey conducted through AUSVEG's Weekly Update revealed that 90% of participants did not support the importation of fresh potatoes from New Zealand.

Senators strike while the iron is hot

A host of politicians, media and industry figures were on hand to see the launch of the Australian Manufacturing and Farming Program.



Dick Smith and Senator John Madigan.

The lush lawns of Australian Parliament House, Canberra, were overrun by hot iron, towering grain augers and armoured politicians at the national launch of the Australian Manufacturing and Farming Program (AMFP). Federation Mall played host to the event, which aims to bring the concerns of the Australian agriculture and manufacturing sectors to the attention of Australia's political decision makers. It would be difficult for these concerns to be ignored by Australian politicians, as their normally crisp views of Old Parliament House were obscured by farming machinery and the smoke from the red-hot fire of a blacksmith's forge.

The forge belonged to the man responsible for driving the

program, Democratic Labor Party Senator and former blacksmith, John Madigan. In his maiden address to Parliament, Senator Madigan pledged to establish a program that allowed Members of Parliament to experience the day-to-day issues faced by Australian farmers and manufacturers. The national launch of the AMFP represented the realisation of this pledge. Here though, the Ballarat-based Senator was not alone in his quest, having gained the presence and parliamentary support of the Hon Bob Katter MP and Independent Senator Nick Xenophon.

The official opening of the program was marked by the symbolic smashing of an Australian wine over a

blacksmith's anvil by adventurer and champion of local produce, Dick Smith, clad in an OzE-Mite branded hat.

Senator Madigan addressed the crowd at the launch, highlighting the importance of the manufacturing and farming sectors for the Australian economy. He then passed to Bob Katter, who described how the once thriving wharves in his electorate of Kennedy are now witnessing the closure of many manufacturing businesses, stressing the need for urgent measures to be taken to reverse the situation.

To the delight of onlookers, Mr Katter then donned a steel Ned Kelly-style helmet and proceeded to regale the crowd with tales of the doomed bushranger's bravery and loyalty

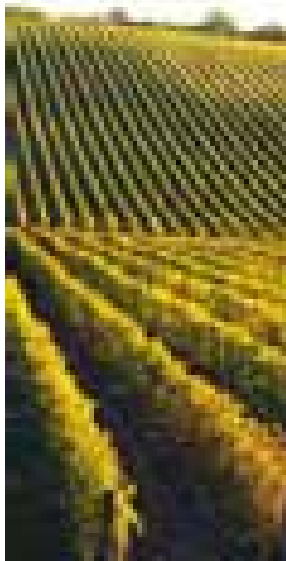
to his fellow outlaws as they made their final stand.

Liberal Party stalwart Bronwyn Bishop and Senator Nigel Scullion were also on hand and joined the group to tour the event, examining the array of Australian produce on offer.

AUSVEG has been closely associated with the Australian Manufacturing and Farming Program since its launch in Ballarat last December. It is hoped that Australian vegetable growing operations will be among the first to host parliamentary visitors as part of the program.

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An eye for the industry

After five years in Australia, Joerg Ellmanns is keenly engaged with the issues facing the Australian horticulture sector. During his time at the AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence in Hobart, Bayer CropScience's Australian and New Zealand Managing Director spoke with *Vegetables Australia* about the state of the industry, the current skills shortage and the need for Australians to place a greater value on a healthy meal.

You spoke at the Convention Agribusiness Leaders Panel about the need for Australian agriculture to not just get better, but to also get smarter. How are we as an industry able to achieve that?

I think we need to accept that some of the challenges we face at the moment - high labour costs, the high Australian dollar and so forth - are around for

the short to mid-term and we should look to other industries for examples and ways to overcome deficiencies in comparison to other markets.

Take, for example, countries like Germany or France, which have traditionally been high-cost countries. In the last 30 years, they defined quality and innovation as the key criteria to ensure their products can be exported. If I translate this

into an Australian context, key Asian markets like China and Indonesia are not able to produce enough food to feed their own people, so they will increasingly rely on imports. Given our close proximity to Asia, I think we need to define the crops which make sense to export to China and Indonesia and find innovative ways to enter those markets.

Is there a way in which we can bridge the gap to enable local growers to feasibly and sustainably export their produce to Asia?

It is a big question and I think we need to look at this in terms of a broader industry approach. I believe that if the entire horticulture industry - not just veggies - speaks with one voice, and collaborates together with

benefits; it's not changing the game immediately. In the short-term, I think there are two things we can do: take costs out where possible and try to find smarter solutions to grow crops. This is where a company like Bayer can help. For example, we've worked with growers and industry partners to determine how selective crop protection products like Belt® and Movento® fit into a holistic approach, to ensure we get the most out of the available tools. Integrated Pest Management programs can reduce the number of sprays used, which can bring input costs down. I think there are a number of things that can be done to help grow healthier crops more efficiently and more sustainably, and it is up to each farmer to decide what makes sense for his business and the best way to go about it.

What role does Bayer hold for Australian growers and the vegetable industry in general in 2012?

Bayer is clearly committed to innovation for the Australian agricultural market. I think it's fair to say that Bayer has the largest local development team on the ground, which ensures our products and solutions are tailored to suit Australian conditions. Secondly, I think the close collaboration we have with industry partners such as AUSVEG, HAL and IPM

continued over page ►



Bayer CropScience's Australian and New Zealand Managing Director, Joerg Ellmanns (left) with Horticulture Australia Chief Executive Officer, John Lloyd.

government and key countries, we can be more influential.

Secondly, I think we can challenge ourselves further. Are we too inward-looking? Can we shift this mindset into an external view and a long-term commitment?

I absolutely appreciate the difficult situation farmers are faced with right now. Much of what the industry is focussing on will see mid to long-term





Technologies, builds on our commitment to deliver smarter solutions to Australian growers. Ultimately, it is about working closely with growers and industry partners to cultivate ideas and answers so that the industry can be more profitable and more sustainable year on year.

You have spoken of the need for Australians to value a healthy meal more than the latest technological gadget. It is a

very effective way of phrasing it, but it seems consumers do not presently place that level of significance on vegetables. How do you see that being amended? Does the industry need to target schools and younger children?

I am absolutely convinced that we need to educate children and students so that they can learn how precious food is, how it is produced, where it comes from and how to help secure its supply in the future. In addition,

we need to better educate people about the significance of agriculture. Take, for example, the last food crisis in 2008-2009, which led to social unrest in some countries. Agriculture - or providing sufficient food for the planet - is actually a peace-keeping exercise. It is probably more important to produce food, than it is to take coal out of a mine. In the long run, I think agriculture will be widely recognised as the most important industry in Australia.

In light of the current skills shortage, one of the things you have identified as being crucial to the future success of the industry is developing a greater skills base in this country. How can the industry encourage more local students to take up AgScience degrees, and how can horticulture better promote itself as an attractive career path?

It is a very difficult question. I mentioned [at the Agribusiness Leaders Panel] that there has



and agronomy graduates. As a research-based company, Bayer is investing in agricultural education to help fuel the motivation of students to pursue careers in AgSciences. The CSIRO CarbonKids Program aims to spark interest in climate science and agriculture at an early age. It offers educational resources for the early, primary and middle years of schooling. After a successful pilot, Bayer has made it possible to roll this program out nationally, with 239 schools now registered in the program. Not only did we provide funding, we also helped design an agricultural module called "Agriculture in a changing climate."

Ultimately, we expect CarbonKids will give young kids an appreciation of the importance of science, as well as motivate undergraduate students to move their area of study into plant science or agronomy.

As the second largest industry in Australia, I think we can also think about attracting international talent to the industry to ensure that we are leveraging global best practices here in Australia.

What are you most proud of to have overseen and been involved with in Australia during your time at Bayer?

When I started with Bayer in Australia four and a half years ago, we were in the middle of a severe drought. If you are a multinational company, and you have a market which does not represent the top five countries around the globe, you start thinking - does it really make sense to maintain a footprint in a country like Australia? But we looked closely at the overall situation of agriculture in this country and I am really proud that we reconfirmed our commitment to agriculture and employed resources to enhance cooperation with organisations such as AUSVEG, HAL, CSIRO and others. Over the past couple of years, we also introduced fantastic new products to the market such as Belt® and Movento®, which is also something I'm really proud of. But of course this is not my doing - it is a credit to the entire team at Bayer CropScience.

been a dramatic decline in the number of university students enrolling in agricultural science studies and, as such, there is a lack of agricultural science graduates. While Australian universities currently graduate only 800 agricultural students per year, the Australian agricultural industry needs 2000 graduates per year. For Australian agriculture to continue to help feed this hungry planet, it needs highly skilled and trained plant science


“We have trust in them and they have trust in us”

Andrew Bogdanich Vegetable farmer, Gingin WA

When Bogdanich Farms was practically wiped out by hail, Ron and his two sons knew they were in real trouble. It would have been tough to maintain the staffing levels and crop needed to replant the farm, but Bankwest understood the risks associated with seasonal vegetables, and were able to provide the financial expertise to get them through the rough patch. Today, Bogdanich Farms is thriving as one of Australia's leading vegetable producers.

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Building better beetroot

A new report unearths a range of recommendations for better beetroot management, writes Karen Shaw.



Processing beetroot growers, keen to improve crop yield, should focus on seed varieties that produce one seedling, rather than multiple plants, and then determine appropriate in-row planting densities, according to the latest Australian research.

The four year research project, *Beetroot Stand Management*, funded by HAL with a voluntary contribution from SPC Ardmona and matched funds from the Australian Government, recommends growers specifically select varieties that, on average, produce just one seedling.

Beetroot is a fast growing biennial root crop, grown from seed, which is clustered together in a cork-like fruit. Problems arise when all seeds - between one and up to five - germinate from the cluster.

Research project leader, Dr Donald Irving of NSW Department of Primary Industries, said that Cowra processing beetroot growers had

noticed that a batch of industry standard Detroit Dark Red seed had produced several seedlings, per seed cluster, which made it difficult for them to determine the right planting densities for a uniform crop.

The growers also wanted to learn more about how planting densities would affect yield, given supermarkets were demanding they produce smaller processing beetroots.

"Where once the industry standard was a beetroot that measured 100mm in diameter - perfect for a hamburger or for canning - the new one litre plastic packaging required smaller beetroots between 50-75mm in diameter," Dr Irving said.

The trials

Dr Irving said the on-field trials started in 2008 and continued for three growing seasons on two commercial beetroot farms. On Farm One, a 1.5m wide flat bed was configured in three rows, 37cm apart. The Farm

Two trial saw seeds planted on raised 15cm beds, in two rows per bed, with the seed planted 10cm from the edge.

The trials examined row orientation in the paddock. Results showed that rows in an east-west direction resulted in a yield loss of 3-4 tonnes per hectare compared to the most northerly facing rows in the three row bed system. The report recommends crops be planted in a north-south orientation if possible, to produce more uniform yielding beetroot crops and to maximise exposure to sun.

Dr Irving said the trial was also focused on seed density.

"We planted beetroot seed, in the rows, spaced from 4cm apart and up to 10cm apart. We found that in most cases, crop yield was barely affected by the sowing distance. This is interesting, because we previously thought that leaving a larger space between seeds in the row would produce much bigger beet and higher yields," Dr Irving said.

"We believe what's happened in the field is that when seeds are planted at higher densities, say at 3-4 cm apart, there is also a high seedling mortality rate," he said.

The research serves to confirm that processing beetroot growers can plant fewer seeds, at a substantial cost saving, and plant them further apart.

"What's really important is that growers constantly monitor the beet growth to determine the optimum time to harvest, based on root size," Dr Irving said.

Seed variety

Growers also wanted information on what varieties to plant to produce beets of consistently good colour, size and ideally a single plant. This was the focus of the second part of the trial, undertaken in glasshouse and field germination and growing tests.

Based on these trials, one grower switched to planting a monogerm variety, because as the report cites: "The



Hand harvesting density trials.



Field trials conducted during the project.



Germinating beetroot seeds.



Globe and cylindrical beetroot.

variety was suitably coloured for processing, the crop was vigorous, the beetroot of good shape and the seed effectively monogerm - meaning that single seeds would produce a single plant."

While at least one, as yet unnamed and not commercially released variety, performed well, the processing industry standard also came out a winner, with its good red colour and globe shape.

Dr Irving said most seed tested were globe shaped, but a cylindrical beet also performed and yielded well. He said while the processing industry was

currently set up for globe shaped beets, the cylindrical shaped tubers might be something to consider in future, but more research into this was needed.

In support of this research, the report says: "It would be of interest to know whether per hectare yields can be increased in cylindrical beets using closer spacing, given that the harvestable root of cylindrical types will explore deeper soils than those of the globe types."

Dr Irving said growers had welcomed the results of the research trials.

"It is important that beetroot growers are armed with enough

information to confidently make on-farm decisions about planting future crops for maximum yields," he said.

THE BOTTOM LINE

New Australian research into processing beetroot recommends:

- Growers select seed varieties that germinate a single, rather than multiple, seedling.
- Growers determine their own seed sowing regime, based on what works on their farm.
- Configure north-south facing rows to maximise production.

The full report is available free to National Vegetable Levy-payers and can be downloaded via the AUSVEG R&D database.



