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- **Evaluation of quality assurance software for the vegetable industry**

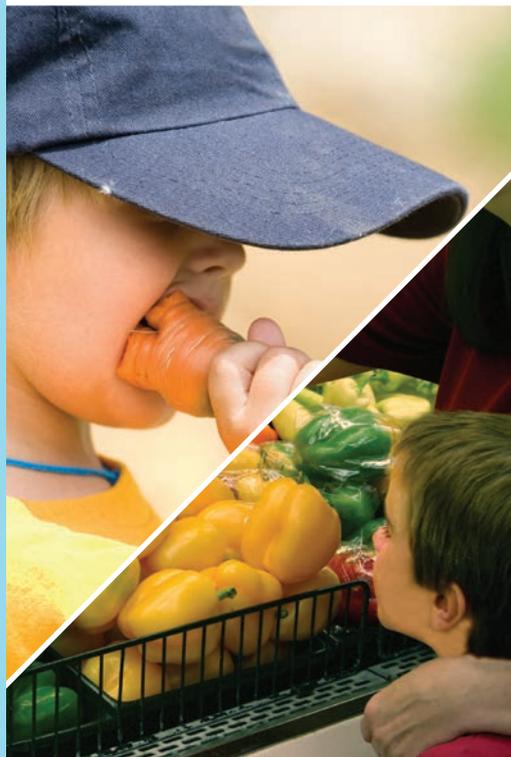
HIA R&D project number: VG13082

Project VG13082 investigated a practical checklist to assist vegetable growers in purchasing tools to manage their quality assurance systems.

- **A strategy to address consumption of vegetables in children**

HIA R&D project number: VG13090

Project VG13090 developed a strategy outlining initiatives to increase and sustain vegetable intake in children.





Evaluation of quality assurance software for the vegetable industry.

Facilitators:

Project VG13082 was completed by Project Leader Belinda Hazell from TQA Australia Ltd.

Introduction

Managing quality assurance (QA) systems is often a time consuming and costly exercise for Australian vegetable growers. It is, however, a necessary process, particularly for growers supplying into the fresh, retail and export markets.

Through the careful consideration and selection of well-documented, flexible and fit-for-purpose QA systems, vegetable growers have the opportunity to reduce operating costs and improve farm performance, traceability and risk management.

About the project

TQA Australia (TQA) undertook this project on behalf of Horticulture Innovation Australia (HIA) – formerly known as Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) – to provide an evaluation of the range of QA tools and systems available for vegetable growers.

A central desktop study was conducted, in conjunction with vegetable grower interviews, cost benefit analysis and mapping, to develop a practical checklist to aid growers in the selection and purchase of tools to assist in managing their QA systems.

Project leader Belinda Hazell said a common concern raised by industry was the overwhelming amount of paperwork and time that was required to prove compliance to one or more QA systems that were essential to meet customer and/or market requirements.

“QA tools need to be flexible in order to monitor performance and to cater for the varying and changing needs of vegetable growers and packers who are supplying markets with increasing expectations,” she said.



“As a result of this, many vegetable growers are moving away from traditional paper-based QA tools and turning to innovative technology such as software, ‘apps’ and options such as cloud-based and web-based platforms.

“However, the range and complexity of the tools available on the market can make it a difficult space to navigate, so deciding on the right tool and whether it covers the functionality required by the individual business can be a challenging task.”

Major findings

Vegetable grower research has revealed that there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to purchasing and using QA tools.

When contemplating a QA investment, Ms Hazell said a necessary starting point was to define the requirements of the business.

“This includes differentiating between the functionality the business ‘must have’, ‘would be nice to have’ and ‘doesn’t need’,” she said.

“Planning is essential and the impact of poor decision making can be potentially far-reaching.”

Project VG13082 made no recommendations to the use of a specific tool but instead developed two tables to illustrate the QA tools identified.

“From the two tables provided, vegetable growers can ascertain whether a QA tool is deemed easy or more complex to use and whether it covers the functionality that is suitable to their business needs,” Ms Hazell said.

“A practical checklist has also been developed to assist vegetable growers in making confident and informed decisions in the selection and use of QA tools to support managing their QA systems.”

Ms Hazell said the project did not include tools that were described as predominantly focused on farm management.

“This is because our main focus was on the evaluation of QA software for the vegetable industry,” she said.

“The HIA funded project VG13106 – Evaluation of commercially available farm management software programs for the vegetable industry focused on farm management software tools in more detail.”

Implications

Ms Hazell said one of the main benefits of QA systems identified throughout the project was the critical market access they provided.

“The majority of growers interviewed mentioned market access as the primary benefit of implementing a QA system,” she said.

“In some situations, growers reported that their QA system enabled them to break into new markets or receive a marketing advantage, as customers took them seriously due to their focus on quality and food safety.”

Ms Hazell added that there were a number of further benefits, including improved farm performance (yield and reduced costs),

traceability and improved risk management.

“For the vegetable growers who are successful in selecting QA tools suited to their needs, this can result in additional revenue, cost control and potential profit,” she said.

THE BOTTOM LINE: VG13082

- This project provided information for the vegetable industry by identifying a range of QA tools that can assist vegetable growers, including packers, in deciding on the selection and purchase of tools to assist in managing their QA systems.
- By choosing the correct QA tools, vegetable growers can reduce operating costs and gain critical market access, as well as improve farm performance, traceability and risk management that reduces costs.

Acknowledgements

This project has been funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia using the National Vegetable Levy and funds from the Australian Government.



A strategy to address consumption of vegetables in children.

Facilitators:

Project VG13090 was completed by Project Leader Dr David Cox from CSIRO Food and Nutrition, with the assistance of Atul Kacker, Gilly Hendrie, Danielle Baird, Haidee Lease, Jane Bowen, Astrid

Introduction

Establishing good eating behaviours as a child is essential for forming a basis for future behaviours and relationships with food.

Results from the latest Australian Health Survey, however, suggest children are a long way from meeting the recommended levels of vegetable consumption.

Therefore, an opportunity exists for the vegetable industry to work with those individuals and groups pursuing public health goals to increase demand for vegetables among children – and their families – in a way that is profitable to the industry.

About the project

Horticulture Innovation Australia (HIA), formerly Horticulture Australia Limited, commissioned CSIRO to develop a Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) for increasing vegetable intake among children.

The project comprised a systematic review of worldwide initiatives on increasing vegetable consumption with a view to identifying initiatives that have been shown to be effective, as

well as any gaps and opportunities for new initiatives.

The researchers also engaged key stakeholders for collaboration, and developed a plan to prioritise and recommend initiatives that have demonstrated effectiveness.

Project leader Dr David Cox from CSIRO Food and Nutrition said the objective was to create a long-term and sustained increase in consumption of vegetable produce by children.

“The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating recommends children aged 2-18 consume between 2.5 and 5.5 portions of vegetables a day, with a portion defined as 75 grams,” he said.

“But, according to the Australian Health Survey (2011-13), children are not eating nearly enough vegetables for their age group.

“This is of significant concern, as eating behaviours established in childhood are likely to persist into adulthood and inadequate vegetable consumption can contribute to chronic disease later in life.”

Children aged between two and three were more likely to meet the recommended usual intake of vegetables (49 per cent) compared to children aged 4-18 (less than 10 per cent).

Strategic priority areas

The outcomes from the analysis of worldwide initiatives to increase vegetable intake in children, discussions at a stakeholder workshop and gap analysis have been incorporated into four key strategic priority areas.

Dr Cox said these priority areas formed the basis of the SIP and would inform R&D investment.

“The first priority area – collaboration – recognises that increasing vegetable intake in children will require the input and contribution of