For more information:

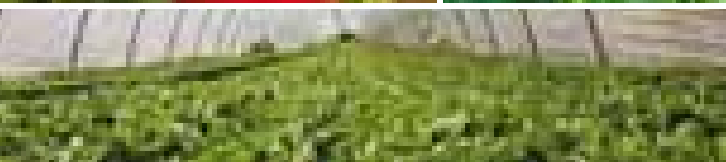
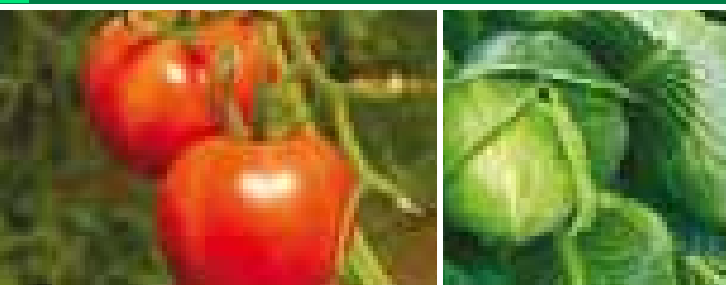
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Biosecurity brief

Dr Kevin Clayton-Greene



In this instalment of *Vegetables Australia's* recurring biosecurity series, AUSVEG biosecurity advisor, Dr Kevin Clayton-Greene, discusses the example of importing fresh potatoes from New Zealand and the threat it holds to Australia's biosecurity.

If Australia were to begin importing fresh potatoes from New Zealand, what is the likelihood of a pest or disease incursion?

If we import potatoes from New Zealand into Australia, there is a reasonable probability - in fact it is almost a certainty - that some of those potatoes will be infected with *Liberibacter* (*Lso*). There is currently no non-destructive test for testing *Liberibacter* in potatoes, so we are going to be importing diseased potatoes. We can say that with almost a 99.9% probability.

How much do we know about the disease, and how can we gauge what its affect on the industry would be?

The current work - and it's just really in its infancy - shows that there are only five of these *Liberibacter* known to science. The one in potato has only been known to science for four years.

We have no idea why an insect that was not even listed as a major pest of potatoes in the US, and is native to the US, should suddenly become a major pest in its own right. We

have no idea how *Liberibacter* suddenly became a pathogen in potatoes or Solanaceous crops. And we don't understand or have any idea about its potential for development or change, and to morph into other things.

Australia has got about 800 species of psyllids. There is some work coming out from America that suggests that the genome sequences in New Zealand and the US are different.

There's also work suggesting that there's several different populations of psyllids in the US, and that it over-winters, even in some of the colder sections of the US, quite comfortably. Furthermore, we have absolutely no idea what would be the response within the Australian psyllid population, should they become exposed to *Liberibacter*.

Now the argument that it is only carried by one particular type of psyllid has also shown to be false, as a different species of psyllid has been shown to vector *Lso* in carrots in Europe. As I said earlier, we don't know why it suddenly became such a problem in the first place. Was the genome already there, and was it then made into a more pathogenic form by the uptake of some other virus particle which is integrated into the genome of the bacteria? We

don't know. These sort of huge unknowns then raise massive questions about what will be the likely outcome if it arrived here, in whatever form.

The question is, why did this thing suddenly become a pest? It clearly hasn't evolved with potatoes, because otherwise potatoes would have resistance to it. Yet other Solanaceous hosts, native ones in the US and New Zealand, will tolerate psyllids. We don't know to what extent they tolerate *Liberibacter*, but presumably they do, because they don't seem to show any signs of infection.

How does this example speak to broader considerations and concerns surrounding heightened trade in and out of Australia?

It is all very well to bow down at the altar of trade, but the real nub of it is that the people who benefit from trade are not those who suffer the implications of that trade in terms of biosecurity. Governments seem to think that trade is a great idea, because they obviously benefit from it through all sorts of revenue, but don't see any responsibility in that area either. Somehow or another, people

have to start taking a slightly less blanket approach to how they look at these things.

There is no such thing as zero risk - that's okay. But when is risk acceptable and when is it not? And how do you balance that against economic benefit and economic consequences? Those are the sort of issues that are not grappled with in my opinion.

It is just talked about as science and trade. The science that is used, and I don't think Australia is the only one, is usually not that great. The quality of work is pretty ordinary. If we are to accept assurances from a country like New Zealand - well, they have *Psa*. They have psyllids. Where is the level of control that they maintain in their industry? They don't appear to be able to control things that are coming into their country, yet we are expected to take them on their word that they can control stuff going out of it.

It is all very well for them to say that there is very little risk, but they are not going to lose their farms or their industry. These are some of the real issues that people don't want to talk about it.

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

Name: Grayson White

Age: 32

Location: Heatherton, Victoria

Works: Business Manager, Butler Market Gardens

Grows: Asian vegetables, spring onions, herbs, rhubarb

Q&A

Young grower feature

A background in horse racing may not form part of the usual horticulture narrative, but Grayson White is now firmly a part of the vegetable industry. Having been involved in AUSVEG's Grower Study Tour to Germany and the Netherlands, Grayson appears determined to further improve himself and the business of Butler Market Gardens.



Heatherton, Victoria

Photographs by Carole Whitehead.





Rick Butler and Grayson White.

How did you first get involved in the vegetable industry?

I had recently left the thoroughbred racing industry, where I had spent most of my life, and was running a small online collectables business when Rick Butler, the Managing Director of Butler Market Gardens, was introduced to me through a fellow collector. The rest, as they say, is history.

What is your role on the farm?

My role is to improve the market position of our company in a sustainable way and my title of 'Business Manager' is perfectly vague enough to encompass all the elements of my role, which oscillates between strategy development, customer relations and marketing.

Every element of my role requires a significant level of communication and as a business, we value the importance of communication in building positive relationships.

Describe your average day on the farm.

Butler Market Gardens is very driven towards providing better value to our customers and ultimately that can only be achieved through improving existing processes or developing more efficient ones.

In that respect, I am mostly found in my office penciling away at either our key internal business objectives or working on external projects with our customers.

While I've always worked in the fresh air and love getting my hands dirty, I'm embarrassingly out-qualified in our production and farm areas as we are lucky to have both an experienced and loyal team.

I will continue to work to improve the tools and processes around those key staff and ensure that the quality of their finished product is communicated efficiently and that their efforts continue to build our company's position.

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

There is a great deal I enjoy about this field, but I would say that the three things that most stimulate me about the vegetable industry are its people, its environment and its evolution.

The people are grounded and I liken them to those in the racing industry. They want clear, simple and honest opinions and don't care too much for fancy presentations.

The environment is a dynamic one and by its very nature, driven by the world around us. Mother Nature can be very humbling or equally rewarding but through sustainable strategies, we can expect to have both a positive impact in the field and the marketplace.

Lastly, but most importantly, it is the evolution of this industry which I am most fond of and probably what I would market as its greatest asset in attracting a fresh audience. I see other industries that are saturated with ideas, bound up in red tape or nearing extinction.

The vegetable industry is

as important now, if not more important, that it has ever been. While it faces a number of challenges, it also provides - pardon the pun - a fertile landscape for creative and entrepreneurial thinking.

You were part of the AUSVEG Grower Tour of Germany and the Netherlands earlier in the year. How was that experience and what did you get out of the tour?

The experience was quite amazing. Fruit Logistica was a visual feast and if that didn't get your creative juices flowing, I can't imagine what would.

Simon Coburn, AUSVEG National Marketing Manager, guided us seamlessly through the foreign landscape, providing many insightful guest speakers and farm visits along the way.

That said, I gained just as much from the great people I had around me, fellow tour members, growers and now I'd like to think friends.

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

I think we need to look at what our competition in the marketplace has on the table and develop positions and career structures that are equally stimulating and rewarding.

As the requirement of farms

to have high-tech business and quality assurance systems in place grows, so does the need for a new skill-set in the vegetable industry; an IT skill-set.

Lucky for us, this IT skill-set is in great supply, however, we have to ensure that when considering the job, the applicant can envisage a career.

Once we have secured them, we must offer training and opportunities, like those which AUSVEG provides, to educate them on what is ultimately the most important aspect of our industry - the vegetable itself.

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

Working with thoroughbred racehorses or as an amateur graphic design lightweight, wondering where his next meal might come from.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

I'm not one to think that far ahead. In five years' time I want to look at Butler Market Gardens and be proud of where our company is in the marketplace, with other companies copying the innovative structures and systems which we have put in place.

My parents run a successful stable in Tasmania and my father is a hall of fame trainer so on a personal level, I'd like at some stage to have racehorses around me but when, or in what capacity that will present itself, I've got no idea.





Managing mildew and beating white blister

Advanced downy mildew.

Significant new research reveals a host of recommendations for better management of downy and powdery mildews and white blister, writes Karen Shaw.



A landmark Queensland research study has developed a promising forecasting system for predicting powdery mildew in cucurbit crops.

The research advances work already undertaken in a major project called *Benchmarking predictive models, nutrients and irrigation for management of downy and powdery mildews and white blister*, funded by HAL using the National Vegetable Levy with matched funds from the Australian Government, and financial support from the Department of Primary Industries Victoria and the University of Queensland.

The wide ranging project recommended that where possible, growers plant varieties that are disease resistant to powdery and downy mildews and white blister. The study also found that irrigating crops in the early morning, rather than at night, was beneficial, allowing time during the day for the leaves to dry.

The research was commissioned to help growers benchmark better disease control because of widespread crop losses associated with the specific diseases. For example, the damage bill of powdery mildew in cucurbit crops costs up to \$2500 per hectare.

Powdery mildew in cucurbits

Associate Professor Victor Galea, project co-researcher, is excited by the results of the predictive model research, designed to help growers forecast when disease might develop in crops.

“We wanted to understand how powdery mildew builds up in the crop and what influences it, so that growers know more about conditions that will accelerate infection,” said Professor Galea.

The research involved setting up an infield weather station to record and collect data, such as

temperature, humidity, rainfall and also regularly measured plant leaf wetness.

The trials continued over two growing seasons, monitoring the weather data and disease build up.

“We wanted to know exactly when the weather is right for mildew; what slows it down, and be certain of what speeds it up. This was then supported by lab work to replicate conditions for infection,” said Professor Galea.

“There’s still some fine tuning to do, but what we hope to release is a forecasting system to help farmers target the optimum time for spray fungicides to control the disease and



Weather station.

ultimately reduce the number of sprays needed during the growing season.”

Project team leader, Dr Elizabeth Minchinton said testing of disease predictive models for white blister on brassicas and downy mildew on lettuce showed they also had promise to better time fungicide sprays for disease control.

“In some situations and under some conditions, this can lead to fewer fungicide sprays with similar disease control to weekly sprays,” she said. More research was needed, however, to fine tune these results.

White blister in brassicas

Separate brassica research in a field trial at Werribee evaluated variety, irrigation timing and spraying regimes. Based on this trial, the research recommended that growers seek out disease resistant varieties.

“We found that growing a more resistant variety, such as Tyson, reduced the incidence of white blister on broccoli heads by 99 per cent, compared with planting a susceptible variety such as Ironman,” said Dr Minchinton.

As well as being resistant, the Tyson plant structure was more open, aiding ventilation. Its domed shaped head also allowed better water runoff.

“Our figures show planting a disease resistant cultivar could increase profits by up to 11 per cent, so it’s worth seeking out these new resistant varieties,” said Dr Minchinton.

“We know that most pathogens require the presence of water on the plant surface for germination and infection. Most farmers use overhead watering systems. This could affect the duration of leaf wetness depending on the time of application,” she added.

“Our trials confirmed that irrigating in the early morning, say at 4.00am rather than at night, resulted in a 58 per cent reduction in white blister disease, improving on-farm profits by 3 per cent. The shorter time the leaves are wet, the less chance there is of the fungus germinating and infecting the plant.”

Meanwhile, field trials on Chinese cabbage found that good control of white blister on the wrap leaves was influenced by the age of plant foliage and achieved with a single application of a registered systemic fungicide 14 days before harvest.

“This reduced the disease by 20 per cent and increased profit by 60 per cent,” said Dr Minchinton.

Downy mildew in lettuce

Project collaborators at the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI), led by Dr Belinda Rawnsley, focused on lettuces; specifically investigating downy mildew and anthracnose disease resistance in cultivars and the effect of nutrients on crop growth.

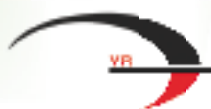
Dr Rawnsley said the SARDI researchers found only four

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THE BOTTOM LINE

Major new research into management of downy and powdery mildews and white blister recommends:

- Where possible, grow disease resistant varieties, although these still need to be sprayed with fungicides.
- Irrigate broccoli at 4.00am instead of at night to reduce the incidence of white blister.
- Spray Chinese cabbage with fungicides 14 days before harvest to help control white blister.
- On lettuces, use calcium nitrate based fertilisers instead of ammonium or potassium based fertilisers to help prevent downy mildew and anthracnose.

i For more information

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of the 21 lettuce cultivars, including Iceberg, Cos, Red and Green Oakleaf, Red and Green Coral and Mini Green Cos, were susceptible to a South Australian isolate of lettuce downy mildew, suggesting there was a substantial resistance to downy mildew in lettuce.

The research lists cultivars Fortune and Sure Shot as the least susceptible, while Winter Select and Costanza were the most susceptible, with cotyledons being more susceptible to downy mildew than true leaves.

In Australia, there are up to 27

downy mildew resistant (DMR) genes recognised for lettuce varieties and these are sold with their DMR gene numbers listed. But Dr Minchinton stressed even resistant cultivars required fungicide protectants to maintain resistance.

According to the research, only three of the 20 cultivars evaluated showed tolerance to anthracnose, suggesting there is little resistance to anthracnose in these lettuce cultivars.

The research found that ammonium nitrate should be avoided as a fertiliser for lettuce seedlings because it increased

seedling susceptibility to downy mildew and anthracnose. Alternatively, high rates of calcium nitrate decreased seedling susceptibility to these diseases.

Dr Minchinton recommended further research be undertaken into developing predictive models and tools for crops such as brassicas and lettuces.

“Growers are also keen to learn more about possible in field spore test kits to help them better develop targeted spraying regimes to help prevent crop infection,” she said.

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The 2012 Italy/Israel Female Grower Study Tour provides nine female vegetable growers with the opportunity of a lifetime to visit farming enterprises in Italy and Israel, as well as attend the EIMA International machinery exhibition in Bologna, one of Europe's largest agricultural machinery trade shows featuring over 1,800 exhibitors from 40 countries.

Vegetable levy payers are encouraged to apply for this tour now, as places are limited. The Female Grower Study Tour is also extremely cost effective for growers, at a cost of just \$1,910 for vegetable levy payers. The tour will provide many benefits to participants - growers will be introduced to new technological innovations as well as farming practices in Europe and the Middle East.

Expressions of interest welcomed now!

For further information or to express your interest,
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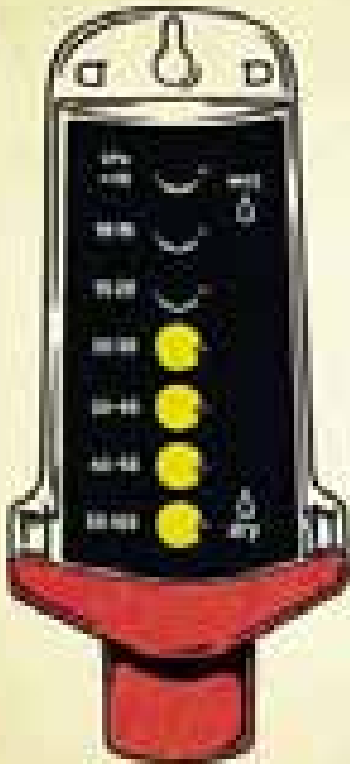
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The project is funded by HAL using the National Vegetable Levy, voluntary contributions from industry and matched funds from the Australian Government. Growers will be required to make a voluntary contribution of just \$1,910 towards the cost of the tour.



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MEA

Vocal point: Senator Madigan speaks up

He may not consider himself to be a great orator, but Senator John Madigan insists on speaking up for farmers and manufacturers across the country, writes Jeremy Story Carter.



“I think you have probably realised by now that I am not what writers would refer to as a great orator,” admits senior member of the Democratic Labor Party, Senator John Madigan, to a vast theatre filled with vegetable growers, members of industry and the media.

“I doubt too many sentences in the future will include the names Winston Churchill, Abraham Lincoln and John Madigan. But while I may not hold you spellbound with my speechmaking, I hope I make up for it with the passion I feel for the issues I am discussing and in the genuine concern I have for our future.”

On both counts, it is hard to argue against Senator Madigan. Or John, as he would prefer to be known. His low, gravelly timbre is hardly conducive to grand political broadcasts, yet he speaks with a directness and conviction that is often absent in many members who hold Parliamentary office. Speaking to *Vegetables Australia* following his address at the 2012 AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence, Senator Madigan expressed frustration with the present state of political discourse.

“I think people are just sick of rhetoric. They want actual tangible outcomes,” says

Senator Madigan.

“It is all well and good to have these photo shoots [of politicians] in high-vis vests; they come into a farm or food processing room or a manufacturing shed and smile for the camera, but what do they tangibly do when they leave, to address the concerns of those people? Really, why have we got such a high informal vote in this country - a donkey vote? Why do people not value their vote? These are the questions that go to the very heart of things.”

A former blacksmith turned politician, Senator

“Nothing any good is easy.”

Madigan’s political gaze is fixed squarely on the farming and manufacturing sectors; on those who make, build, grow and produce. He espouses the mantra of “a country is what a country makes and grows,” and his semi-regular appearances in the media see him almost exclusively advocating on behalf of workers who do just that.

“Farmers want a fair ear of the government, they don’t just want to see bureaucracy and politicians,” says Senator Madigan.

“At the end of day, after they’ve bought all their supplies and inputs, they have got to get something out of it, otherwise there is no point to them trying to farm in this country. A lot of people take things for granted. They take for granted the quality of our food and the availability. It doesn’t just happen, somebody’s got to do it. The fact is that real wealth, in any country, comes about through people actually physically doing something. We talk about national security, we talk about national interest, but the rhetoric and the reality at the coal face don’t marry up.”

Enter the Australian Manufacturing and Farming Program (AMFP); an initiative borne from concern over “the ever widening gap between the manufacturing and farming industries and their elected representatives.” The program is designed to get Federal parliamentarians and Senators out onto the very sites and among the people their decisions directly affect. Not for the fleeting high-vis vest media opportunities that so aggravate Senator Madigan, but for full days on end, observing and participating in key farming



and manufacturing industries. It is an ambitious project, but one that aligns with his ‘back to basics’ approach.

“There needs to be a 10, 20, 30, 40 year, bi-partisan vision for this country and for what it is that we want, for all Australians. And everybody has got to go forward together,” he says.

“The people demand of governments - no matter what their party or persuasion - that when we act, we act in the national interest; in the interest of the majority of Australians. The majority of Australians want green, affordable food, and they need security of supply. It

“What do we want for this country and how are we going to achieve it?”

is in the national interest and it is a national imperative for all Australians, no matter who they are or where they live across the length and breadth of Australia. That is an issue of national security and is of national importance. If anybody thinks that if we just rely on the market - that once there’s nobody here who can manufacture or grow food to suit us, that there will be cheap food from the rest of the world - they are kidding themselves.”

Based in the Victorian town of Ballarat, once the epicentre of





Senator Madigan at the 2012 AUSVEG National Convention.

“Farmers want a fair ear of the government, they don’t just want to see bureaucracy and politicians.”

the country’s gold rush, Senator Madigan clearly holds concern as to how diminishing farming and manufacturing industries stand to affect rural Australia.

“We had lots of country towns in regional and rural Australia that once thrived. They supported families. People bought homes in these towns, they raised their children. These towns have been decimated,” he says.

“You can’t just cut the daylight out and destroy country towns, destroy communities with the stroke of the pen and abdicate our responsibility. We’re elected by people to serve people, to do the best for them and the long term interests of all Australians, no matter where they are or what they do.”

He, like many others in the industry, stresses the need to open up export opportunities in order to help strengthen the position of Australia growers. While acknowledging the inherent obstacles that prohibit many growers from exporting their produce, he cites the example of 19th

Century pioneering agricultural developer and entrepreneur H.V. McKay as an example to the industry on what can be made possible.

“I know that we have to export, I want us to export. H.V. McKay had the tyranny of distance, the tyranny of communication, he had a higher wage rate than our competitors, yet he exported to the world. He didn’t tell us what he couldn’t do; he told us what he could do,” says Senator Madigan.

“We should take a leaf out of H.V. McKay’s book. As with anything, you are never going to agree with everybody on everything, and I’m sure I would have had a fair few disagreements with H.V. McKay, but there is a great thing there. History repeats itself; the high dollar and the problems we face are nothing new. What I’m saying to people is, we need to challenge ourselves and we’ve got to say - what do we want for this country and how are we going to achieve it? Nothing any good is easy.”

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Designing a better industry

The three newly formed industry Design Teams have held their inaugural meetings in Melbourne.



The recently developed industry Design Teams have conducted their first round of meetings over three days in Melbourne.

The three teams, who are divided into Consumer Alignment, Market and Value Chain Development and Farm Productivity, Resource Use and Management, held separate meetings between August 6-8.

The Design Teams will build on the contributions of the former Working and Advisory Groups, who advised on project proposals in specific industry areas such as biosecurity, protected cropping, the environment and others. They have now been condensed to reflect the three Strategic Priorities outlined in the Vegetable Industry Strategic

Investment Plan (SIP).

The SIP was published earlier this year and launched in Hobart at the 2012 AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence.

The Design Team members include a strong proportion of levy paying vegetable growers, figures across the supply chain and industry leaders.

AUSVEG Design Team Coordinator, Courtney Burger, said the inaugural Melbourne meetings were a resounding success.

"I was pleased to witness three days of productive meetings from the Design Teams," said Miss Burger.

"By pulling together a broad range of growers from across the country and key industry

figures, the new Design Teams are well positioned to drive forward the priorities that are central to our industry."

Approximately 45% of funding will be allocated to the Consumer Alignment Strategic Priority, which seeks to generate heightened local and international consumer demand for Australian produce.

The Farm Productivity, Resource Use and Management Strategic Priority will be allocated 35% of funding, to further on-farm technologies and assist growers' efforts to adopt more efficient and sustainable practices.

The remaining 20% of approximate funding will be attributed to Market and Value Chain Development, to enable growers and producers to

add-value to their business and further enhance their market competitiveness. Vegetable levy funds are matched by the Australian Government, with approximately \$10 million to be spent over the next financial year.

The SIP has also developed a new process for project proposals that will see projects created in conjunction with growers.

"By obtaining greater input from growers, projects will now be less driven by researchers and ultimately reflect what the industry truly wants and needs," said Miss Burger.

"This process is a step forward in giving growers a stronger voice in where levy funds are spent, by having projects developed at the hand





of vegetable growers.”

In the new process, the Design Teams will advise on what projects are needed for the vegetable industry aligning to their Strategic Priority. Project proposals will then be developed and specific service providers will be invited to put forth a tender for the project.

AUSVEG, in conjunction with

Horticulture Australia Limited, is currently developing a list of registered service providers who possess the skill sets specific to the three SIP priority investment areas and may be called upon to tender for future projects.

“At present, there have been many responses from a wide range of service providers, with industry already being very

active in wanting to be involved in the new process of project development,” said Miss Burger.

The next series of Design Team meetings are expected to be held in November this year. AUSVEG will continue to provide updates on their progress over the ensuing months.



For more information:

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Soil solutions

with Rohan Davies



Making sense of nitrogen nutrition

Rohan Davies, Technical Agronomist at Incitec Pivot Fertilisers, discusses the role of nitrogen in soil health.

Nitrogen plays a crucial role in determining the amount of cellulose contained within a plant, which in turn dictates the strength of its cell walls and the ability to resist disease.

Once the plant's roots have taken up satisfactory levels of nitrate nitrogen, any subsequent uptake will generally be translocated to the aerial parts of the plant. When nitrate enters the plant, some energy is used converting nitrate into ammonium nitrate nitrogen, which is then connected with a carbohydrate to form amino acids.

In the case of ammonium nitrogen, uptake by the roots is generally fairly rapid. This is due to the fact that ammonium can be quite toxic to the plant at low concentrations. Consequently, it is quickly metabolised in the roots to form amino acids, which can reduce the potential for toxicity.

In a research trial conducted by Bowman and Paul (1988), the uptake and assimilation of nitrate nitrogen and ammonium nitrogen was assessed in perennial ryegrass.

Bowman and Paul found that after 48 hours, only 53 per cent of available nitrate nitrogen had been taken up by the ryegrass, with the majority of this translocated to the aerial shoots.

With regards to ammonium nitrogen, it was found that 97 per cent of the available ammonium nitrogen had been taken up by the ryegrass after 48 hours. The rapid formation of these amino acids requires the use of carbohydrate - diverting this away from being used for plant growth to the roots.

Effect of different NO₃/NH₄ relationships on growth of rye grass:

NO ₃ /NH ₄ - relationship (total 10mM)	DM (mg/day) Root	DM (mg/day) Shoots	Generative shoots %
100/0	23	162	41
75/25	28	169	72
50/50	30	320	70
25/75	30	319	64
0/100	22	225	81

(Nutrient solutions with constant pH).

(Source: Griffith and Streeter (1994). Nitrate and ammonium nutrition in ryegrass: changes in growth and chemical composition under hydroponic conditions, *Journal of Plant Nutrition*(17)(1)).

Plants receiving exclusively ammonium nutrition typically have a higher concentration of amino acids in root tissues than plants receiving nitrate nutrition (Datnoff, Elmer and Huber (2007). *Mineral Nutrition and Plant Disease*).

These amino acids greatly influence the microbial composition (good and bad bugs) and nutritional status of the rhizosphere.

For example, it has been shown that growth of *Rhizoctonia*

solani (damping off) increase as tissue levels of asparagine increase (Weinhold, Bowman and Dodman (1969). *Virulence of Rhizoctonia solani as affected by nutrition of the pathogen*).

This is due to the fact that ammonium nitrogen stimulates the production of extracellular macerating enzymes by *Rhizoctonia solani*, whereas nitrate nitrogen inhibits the production of these enzymes.

Table 1 - Predominately nitrate nutrition and or alkaline pH of the soil will reduce disease severity of:

Crop	Disease	Pathogen
Asparagus	Wilt	<i>Fusarium oxysporum</i>
Bean	Root & hypocotyls rot	<i>Fusarium solani</i> or <i>Rhizoctonia solani</i>
Beet	Damping off	<i>Pythium spp</i>
Cabbage	Clubroot Yellows	<i>Plasmiodiophora brassicae</i> <i>Fusarium oxysporum</i>
Celery	Yellows	<i>Fusarium oxysporum</i>
Cucumber	Wilt	<i>Fusarium oxysporum</i>
Pea	Damping off	<i>Rhizoctonia solani</i>
Pepper	Wilt	<i>Fusarium oxysporum</i>
Potato	Stem canker	<i>Rhizoctonia solani</i>
Tomato	Grey Mould Sclerotium blight Wilt	<i>Sclerotinia spp</i> <i>Sclerotium rolfsii</i> <i>Fusarium oxysporum</i>

Predominately ammonium nutrition and or acid pH of the soil will reduce disease severity of:

Crop	Disease	Pathogen
Bean	Root rot Root knot	<i>Thielaviopsis basicola</i> <i>Meloidogyne incognita</i>
Carrot	Root rot	<i>Sclerotium rolfsii</i>
Corn	Stalk rot	<i>Gibberella zeae</i>
Eggplant	Wilt	<i>Fusarium oxysporum</i>
Onion	White rot	<i>Sclerotium rolfsii</i>
Pea	Root rot	<i>Pythium spp</i>
Potato	Potato virus X Scab Wilt	<i>Potato virus X</i> <i>Streptomyces scabies</i> <i>Verticillium dahliae</i>
Tomato	Anthraco-nose Southern wilt	<i>Gloeosporium phomoides</i> <i>Pseudomonas solanacearum</i>

(Adapted from Datnoff et al 2007).

Typically, in optimal soil based systems, plants at the height of their crop cycle will take up most of their nitrogen nutrition in the form of nitrate. At certain times though, the production system and nutrient source may allow for the manipulation of the ammonium nitrogen and nitrate nitrogen balance to optimise plant production and disease resistance.

Table 2 - Conditions affecting nitrification and the predominant available form of nitrogen:

Situation	Effect on rate of Nitrification	Predominant form of N
Acid soil	Decrease	Ammonium
Alkaline soil	Increase	Nitrate
Ammonium fertiliser	Increase	Ammonium or Nitrate
Animal manures	Increase	Nitrate
Chloride fertilisers	Decrease	Ammonium
Firm seedbed	Decrease	Ammonium
High plant populations	Increase	Nitrate
Liming	Increase	Nitrate
Loose seedbed	Increase	Nitrate
Moderate soil water	Increase	Nitrate
Monoculture (long-term)	Decrease	Ammonium
Ammonium stabilizing fertilisers	Decrease	Ammonium
Waterlogged soil	Decrease	Ammonium
Plant stress	Increase	Nitrate
Tillage	Increase	Nitrate

(Adapted from Datnoff et al 2007).

Ammonium stabilised fertilisers like Entec® Nitrophoska® Special can help the plant to access a more balanced ratio of ammonium to nitrate nitrogen, which has the potential to increase production.

This product has available nitrate nitrogen and stabilised ammonium nitrogen, thereby supplying a balance for most crops.

One of the benefits that mixed ammonium and nitrate nutrition has over pure nitrate nutrition is the enhanced transport of nitrogen during critical grain filling and fruit development stages. This is important when nitrogen delivery via the roots slows due to the onset of senescence.



Soil nutrition questions

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

Email: info@ausveg.com.au

Telephone: (03) 9822 0388



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Protecting plant health



In *Vegetables Australia's* continuing focus on biosecurity, CEO of Plant Health Australia, Greg Fraser, discusses the role and significance of the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed.

Australia has a world class biosecurity system, but as long as international trade and people movement occurs, there will always be a risk of new plant pests entering the country. Pests can also be spread to Australia through natural means, such as wind and water currents.

An essential part of Australia's plant biosecurity system is to rapidly eradicate or contain an incursion of an exotic plant pest. Biosecurity is everyone's responsibility, and growers are at the frontline in reporting suspect pests and diseases in their crops.

Since October 2005, Plant Health Australia (PHA) has been the custodian of the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (the Deed, or EPPRD), a formal, legally binding agreement between PHA, the Australian Government, all state and territory governments, and 27 of PHA's industry members.

The Deed binds industries and governments to a formal incursion response, sharing the responsibility and costs, based on a pre-agreed assessment of the relative private and public benefits of eradication.

Vegetable growers, represented by AUSVEG, who has signed the Deed, are

eligible for reimbursement of specific costs that result from an approved eradication response. Generally, vegetable crops that incur a levy are covered under the Deed, but check with your industry to make sure. This is an important protection but one that is not guaranteed for members of non-signatory industries.

The Deed also outlines the role of industry and government in the decision making and operational processes of eradication responses.

Industry signatories have a direct say on whether responses to plant pest incursions will occur and, if so, a clear role in decision making and funding these responses.

Early detection and reporting gives you the best chance of eradicating a pest or disease and minimising its impact. The Deed should eliminate growers' fears about being disadvantaged and give them the confidence to report suspicious pests and diseases.

Emergency plant pests are categorised into four groups, based solely on the public versus private benefit of eradication for government and industry parties, not the importance of the pest or the

likelihood of eradication. For example, the response to an incursion of a category 1 pest, with a high level of impact on the public, is 100% government funded. Whereas for a category 4 pest (like Western plant bug), with a greater degree of private impact, it is 20% government and 80% industry funded.

Signing the Deed also brings with it obligations, because signatories commit to implement risk mitigation activities.

With the ever present risk of incursions, and the potential for an incursion to adversely affect the economic viability of Australia's plant industries, it is essential that we develop measures that will minimise risk.

To identify the most serious industry pests and determine actions to reduce their threat, PHA partners with governments and industries to create biosecurity plans. A series of these plans now cover the EPPs of crops from fruit and vegetables through to cotton and grains.

PHA continues to work with industries that are yet to become signatories to reinforce the importance of being a part of the Deed. It remains as important as ever that all plant

producers in Australia have access to its protections and benefits.

Members of signatory industries are also encouraged to implement on-farm biosecurity measures to minimise the risks of EPP incursions. One spin-off is that these measures also minimise the cost and impact of endemic pests.

For an effective response to new plant pests, everyone involved must know what's expected of them under the Deed. That's where biosecurity training comes in.

Biosecurity Online Training (BOLT) is a free online version of the face-to-face training program run by PHA. Currently, there are two modules available:

- Foundation - a summary of the plant biosecurity system and the EPPRD.
- Reporting a suspect EPP - when and how to report a new plant pest.

i For more information: Further details on the Deed are available through the PHA website: phau.com.au/EPPRD. The Biosecurity Online Training can be accessed via: phau.com.au/training.

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The curious case of Callum Hann

Callum Hann might have come to prominence on Australian television, but he's much more interested in cooking - and teaching others to do the same - than chasing fame.

Amid a sea of 'just your average Aussie mums' and modern-Australian lawyers turned cooks, Callum Hann stood out during his time on reality-cooking program *MasterChef*. Fresh-faced and wide-eyed, the then 19-year-old seemingly struck a chord with the Australian public on his way to a second-place finish in the show's rabidly devoured 2010 season. Rather than following the Julies and Justines into the realms of minor television

celebrity and publishing deals, Hann's ensuing time as a *MasterChef* alumnus has seen him largely eschew the path most-trodden by former contestants. Having undertaken a culinary scholarship subsequent to the program's conclusion within presenter and chef George Calombaris' chain of restaurants, Hann opened up Sprout cooking school in Adelaide with dietician Themis Chryssidis. Far from serving as a vehicle to carry and further

his *MasterChef*-afforded profile, Sprout seems firmly aimed at encouraging others to cook.

"I've been very lucky to have a bit of exposure I suppose, and it's helped me start my own business," says Hann.

"We really focus on getting people interactive in the kitchen and learning a few skills about how to eat well and healthily."

In spite of the tendency to lavish praise and hyperbole at the feet of most amateur television chefs, Hann remains

self-effacing. He doesn't pretend to be anything other than a wildly enthusiastic but still very much developing cook, and believes his relative inexperience in many ways actually helps his approach to teaching others about food.

"I'm certainly not a chef, but from running a cooking school point of view, it's kind of good in a way, because I can approach it from a cook's level. I feel like I'm [the students'] peer," says Hann.

"I don't feel like I'm trying to come at them from a higher

On chefs and restaurants promoting vegetables...

"At the end of the day, most dishes in most restaurants are going to have vegetables as a key component in them. Surely chefs should be aspiring to be involved in this as much as possible.

If someone is promoting a line of cookware, that's all kind of brand vs brand stuff. But at the end of the day... if we can get Australians eating more vegetables, then we're going to have a healthy nation. I think that has to be a really positive thing.

I think it's a great time at the moment as well. Kids seem to be getting on board with healthy eating and it's a good time to take advantage of that as much as we can. It seems like cooking is almost a fad at the moment, it's like the cool thing to do. So if we can get kids enjoying their cooking as much as possible, then we're going to have the next generation of people to carry on - it's going to be very beneficial."





Callum Hann at the 2012 AUSVEG National Convention.

notch, I don't mean expensive; I just mean fresh, in-season, what's good at the time and what's tasting the best," says Hann.

"In Australia, we are lucky to have a brilliant livestock industry. We have brilliant fruit and veg, so we have some of the best produce in the world to use, and it's kind of just do with it what you will, and you can do something quite simple and still get a really good end product."

The past few months saw Hann's now slightly more-matured face return to Australian television for *MasterChef All Stars*, where he fended off a host of former contestants to win the entire competition. Elsewhere, his work teaching others to cook saw him named as the Australian ambassador to Jamie Oliver's Home Cooking Skills program. As part of a generation who have grown up watching Oliver's cooking programs, Hann clearly brings a similar energy and attitude towards food.

"I love teaching things - a new little skill, or trying to get a kid who has never eaten beetroot in their life to try some fresh

beetroot - I think that stuff is really great," says Hann.

A cookbook has now somewhat inevitably materialised, but it shares little in common with the efforts of some of his fellow constants. Nary a photo of Hann appears in *The Starter Kitchen*, while his name is positioned unceremoniously in small font on the bottom corner on the book's cover. As with all of his efforts, it's an instructional but involving read, filled with simple and flavourful food.

"I think [*Vegetables Australia*] interviewed Peter Gilmore recently. As a cook, he's one of my idols and people I look up to," says Hann.

"He is a very smart man who knows what he's doing. But if you go and buy his cookbook, for example, as a first-time cook it's very intimidating because it's very difficult - because that's the kind of food that he does. He does food that you go and pay lots of money to eat, because it's the top; it's the best stuff in Australia. Whereas I want someone who has never cooked before to be able to pick up my book and if they see bake, roast

or sauté - they are not going to have to worry about what that means, they can look it up and have that basic stuff explained to them in the book. In terms of the vegetable industry, [*The Starter Kitchen*] explains about seasonal vegetables; how you know when something is in season and how you know when it's good."

With a burgeoning career that's still in its relative infancy, Hann seems committed to continue to teach others, while constantly striving to improve and better himself as a cook.

"Looking forward, I want to keep working with schools, [and] hopefully give kids a little inspiration to go home and try cooking something themselves. [To] try eating a little bit better and avoid the takeaway," says Hann.

"I really enjoy what I do. But I am still learning myself, and I'm constantly learning from other people. You will never know everything about anything. I'll certainly never know everything about food, but I'm constantly trying to learn and meet new people and try to pick up things."

platform and look down at them and say 'look how hard this is, you won't be able to do this.' I'm kind of saying, 'this is what I cook for myself for a Tuesday night dinner, why don't you try and cook it for yourself?'"

This passion for cooking simple food from locally grown and sourced produce was evident during his appearance and cooking demonstration at the 2012 AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence in Hobart.

"The dish I cooked [at the Convention] was incredibly simple but looked quite fancy. But all I did was use top-notch ingredients. When I say top-

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New EnviroVeg website: a guide for growers

AUSVEG has launched a new website for the EnviroVeg Program - www.enviroveg.com. Members can now complete their annual self assessment online, as well as access new reports which compare performance against other growers throughout Australia. New reports can be generated after completing the assessment online to compare and benchmark by national average, state average, farm size or crop type. The new website can also be accessed on mobile phones for those who would like to complete the assessment out on their property.

With the rising cost of farming inputs like fuel and fertiliser, periodic monitoring can achieve efficiencies which benefit the business bottom line.

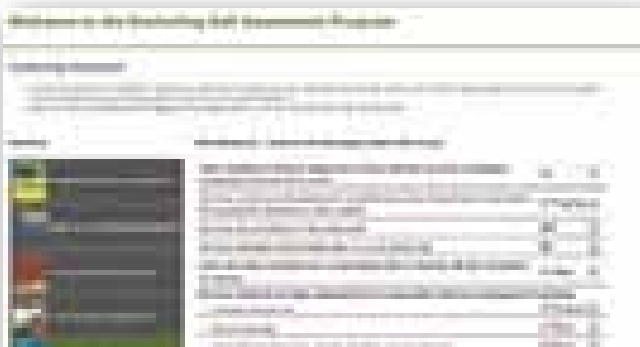
The new website - www.enviroveg.com - gives growers better tools and data to effectively monitor and measure their environmental and efficiency performance each year.



Online self assessments

Self assessments can be completed online in the EnviroVeg members' section of the website. When prompted, growers can create a new self assessment or edit an existing assessment for the year. Note that only one assessment can be created for each year. Once an assessment is created, growers can complete their self assessment using the drop-down menus on the site and going through the different sections of the assessment.

If you have any difficulties completing your self assessment online, get in touch with the Environment Coordinator on (03) 9822 0388 or by emailing info@ausveg.com.au.



Reporting

New reporting features provides growers with more detailed information about how different aspects of their environmental performance compare to other growers throughout Australia. Once the self assessment is completed, growers will be able to access new reporting features in the EnviroVeg Members section of the website, which provide comparisons against both total score and each of the nine sections covered in the EnviroVeg Manual:

- Property and Business Management
- Soil and Nutrition Management
- Water and Waterway Management
- Pest Management
- Chemical Management
- Biodiversity Management
- Waste Management
- Air Quality Management
- Energy Management

For the first time, growers will now be able to compare how scores for each section compare with national and state averages.

Section	Score	National Average	State Average
Property and Business Management	100%	100%	100%
Soil and Nutrition Management	100%	100%	100%
Water and Waterway Management	100%	100%	100%
Pest Management	100%	100%	100%
Chemical Management	100%	100%	100%
Biodiversity Management	100%	100%	100%
Waste Management	100%	100%	100%
Air Quality Management	100%	100%	100%
Energy Management	100%	100%	100%
Total	100%	100%	100%

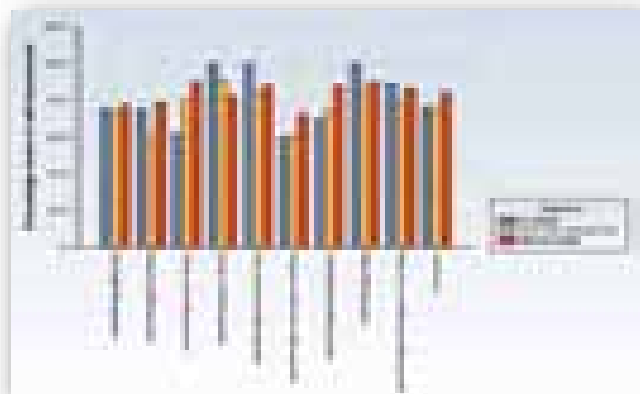
Looking for gaps

The new reports will provide an opportunity for growers to look at areas where they are underperforming or excelling in comparison to other growers. For example, if other growers are focusing heavily in an area such as fuel and energy efficiency or soil management, this may be an area to address for both environmental and competitive reasons.

Better benchmarking data

In addition to comparing scores to national and state averages, growers can compare their averages by farm size and crop type. The ability to compare scores against growers of a similar size allows growers to consider where other operations of similar financial means make environmental and efficiency investments.

Understanding that different crops and growing conditions can impact environmental practices, the new website also allows growers to compare their scores against growers with similar crop types or setups. For example, hydroponic or greenhouse growers can compare their scores against similar growers to get a better idea about how they compare to their peers, given their own challenges and growing conditions.



New Members

New members can now sign up for the Program online, using the 'Register' button on the homepage and filling in the new member form. AUSVEG will then send out a confirmation email and post your Manual out shortly after.

Setting up a profile

It is important that growers complete all details in the profile, as this information will form the basis of reports generated from the self assessment. Members can easily manage their profile and update information in the 'My Profile' tab on the navigation bar.

Online Information Resources

Members will now be able to access the full range of Program resources, including the EnviroVeg Manual, on the website. Updates on news, such as grant schemes and local events, is also regularly provided to members, while regional guides for prominent vegetable growing regions help growers keep up-to-date with the local laws and priorities relating to their business.

The Manual contains all that growers need to know to complete a self assessment, and provides a number of management tools that growers can use to monitor and improve their efficiency and environmental performance over the year.

“ Register today at
www.enviroveg.com ”

New Regional Guides for EnviroVeg members

EnviroVeg members now have access to detailed guides that outline natural resource management priorities for their region, as well as relevant environmental legislation governing on-farm activities.

The guides were developed to give growers greater confidence that when participating in EnviroVeg, they are able to understand relevant local laws and land management priorities. In addition, local contacts for Natural Resource Management (NRM) bodies and support programs are outlined if growers would like to know more about activities in their region.

These resources will be useful for growers to help understand local strategies and regulations in place, which govern environmental activities on-farm. Farming activities, such as pest and weed management activities, have consequences beyond the individual farm, and often require coordinated regional responses. The new regional guides will help farmers to engage with land managers in their area to ensure that farming activities contribute to the ongoing sustainability of their region.

Download your free copy at the EnviroVeg website

Guides have been developed for the nine regions listed below and can be accessed in the 'Resources' section of the EnviroVeg members' website.

1. Central West Region (NSW)
2. Wide Bay Region (QLD)
3. North Queensland Dry Tropics Region (QLD)
4. South East Queensland Region (QLD)
5. Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges Region (SA)
6. Cradle Coast Region (TAS)
7. Port Phillip and Westernport Region
8. Perth Region (WA)
9. Rangelands Region (WA)

Hard copies available

AUSVEG can arrange to send a hard copy of the relevant guide for your region, which can be inserted into the back of your current EnviroVeg Manual. If you would like to request a hard copy, contact AUSVEG through the details below.



For more information on the EnviroVeg Program, contact:
Jordan Brooke-Barnett
AUSVEG Environment Coordinator
Telephone: (03) 9822 0388
Email: jordan.brooke-barnett@ausveg.com.au
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Fostering the future of Frais Farms

A fourth generation farmer from East Gippsland and graduate of Glenormiston College, Kim Martin turned to the fertile soils of the Lindenow flats when setting up his first growing and processing operation after a successful career in the industry. Four years on, Martin speaks to *Vegetables Australia* about his operation, his successes to-date and where environmental management fits in to his plans for the future.

A good idea and a great deal of industry experience were the driving forces behind Kim Martin establishing Frai Farms in 2008.

“The reason I started the business was to commercialise Mache Rosettes,” says Martin.

The delicate French salads had long been popular in Europe, and Martin saw an opportunity to grow them in East Gippsland, where conditions were favourable.

“I had worked within the industry and became aware that it was not being commercially grown in Australia. We also grow a lot of other products, but Mache Rosettes are a special part of the business.”

Today, the business has significant growing operations, combined with a factory in Lindenow that produces pre-washed and ready-to-eat salads and spinach marketed under the ‘Fra Farms’ brand. With an eye on the market, Martin constantly looks abroad for inspiration for new products and growing innovations.

“We have tried to look to where the opportunities are, and you obviously look at what’s happening around the world to find new ideas and target markets.”

This keen eye for opportunity, coupled with a focus on the market and a willingness to

innovate, has served Frai Farms well, but environmental management has an equally important role to play in securing its future success.

Asked about where environmental management fits within every-day operations in the highly-successful business, it is clear that even at such a top level, Martin places a great significance on environmentally sustainable growing.

“You’re looking at crops which use a lot of resources and have low margin and it becomes apparent that some things aren’t worth doing in this commercial environment.”

Efficiency

Martin is constantly on the lookout for any avenues to improve the efficiency of his operations. At Frai Farms, soil and plant tests are not just taken once or twice a year, but used to continuously monitor each block and crop.

“I’m always looking for innovative ways to more efficiently give the plant what it needs,” says Martin.

“Constantly monitoring the fertility of your soil and being aware of exactly what a plant needs is as efficient as you can get.”

Martin uses drip irrigation as a means to both save water

and deliver plant nutrients.

Situated on the Mitchell River, the Lindenow flats are known for their tricky growing conditions as a result of the boom and bust caused by floods and low water flows over the summer. Given their heavy reliance on the water flows of the river due to limited bore water in the region, local growers have had to adapt to floods such as those seen earlier this year, or water restrictions in times of low water flow.

“Drip irrigation is an excellent way to manage water. Here, we rely on the Mitchell River and we don’t have a secure catchment so it’s just a free-flowing river. If there’s no water in the river, there’s nothing to irrigate with.”

For crops that are able to be grown on drip irrigation, this means that the technology can help to ensure greater consistency in supply. The challenges of growing in the region mean local knowledge is essential.

“We haven’t had any outside companies who have come in to start farming, because you would look at [the land] and think the water reliability is not good enough.”

But for growers like Martin, the fertile soils of the Lindenow flats present an opportunity, provided the conditions can be effectively negotiated.



Frais Farms also runs processing operations for their packed salad business, making energy a considerable component of ongoing business costs.

“Right at the moment, we are having an audit done as a result of a Federal Government program to get businesses to embrace more efficient power consumption. We are doing a baseload analysis, then going through and itemising all the kit to work out whether there are upgrades, like variable speed drives or new refrigeration equipment, that can be put in place to save energy and lower our carbon footprint.”

Faced by the challenge of considerable energy costs, any efficiencies gained will significantly affect the ongoing sustainability of the business.

Accountability

Operating in the fresh cut industry and marketing under the Frais Farm brand offers its own challenges. With increasing levels of consumer accountability for the quality of product, as well as pressure to

rationalise chemical use, Frais Farms needs to continuously improve practices to maintain its strong reputation. These considerations saw Martin recently embrace the practices of Integrated Pest Management, and he is in the process of adopting selected practices into farm management.

“As chemistry becomes more important to consumers, I think we are going to possibly see less availability of some of the existing chemicals and hopefully some replacements which fit within the space of that consumer need.”

With continued innovation in this area, there is real potential.

“If you’ve worked in this industry for any amount of time, you’re very aware of the issues around food safety and chemical management.”

In the view of Martin, however, this innovation will take time to adopt due to the pressures of marketing fresh cut produce.

“If targeted chemistries and products were more freely available now, there would be little resistance from growers. Let’s face it, if defects weren’t an issue you would probably

be able to halve your chemical usage, which you do to make the product saleable.”

Chemical management is a focus of the business, with considerable effort going into training key staff and working with the community to allay concerns and minimise effects such as spray drift.

“As a grower, you are always acutely aware of your surroundings and the public, along with perceptions of the business. All people on-farm are properly trained with a chemical users’ course, so you just wouldn’t do anything that caused issues. In this business, your reputation in the public’s eyes is extremely important and you just wouldn’t want to have any issues where you would have to argue.”

An eye for opportunity has seen Kim Martin become a leader in the fresh cut industry. His ongoing commitment to the sustainability of his land and efficient operations also means, however, that the Martins are likely to work on their land on the flats for many more generations to come.

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Ask the industry

with Scott Mathew

Scott Mathew, Technical Services Lead at Syngenta, discusses different wetters and adjuvant application.

Question: I see terms like surfactant, adjuvant, wetter all the time. Can you explain the basic difference between the groups?

There are a large number of additives available for use in the application of agricultural products. These can be grouped into two broad classes:

- Activator adjuvants can include surfactants such as wetters, oils, stickers and penetrants. These additives modify the physical and chemical characteristics of the spray solution including density, surface tension and solubility. Activator adjuvants are used to increase droplet spread, improve rainfastness and increase uptake of active ingredients by plants.
- Special purpose additives are generally used to modify the spray solution or application conditions so that a formulation can function effectively. They can also alter the physical characteristics of the spray solution. This group includes buffering agents, acidifiers, drift control agents and feeding attractants.

Question: Is there a difference in “wettters” that I use?

Yes, there can be some significant difference in “wettters,” and it is important to understand the specific types of wetter products available, and how they operate.

- Non-ionic surfactants are spray additives that work by reducing the surface tension of a spray solution, helping to improve spreading, sticking and the uptake of crop protection products.
- Stickers are used to improve the retention of a spray on the plant surface by increasing the adhesion of solid particles on target surfaces. Stickers can help to reduce the amount of product washed off during rain or irrigation, prevent loss of the active ingredient through wind or leaf abrasion and reduce the evaporation of water droplets. Some stickers also claim to slow ultraviolet (UV) degradation of the active ingredient.
- Organo-silicone surfactants provide an even greater reduction in the surface tension of a droplet in comparison to non-ionic surfactant. As a result, the spray droplets will spread more than conventional surfactants. Organo-silicones greatly improve the penetration and spreading of certain active ingredients into plants and are designed for use with systemic and translaminar herbicides. Traditional organo-silicone adjuvants are generally only used with herbicides, as they can be phytotoxic when applied to the foliage of crops.



Scott Mathew, Technical Services Lead at Syngenta.

- This has led to the development of modified organosilicones suitable for use in agriculture, which have a lower phytotoxicity potential than traditional organosilicone adjuvants and are designed for use with non-systemic products.
- Vegetable seed oils are a blend of vegetable oils (e.g. canola) and surfactants. These surfactants exhibit good crop tolerance, but do not have good spreading, sticking or pest-penetrating properties.

Question: Does every spray I apply require an adjuvant?

No, many crop protection products already contain the necessary adjuvants in their formulation for them to perform at their optimum level. If the crop protection product label does not mention use of an adjuvant, then my advice would be not to add one or to just check with your chemical distribution outlet to see if one is required.

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.

The results are in: new data from the 2011 Agriculture Census

Industry economist Ian James dissects the findings from the 2011 Agriculture Census.



The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) recently released the first set of data from the Agriculture Census, which was undertaken last year between June and October. The Agriculture Census is conducted every five years and covers all farmers with an Australian Business Number (ABN) and whose value of operations exceeds \$5,000. The Census provides the most comprehensive data collected on the Australian vegetable industry, with details available at the national, state and regional level. The data is widely used by government and industry decision makers. In the years between the Censuses, the ABS undertakes surveys of farmers. As they are surveys, however, they are subject to greater statistical error than the Census.

Plantings of vegetables

The Census data shows that the area planted to vegetables for human consumption in 2010/11 was 124,615 hectares; a rise of 2.4% on the previous year. A further 6,412 hectares was planted to produce vegetable seeds for planting, predominately potato seed.

Queensland had the largest area planted to vegetables with 37,409 hectares, followed by Victoria with 30,974.

Number and size of vegetable establishments

The number of vegetable

businesses producing for consumption was 5,752, with a further 728 producing vegetable seed. Reflecting increasing consolidation in the industry, the number of vegetable growers producing for consumption fell 3.4% on the previous year. Since the last Census in 2006,

vegetable grower numbers have fallen by 764 or 11.7%. The number of growers reporting vegetable growing as their principal source of income has fallen even further, with numbers down 1038 or a fall of 20%.

In the current Census, Queensland had the largest

Table 1 - Industry snapshot - Census 2011

	AUSTRALIA	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT
Area planted to vegetables (ha)	124,615	15,909	30,974	37,409	14,327	10,958	13,528	1,498
Area planted to vegetable seed (ha)	6,412	878	2,076	218	1,807	521	875	37
Number of vegetable farms	5,752	1,467	920	1,508	622	594	564	74
Number of vegetable seed farms	729	153	181	82	100	71	137	5
Average plantings to vegetables (ha)	21.7	10.8	33.7	24.8	23.0	18.4	24.0	20.0
% of undercover farms	19.7	23.8	11.4	13.8	49.6	14.7	6.8	9.5
Value of vegetable production (\$m)	3,338.2	439.3	726.4	1077.4	502.0	356.7	183.8	52.1
Farm gate value of production(\$m)	2,867.5	376.9	631.2	913.3	443.4	300.2	166.1	45.0
Value of vegetable seed production (\$m)	127.0	6.0	34.8	31.8	27.5	10.1	16.8	0
Farm gate value of seed production(\$m)	114.2	5.4	31.3	28.6	24.7	9.0	15.2	0

Source of data: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

“

The 2011 Census confirmed the vegetable industry as Australia's fourth largest agriculture industry, slightly bigger than fruit but much larger than other Australian agriculture icons such as lamb, wool and sugar.

”

number of vegetable establishments (1508), closely followed by NSW (1467). However, the area planted to vegetables on farms in NSW, which are concentrated in the Sydney basin, is on average much smaller than in Queensland and indeed in other states. While there are wide disparities in the area planted to vegetables, the average area in NSW is 10.8 hectares compared to 24.8 hectares in Queensland. The average size across Australia is 21.7 hectares. On average, vegetable plantings on farms are largest in Victoria at 33.7 hectares.

The Census also revealed significant differences in the relative importance of outdoor as opposed to indoor production. Across Australia, 20% of primary vegetable establishments produce undercover, but in NSW the percentage exceeds the national average and in South Australia,

almost half the number of vegetable establishments are undercover. By contrast, the number of vegetable establishments undercover is less than 10% in Tasmania and the Northern Territory and not much more than 10% in Victoria.

Value of production

The gross value of vegetable production (measured at the first point of sale, usually the wholesale market or processing factory) after several years of lacklustre growth rose strongly

by 10.4% from \$3.023 billion in 2009/10 to \$3.338 billion in 2010/11. This figure is the one used to measure the vegetable industry's contribution to the economy in the national accounts. Of course the industry's importance is much greater than this when all activities along the vegetable supply line, processing, wholesale, transport and retail are taken into account. After beef, wheat and dairy, the 2011 Census confirmed the vegetable industry as Australia's fourth largest agriculture industry, slightly bigger than

fruit but much larger than other Australian agriculture icons such as lamb, wool and sugar. Value of production at the farm gate rose by a healthy 12.9% on 2009/10, representing a better overall industry return. From a state perspective, the most notable feature compared to 2006 was the increasing share of industry value in the Northern Territory and South Australia and a decline in Tasmania.

Individual vegetables

Detailed data was collected on 16 vegetables in the census of 2011. By value, the top ten contributors to the overall total were, in order: potatoes, tomatoes, mushrooms, onions, melons, lettuces, carrots, beans, capsicums and broccoli. In the 2010 Survey, data on individual vegetables was limited to potatoes, tomatoes, mushrooms, onions and carrots. Compared to the previous year, the Census shows that the value of production fell for potatoes and carrots, which is partly explained by lower tonnages. Carrot production fell after four years of steady production from 264,961 tonnes to 224,571 tonnes. Potato production fell to 1,128,208 tonnes, the lowest level this century and well below the peak production year of 2008. While production of both fresh and processed potatoes have fallen since 2008, potatoes produced for processing have fallen over 20%.

Table 2 - Census comparison

Vegetable	2005/06 tonnes	2010/11 tonnes	2005/06 \$ million	2010/11 \$ million	2005/06 \$ per tonne	2010/11 \$ per tonne
Asparagus	9,737	10,276	46.6	68.7	4787	6685
Beans - French & runner	37,878	37,848	89.3	129.6	2358	3940
Broccoli	48,938	49,112	86.5	104.6	1787	2130
Capsicums	60,734	50,862	171.9	113.5	2830	2231
Carrots	264,961	224,571	156.4	130.7	590	582
Cauliflowers	76,568	66,932	53.0	42.9	692	641
Herbs - Total	4,947	7,362	25.1	46.0	5073	6248
Lettuce	162,832	144,637	159.1	164.0	977	1134
Melons - Total	233,062	211,898	180.4	188.3	774	889
Mushrooms	43,641	49,696	243.8	293.4	5586	5903
Onions	221,923	330,847	145.3	274.0	655	828
Peas - Green	17,686	14,205	9.6	9.7	543	683
Potatoes	1,249,605	1,128,208	463.5	552.9	371	449
Pumpkins	110,906	102,934	80.8	71.3	729	693
Sweet corn	63,695	70,808	60.1	85.8	944	1212
Tomatoes	450,459	301,719	272.8	418.1	606	1385

Source of data: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

continued over page ►



THE BOTTOM LINE

New industry economic data from the 2011 Agricultural Census has been released, with results highlighting that:

- The vegetable industry is Australia's fourth largest agriculture industry, placing it ahead of the fruit, lamb, wool and sugar industries.
- The gross value of vegetable production grew 10.4% from \$3.023 billion in 2009/10 to \$3.338 billion in 2010/11.
- Since the last Census in 2006, the number of vegetable growers has decreased by 11.7%.

i For more information:

Ian James is an economist working in the vegetable industry. There is a wealth of economic information on the vegetable industry and more detail can be found on the AUSVEG website: ausveg.com.au/resources/industrystatistics.htm.

Project Number: VG11038

Census comparisons

Table 2 compares figures in the Census of 2011 with the Census of 2006. The wide dispersal of vegetable growing in Australia and variations in climatic conditions can impact on valuations in a given year. The industry has insufficient time series data to draw conclusions on trends in vegetable production, but some observations on the table are in order.

Four of the sixteen vegetables (capsicums, carrots, cauliflowers and pumpkins)

show lower unit returns in 2011, even before any adjustment for inflation between the Census years. The increase in the value of bean production reflects price increases as production volumes and area planted changed little. The increase in the value of broccoli production may reflect product innovation. The strong result for onions in 2010/11 was accompanied by high levels of exports, which were up 30% on 2009/10. Herbs have a much higher presence in 2011 compared to 2006. The fall in pea production was due to

lower plantings and a halving of yields, but values held due to higher prices. The offset was that frozen pea imports were 43% higher in 2011 than in 2006. Asparagus returns are largely impacted by the volume and price of exports into Japan, while the change in tomato unit prices may have something to do with product shifts to higher value product - fresh from processing and undercover from field.

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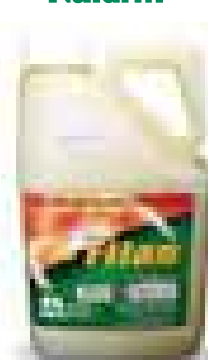


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Vegetable industry service providers: Invitation to register

The newly developed Vegetable Industry Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) has developed a new process for the allocation of future investment of the national Research and Development (R&D) levy for vegetables. Through this process, service providers will be invited to tender for specific projects that relate to the priority investment areas.

AUSVEG and HAL are seeking to identify and register the contact details of potential service providers who have skillsets specific to the three SIP priority investment areas:

1. Consumer Alignment

This area focuses on increasing domestic and global consumer demand, as well as strengthening consumers' perceptions of value of Australian vegetable products. The idea is to begin with research into understanding the needs and preferences of vegetable consumers and to invest in the projects (on and off farm) necessary to deliver products that best meet consumers' expectations, bringing more value to customers and greater margins to growers. It is important to note that projects cannot include marketing and must meet the criteria for R&D funding.

2. Market and Value Chain Development

This area relates to the development of value adding processes and both domestic and international supply chains. The ability for levy payers to be competitive in the vegetable market depends on a range of issues such as value-adding capabilities, access to vegetable markets, and export and import competition.

3. Farm Productivity, Resource Use and Management

This area involves developing innovative techniques and technologies to improve on-farm production efficiencies. The ability for vegetable growers to get better at what they do is crucial for retaining current markets and expanding into new global markets. This area also involves the ability for growers to defend themselves against threats affecting productivity. This includes threats like the rising costs of inputs including labour, the effects of variable climates, water and soil shortages, and emerging pests and disease.



How to register:

If you or your organisation have skills/capacity in relation to any or all of the three priority investment areas mentioned above, please contact Courtney Burger, Design Team Coordinator at AUSVEG to obtain a 'Vegetable Industry Service Providers Register Form' via:

Email: courtney.burger@ausveg.com.au

Telephone: (03) 9822 0388

Please note that your inclusion on the register does not guarantee offers of tenders or assurances in any way that you will be provided contracts as a service provider.

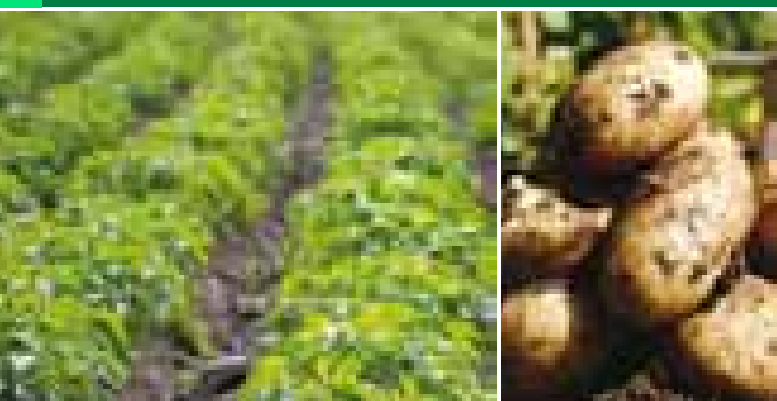
Minor-use permits

Permit Number	Permit Description (pesticide/crop/pest)	Date Issued	Expiry Date	Comments
PER11393	Captan / pitaya / Anthracnose, Phytophthora fruit rots	14-Aug-12	30-Sep-15	Renewal of permit. For use in all states (excl Vic). APVMA require residue data for renewal.
PER13641	Biopest (paraffinic oil) / passionfruit / Red scale, Hemispherical scale & Passionvine mealybug	1-Sep-12	30-Sep-14	Renewal of permit. For use in all states (excl Vic).
PER13574	Boscalid, iprodione & chlorothalonil / onion seed and onions / Neck rot (Botrytis allii)	15-Aug-12	30-Jun-14	Renewal of permit. For use in all Tas and NSW only. Residue data required for iprodione (completed) and boscalid (in progress).
PER13633	Pyrimethanil / Snow peas and Sugar snap peas / Botrytis	01-Aug-12	30-Jun-14	Renewal of permit. For use in all states (excl Vic). Data required - in progress.
PER13639	Diazinon / Macadamia / Macadamia Lace Bug	14-Aug-12	30-Nov-13	For use in NSW, Qld and WA only. Data requirements yet to be notified by APVMA.
PER13243	Iprodione / Pistachio / Botrytis rot & Alternaria leaf spot	07-Aug-12	30-Jun-15	For use in all states (excl Vic). APVMA requires residue data for renewal of the permit.
PER13377	Proclaim Insecticide (emamectin) / Strawberries / Cluster caterpillar, Heliothis, Lightbrown apple moth & Looper	08-Aug-12	30-Sep-15	For use in all states (excl Vic). APVMA requires efficacy, crop safety and residue data for renewal of the permit.
PER13640	Sodium hypochlorite / chestnuts / surface mould	01-Nov-11	31-Oct-17	Renewal of existing permit. For use in all states (excl Vic).
PER13654	Avatar (indoxocarb) / celery / Heliothis, Lightbrown apple moth, lucerne leaf roller, Vegetable weevil	01-Oct-11	30-Sep-14	Renewal of existing permit. For use in all states (excl Vic).

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

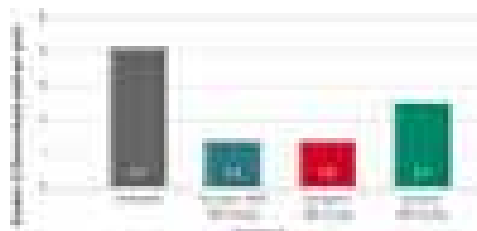
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Sweetening the product

New research is designed to assist growers in producing higher performing sweet potato, to help meet the needs of the marketplace.

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R&D

Consumer Alignment

A new project seeks to aid sweet potato growers in their efforts to grow a product that conforms to market requirements.

Funded by HAL with matched funds from the Australian Government, the project, titled *Evaluating sweet potato varieties to meet market needs*, has recently completed the third milestone stage in its project cycle.

Speaking to *Vegetables Australia*, Experimental Research Scientist at DAFF Queensland, Sandra Dennien, said that consumers were deterred from purchasing sweet potatoes that did not adhere to a narrow set of standards.

"There has been a consumer research project done recently and a lot of [consumers] are turned off by shape," says Ms Dennien.

"A lot of people regard [sweet potatoes] as being old and an ugly shape."

The project is aimed at unearthing varieties that meet consumer specifications, while still high yielding. This includes satisfying and expanding the burgeoning market for different coloured sweet potatoes. Most Australians will predominately be familiar with the gold-flesh variety of sweet potatoes commonly seen in supermarkets, but there is a heightened public interest in other varieties.

"Probably 95-98% of

production in Australia is of the gold-fleshed variety. But there's increasing demand for... the purple-fleshed sweet potato, a red-skin white-fleshed sweet potato, and to a lesser extent, a white-skinned white-flesh sweet potato," says Ms Dennien.

"With the purple-fleshed

however, there are a few readily available alternate varieties that are sufficiently high performing.

"There's a fair bit of market demand for a consistent supply of purple-flesh and the different colours, but the current varieties we have are very low-yielding and the purple-flesh is very



varieties, the anthocyanin that actually creates the purple pigment, they are calling it a very strong antioxidant. The white-fleshed varieties tend to be low-GI. So it's for health reasons that there is a niche market, if you like, for the different colours."

Ms Dennien lists three key areas - shape, size, yield - as being key to successful varieties for growers. At present,

intermittent - and they're not pretty," says Ms Dennien.

"Some of the market growers have mentioned that if they could get consistent good quality of the different colours, they could sell them. But they just can't get the numbers."

For the trials, dozens of seed varieties were sourced from around Australia and the world and lab tested across a number of areas.

"There were a few imported from the States," says Ms Dennien.

"The rest have been collected around the place over the years. We actually have over 100 varieties, and there were over 50 that I put in the initial plot. We just had a look at those."

In addition to sourcing high-performing, more market friendly varieties, the project also hopes to insulate the current gold-flesh sweet potato market against the threat of pest and disease with alternate varieties.

"There's also no back-up for our current gold variety," says Ms Dennien.

"If it was to fall over with disease, we don't have a back-up variety for it."

Although some of the tested varieties were susceptible to soil insects, there have been encouraging signs from several of the imported seeds.

"We have some varieties that are actually showing some tolerance. Some gold varieties that we have imported from the States are showing some tolerance to some soil insects," says Ms Dennien.

"The main [pest to sweet potato] is the nematode. The current gold-fleshed variety Beauregard is very susceptible to nematode infestation. Some of the new varieties imported from the States are showing good tolerance at this stage."

As part of the project, a series of trial field days were conducted in sites across Bundaberg,





Gatton and Cudgen. During the field days, the project sought to actively involve and harness the views and expertise of sweet potato growers, with the Bundaberg field day in particular proving highly successful.

"There were a lot of growers there," says Ms Dennien.

"Basically, we had the growers walk along behind the digger and observe the sweet potatoes as they came out from the back out of the digger. We just stopped and discussed each variety and plot. What they liked about the variety, what they didn't like. It gave them a good idea about shape, colour, size and yield."

After reviewing the results of the trials and obtaining feedback from growers, the number of varieties was narrowed from over 50 to 16. Once second stage trials are conducted in the coming months, the number will be further reduced.

"With feedback from the growers, we will narrow that 16 down and plant larger areas in the third-stage trials. We will

probably hope to narrow them down to maybe 6 varieties, and just plant larger areas on-farm, and have a look at those varieties in more of a commercial-type situation."

Findings from the project will be published in a final report, available free to all payers of the National Vegetable Levy.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- A new project is seeking new varieties of sweet potato that are high performing across three key area: shape, size and yield.
- The project has looked at a variety of different coloured sweet potato varieties to help satisfy a growing market demand.
- Field days have been conducted as part of the project, which have actively involved growers in some of the sweet potato producing regions in NSW and Queensland.

Project number: VG09009

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An innovative lead

Supporting the sector across food security, crop protection and collaborative international research is integral to one of the industry's key players.

With Australian agriculture competing on the world market in an environment of high exchange rates, deregulated markets and import pressure, ensuring sustainable production is imperative to the viability of the Australian horticulture industry. Food production has emerged as one of the key global challenges of the 21st century, and with Australia seen as key long-term player in supplying the Asia-Pacific region, Australian growers need and want to grow more efficiently and sustainably.

Innovation and research are an integral component of ensuring the planet's ever-growing population continues to be supplied with healthy and nutritious food. Bayer CropScience is one of the world's leaders in areas of crop protection, non-agricultural

pest control, seeds and traits. The organisation's efforts in providing innovative products and integrated solutions for the production of quality food, feed and fibre to meet the challenges of tomorrow saw them recently recognised at the Australian Business Awards in Innovation and Marketing Excellence. Bayer took home two awards, underlining the organisation's strong commitment to innovation and research and development (R&D). Recognised for achievements in innovation for an advanced Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program, Bayer collaborated with growers to develop the tailored management system, which included the active release of beneficial insects. The online services offered to growers in the viticulture and

sugarcane sectors provided disease models, SMS alerts and a spray diary tool, which saw Bayer receive the Marketing Excellence award.

In 2011, Bayer spent approximately \$AUD 3,464 million on R&D, equivalent to eight per cent of sales. The organisation has also recently initiated plans to invest approximately \$AUD 14 million for a new breeding centre in the Wimmera region in Victoria, focused on wheat and oilseeds. A hugely successful export for the Australian agricultural market, wheat contributes more than \$AUD 5 billion to Australia's gross domestic product. Through collaboration with the CSIRO, Bayer CropScience is contributing to the sequencing of the wheat genome - which is five times larger and far more complex

than the human genome.

In an effort to develop new varieties with higher yields and productivity improvements tailored to Australian conditions, the new breeding centre will see the continuation of a commitment to not only the domestic vegetable industry, but also the sustainability of the wider agricultural sector. Such innovation in R&D has seen the organisation involved with the decoding of the genetic sequence of a canola rapeseed genome. The collaborative work, involving several international leading research institutions, will allow breeders to improve crop quality and create disease resistant varieties, further bolstering Australia's place as one of the world's largest exporters of Canola.



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As with all sectors of Agriculture, skills and training within the vegetable industry is an important issue. AUSVEG has been contracted by Horticulture Australia Limited to conduct a National Skills and Training Scoping Study, in order to identify the key areas of need for growers on-farm with respect to skills and training. This will be a broad ranging review that will encompass all aspects of farm operations, including technical, practical, business and information technology needs.

It is critical that we get an informed view from growers on this issue, so that the industry can get the investment correct when it considers the best way

to address skills and training needs using the National Vegetable Levy. AUSVEG has subcontracted the review of the skills and training needs in the vegetable industry to Macquarie Franklin, an experienced agricultural consultancy firm based in Tasmania.

Macquarie Franklin has produced a survey to obtain information from growers on skills and training within vegetable growing businesses. A hardcopy of the survey has been included in the plastic package you received this magazine in. It has also been made available on the internet.

To complete the survey electronically, visit

www.ausveg.com.au/survey.

The survey will be open from 14 September to 14 October 2012. Your input is highly valued.

AUSVEG is offering an iPad prize (to be randomly drawn) to one lucky grower who completes the survey. To be in the running for this great prize and to provide your feedback on the skills and training the industry needs to grow and prosper, please take the time to complete the survey. Macquarie Franklin will also be contacting some individuals in each state to see if they are willing to take part in a face-to-face or a phone conversation about the survey.



i For more information:
If you have any questions about the survey or you would like to participate in an interview, please contact:
Leanne Sherriff
Macquarie Franklin
Telephone: (03) 6341 3196
Mobile: 0429 329 349
Email: lsherriff@macfrank.com.au
Project code: VG11038

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Paul Howes: Honing in on horticulture



National Secretary of the Australian Workers Union, Paul Howes, is not known for shying away from a controversial topic. Mr Howes spoke with Caitlin Rodé about the important issues affecting the manufacturing and agriculture industries and shared his opinion on the supermarket duopoly.

Formed in 1886, the Australian Workers Union (AWU) was originally dedicated to representing shearers and miners. Today, it has grown to become Australia's most diverse union, encompassing workers across countless industries, including agriculture. Speaking following his appearance in Hobart at the 2012 AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence, National Secretary of the AWU, Paul Howes, said he is concerned about the increase in the loss of jobs for growers in the supply chain, the rate of foreign produce entering our shores and the slow uptake of export opportunities in Asia.

"The reality is that with our currency sitting as high as it is, with rampant dumping of illegal foreign produce and goods into the Australian market, and the lack of willingness of politicians to deal with the real emerging issue of food security, things are going to get worse before they get better, unless we have some swift and drastic action," said Mr Howes.

"I think there is a lot of opportunity, not just for the food industry but also for the manufacturing sector, in China, as they move from being a production to consumption-based economy. But that's not

going to happen naturally, not just by the virtue of Australia having a lot of land and a lot of produce. If we don't get the policy settings right, other countries will be better placed to take advantage of that transformation in China... my fear is that if we don't plan now, we'll actually miss out on the potential to be Asia's food bowl,"

“ Things are going to get worse before they get better, unless we have some swift and drastic action. ”

he said.

It does not take much to coax an impassioned response from Mr Howes on the actions and market domination seen by supermarket retail giants in recent times, country of origin labelling and the influx of imported produce onto supermarket shelves.

"I think the current [country of origin] regime is grossly inadequate. The reality is that it is virtually impossible for any consumer who walks into their local Coles or Woolies to know

the origin of the goods that they are buying," said Mr Howes.

"We know how many of the big retailers manipulate percentages of content in particular products to be able to portray themselves as Australian made, when really they're not. More often than not, you see labels of goods being assembled in Australia with

sector, would have the ACCC come down like a tonne of bricks," he said.

During his keynote address at the AUSVEG National Convention, Mr Howes spoke passionately about the importance of industry communication and the arrival of the 'new consumer.'

"The transition of China from a production-based to a consumption-based economy will be a total game changer for Australian exporters. This transition will put the Chinese middle class in a stronger position to buy consumer goods, including [from] western manufacturers and imported foods," said Mr Howes.

With the rise of export opportunities for Australian producers, Mr Howes conceded that foreign imports still pose a significant threat to domestic industries in an attempt to compete against cheaper, and often inferior, products.

"Vegetable producers around the country are also being undercut by foreign imports that have been produced with illegal subsidies or sold below cost. This has serious implications for Australia's food supply, particularly when one considers the uncertainty of foreign standards and food quality. In respect to the food industry,

”

imported produce, which is a real issue. We should actually have clear and transparent and enforceable country of origin rules. I think we need to also look at the negative role that the supermarket duopoly plays in this regard."

"Ultimately, I think it is in the national interest of governments of all persuasions to actually intervene here and take on the duopolies that are frankly getting away with the type of anti-competitive behaviour that, in any other

experience has shown that rising incomes usually lead to a rise in demand for complexity in food. That means more opportunities for innovative producers who can see where consumer preferences are heading."

With consumers frequently encountering ambiguous and often confusing food labelling, Mr Howes detailed his personal in-store experiences and why he believes the supermarket giants need to be better regulated.

"When I am doing my own grocery shopping, one of my chief frustrations is the difficulty of distinguishing locally grown food from imported products. In Australia, we really have no idea what we are eating or where it is from," said Mr Howes.

"We all have a stake in the health of our food industry and we should be able to support local producers if we want to. Vegetable growers are the backbone of our nation's food economy and appropriate legislation needs to be in place to be sure that Australian produce is clearly identifiable on

our shelves."

"Perhaps the biggest threat to the health of the Australian food sector, however, comes from the structure of our retail food duopoly. It comes from the way the big two supermarket chains do business with domestic suppliers. The bully-boy tactics of the supermarket chains might bring lower prices for consumers, at least in the short term, but those prices at the checkout come with increased risks," said Mr Howes.

"They are driving independent brand manufacturers out of the market and offshore, which leads to the loss of manufacturing jobs, impacts on local communities and affects our long-term capacity for domestic food production. I strongly believe there needs to be greater oversight and controls on the supermarket chains to remove anti-competitive practices and to improve market access for local suppliers."



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Around the states

Western Australia



VegetablesWA have been focusing on a number of events aimed at communicating project outcomes and good practice to growers across WA.

A visit from HAL saw growers in WA presented with the results of the Carbon and Sustainability project at three separate grower events in Manjimup, Perth and Carnarvon. HAL representatives spoke about carbon and nitrogen emissions from farms, the impact of the carbon tax on the vegetable industry and looked at options to mitigate carbon emissions with offsets such as the CFI. In Manjimup and Perth, Paul Horne of IPM Technologies in Victoria was also invited to speak about his work with IPM in cauliflowers and lettuce production. Growers in these areas welcomed the

knowledge and experience of Paul in the area of IPM and were able to get a real understanding of the practical implications IPM can have in commercial crops, continuing the momentum of IPM seen in a large range of crops in WA over the past few years. At the Carnarvon workshop, presenters from DAFWA and the Caring for Our Country project joined the HAL speakers and shared information with growers on best practice in irrigation, water use efficiency and soil management. Growers who attended the events had the opportunity to ask the presenters questions on how the carbon tax would affect their business and how water efficiency can benefit their bottom line.

Good Chemical Practice field days were run during July/August in the north and south of Perth, reminding growers of the importance of proper chemical use including OH&S, QA and market access considerations. Speakers from the Health Department, Department of Agriculture and Food, Woolworths, Chemical companies and AusChem discussed these important

issues with growers, providing plenty of information about best practice use of chemicals and how to make QA systems work for your business. The second field day also included a demonstration by the team at Syngenta using dyes to show spray applications of different nozzles and spray rates. We were lucky enough to have Syngenta's Scott Mathew, Technical Lead from South Australia, present at this event and talk with WA growers about all things to do with chemicals, diseases, resistance and related topics.

VegetablesWA was invited to join in the Gascoyne Food Festival in Carnarvon and attended the Long Table Lunch in late August. The Food Festival is a celebration of the region, its produce and the farmers by showcasing their produce. The Gascoyne region is recognised for its high quality fruit and vegetables, supplying WA and Australia especially over the winter months, and is working hard to continue to promote this through local branding of their produce. As part of the festival, vegetablesWA spoke at a grower evening about the challenges

and trends facing the vegetable industry today. The Long Table Lunch was then an opportunity for chefs, industry members, locals and tourists to get a taste for the food produced in the Gascoyne and experience what the region has to offer.

We continue to work towards developing new horticultural precincts in WA, with a consultant's report now having been produced for the Myalup precinct, and significant headway made towards the development of the Gingin precinct. New horticultural precincts will allow significant increases in production of vegetables in the WA regions, through water expansion for local and export produce. Existing Horticultural precincts will also benefit from research into extra water for production of horticulture produce.

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New South Wales



Recently horticulturalists and other farmers gathered at the new Chatswood Concourse venue for the NSW Farmers Annual Conference and Horticulture Annual General Meeting.

The Horticulture AGM heard from the Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee Chairman, Jeff McSpedden, who outlined his vision of "Brand Australia"; an aspirational vision of the development of an international "brand" for Australian produce as a premium product worthy

of a premium price. The vision seeks to counter the financial strain placed upon Australian horticulturalists by the impact of the supermarket hegemony on farm gate prices and the inability to compete internationally on price alone.

At the AGM, the Horticulture Section determined that work is needed to ensure that food handling systems at the wholesale and retail sectors of the fruit and vegetable supply chain ensure farm gate quality is maintained for consumers, and continue to seek greater biosecurity efforts by DPI. The NSW Farmers Annual Conference further moved a call for the mandating of a comparison between farm gate prices of produce against supermarket prices, and changes to food labelling laws to make it compulsory for the percentage of Australian grown, produced or processed ingredients to be labelled.

NSW Farmers Horticulture Committee will be developing plans to implement horticulture motions over 2012-13.

In line with the vision of Brand Australia, NSW Farmers has made a submission to DAFF supporting Horticulture Australia Limited's (HAL) export regulation power. This power provides HAL with the ability to make rules for the export of horticultural produce, which assists industry to coordinate its export activities with the aim of maximising Australia's horticultural industries' export potential. This can include issues like requiring quality assurance of exported produce, which will assist in developing a premium brand for Australian horticulture.

NSW Farmers has also made representations to a NSW Parliamentary Inquiry, which is examining the management of public lands in NSW seeking greater access to National

Parks and State Forests for beekeepers. With the pollination services provided by beekeepers an essential element of risk management for horticulture, access that helps maintain managed hive strength is crucial.

Lastly, with submissions to DAFF's review of the protocols for the import of fresh potatoes from NZ for processing due in September, NSW Farmers has been liaising with AUSVEG and with the NSW DPI to develop a submission seeking the protection of the Australian potato industry from exotic pests and diseases in NZ including the tomato-potato psyllid and Zebra Chip.

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Victoria



The Federal Government's move on illegal farm workers has aggravated Victorian vegetable growers who utilise registered labour hire groups to provide field workers during planting and harvesting. Prominent commercial vegetable growers are incensed that the Federal Government will expect growers to individually check all visas and identification papers when hiring labour from a registered hire group. This is the responsibility of the provider of labour, not the grower. Threatening

growers with criminal action for not complying is totally unreasonable. Labour hire companies must be held responsible for their employees in the hired group; that is the reason why growers pay a hiring fee so that labour utilised is legitimate under Australian law.

The 2013 National Vegetable Expo Committee is now in the process of developing a planning schedule for the 2 and 3 May event at Werribee next year. All seed plots have been prepared and are ready for vegetable seed planting of a range of varieties, commencing during the coming spring. A Prospectus for exhibitors' static sites will be distributed next month. The biennial Vegetable Expo attracts visitors from each state and New Zealand, and there is an expectation that 2013 will be an excellent year for displaying a large number of

vegetable varieties and sharing industry knowledge.

On the lighter social side, the Annual VGA Vic Growers Golf Day was held in August at Lang Lang Golf Club. 25 teams teed-off in the Ambrose competition amongst brilliant sunshine, firm fairways and smooth greens. After an excellent lunch, the competition winners were announced, with Bearing and Industry Supplies team taking out the President's Trophy. A raffle followed with a fantastic range of prizes generously donated by Industry Associate Suppliers, with proceeds being donated to the Royal Children's Hospital Auxiliary.

The Annual General Meeting of VGA Vic will take place on Friday 12 October at the Crowne Plaza Hotel situated in Spencer Street Melbourne, commencing at 4.30pm followed by dinner. All members and industry

associates are most welcome to attend. Following the formal business session, there will be short presentations from a range of industry guests, to be followed by a presentation during dinner. More information is available from the VGA Vic office.

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Queensland



Growcom recently completed an analysis of the impacts of the carbon price on fruit and vegetable growers. This analysis was based on real data from six case study farms, and produced estimates of the impacts of the carbon price on farm costs and profitability.

The report was provided to the federal Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency and the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, to foster ongoing discussions on how the impacts can be reduced and how effective assistance can be provided.

A reply from the office of the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency dismisses our analysis based on a smokescreen constructed from a series of irrelevant points.

For example, the Department criticises the analysis for using a carbon price that is inconsistent with Treasury modelling. The

carbon price is currently \$23 per tonne and fixed for the first three years. We used \$23 per tonne.

The Department argues that the impact of the carbon price is overstated in our report. However, our projected carbon prices are actually less than Treasury's latest forecasts, so our figures are more likely to be an underestimate of the impact.

The Department criticised our report because we haven't modelled exchange rate fluctuations. For most inputs, the incremental increase caused by the carbon price is entirely independent of the exchange rate. For example, the increases in costs of fuel and refrigerants are the result of an effective carbon price per unit and will remain fixed despite changes in currency.

They compare our results with modelling by ABARES (grains and dairy), neatly ignoring that horticulture has distinctly different cost profiles and that ABARES has never produced detailed modelling for horticulture. On average, horticulture is more energy intensive than any other agricultural industry because of its reliance on cold storage for the production of fresh and safe food.

We have received inconsistent advice from these departments in the past. Previous

correspondence from the Ministers' offices had indicated that they believe the Carbon Farming Initiative (CFI) will make up for the extra costs from the carbon price. However, in their critique of our analysis, the Department clarifies that the CFI is not meant to be a compensation mechanism, but rather a way for landowners to earn additional income.

We have produced a substantial amount of information that clearly shows that the CFI is not a cost-effective option for intensive agricultural industries (e.g. quick turnaround, high value crops on small land areas where a forestry carbon sink taking land out of production for years is not feasible) but the Department has chosen to ignore that. The potential CFI methodologies for horticulture that will form the basis of any income stream are still in development while the effects of the carbon price are already felt by all.

The letter goes on to explain the benefits of the Clean Technology Food and Foundries Investment Program, neatly overlooking that this program only applies to processors and manufacturers, not producers.

One of the most frustrating aspects of the response is that the Department attempts to explain the mechanics of the

policy when, had they read our report properly, they would be aware that we fully understand how it works. We're just not sure they do.

Their dismissal of evidence comes after comments by both the Prime Minister and Greg Combet that farmers can pass on the increased costs because 'that is how the economy is supposed to work'. These comments, and the refusal to accept new evidence, illustrate that the Government does not understand how the horticultural supply chain really works.

We're still waiting for the Government to consider the impacts on intensive agriculture seriously.

Growcom will be applying to the Productivity Commission for a detailed investigation of the cost impacts on horticulture.

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South Australia



Over 100 people have now been through the FarmCard program and FarmCard Certification is now a contractual requirement for some large employers. FarmCard Certification provides industry induction and portable training records for employees,

thus mitigating or reducing some OH&S risks for employers. Through an extensive database linked to photo ID FarmCard also maintains current visa status for overseas workers and training records for all people working within the industry. The industry-based training course that underpins FarmCard Certification is about to undergo its pilot review prior to formalisation of training resources and guides. Once the review is completed, FarmCard will be made available on a national basis. Organisations or individuals interested in

delivering the course in other regions should contact Grow SA to lodge an expression of interest.

Grow SA has commenced development of an On-Farm Biosecurity System, which is aimed at helping to protect growers from increased risks of disease and pest incursion at a farm level. The program will implement achievable and realistic control points aimed at formalising an on-farm system that allows growers to assess and manage their own risk. With labour hire becoming more and more common practice, the

cross contamination risks appear to be increasing and movement of people and machinery between properties will feature within the program. Current updates to state biosecurity policy will also be considered as soon as they are released for comment.

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Tasmania



In the food world, we can often predict what is going to happen in the future here by monitoring what is going on in the UK right now. In a report just released, Catalyst for Change, the National Farmers' Union says Britain's self-sufficiency in vegetable production fell from 73% in 1998 to 60% in 2010; and it is only 38% self sufficient in fruit.

The report blames "poor supply chain practices and a short-term approach to relationships between growers, intermediaries and retailers" for removing the financial incentive for the growers to continue growing.

NFU horticulture and potatoes board Chairman Sarah Dawson said: "British growers want to do business with retailers, yet the sector is being driven to its limits

and is evidently not coping with the strain. Against a backdrop of higher costs, lower profits and a falling market share, we desperately need to find better ways of doing business."

Australian farmers are facing exactly the same pressures. They are being squeezed by a duopoly-dominated retail market, where the prices they receive often don't cover the cost of production, let alone provide them with a margin. Yet the mark-up at checkout still delivers high profits to the retailers and cheap prices to consumers. The Australian Bureau of Statistics tells us so.

The latest consumer price index gives us an annual inflation rate of 1.2%, the lowest for 10 years. While there was a slight rise in the price of vegetables in this quarter, this is off the back of a massive drop in fruit and vegetable prices over the past year. According to the ABS, the price of fruit and vegetables plunged nearly 22% in 2011-12.

I like to think that most Australians are fair-minded and not totally driven by price; that they expect to buy food that, by default, is grown in Australia where possible and at a price through the supply chain that allows the producer to make a

living. No sensible person really believes that food prices can continue to fall when everything else goes up in price. Like everyone else, farmers' input costs are continually rising - but farmers have no way of passing these increases on. The end result of a 'down, down, down' type strategy will be to drive Aussie farmers out of business. Both major retailers announced their half year results last week and, surprise surprise, both reported increased profits.

Retailers and processors say that they want to support Aussie farmers - it is now even a key theme in marketing programs. They say that they only import fresh produce when Australian products are unavailable. But what does 'unavailable' actually mean? Generally, it doesn't mean that there is no Australian product in the marketplace.

In normal times, we can grow pretty much everything somewhere in Australia, pretty much all year round. More often, it means that the retailers and processors are not willing to pay a price that allows farmers to cover costs of production or - heaven forbid - even make a profit.

Imports of fruit and vegetables have doubled in the last decade and now make up more than

20% of what we consume. Australian farmers are being driven out of business as we speak. In the last few months, at least three major mainland fresh produce growers have been placed into receivership, and that's just the big ones that make the news. Many smaller growers just shut up shop with no fanfare, as their farms become uneconomic.

The British report makes a number of recommendations for change, including: long-term supply contracts to inject stability into the supply chain; greater price certainty for growers through price formulae, market trackers and fixed prices agreed in advance for a specified volume of crop or for the season; supermarket promotions linked to actual production. We should take note. It is already happening here.

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Calendar of events

October 2012

12 October

VGA Vic Annual General Meeting

Time: 4.00pm

Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel,
Spencer Street, Melbourne.

For more information:

Telephone: (03) 9687 4707

Email: contact@vgavic.org.au

October 2012

17 - 19 October

Eurofruit Congress Southern Hemisphere Conference

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For more information:

Website: sh-congress.com

November 2012

6 - 18 November

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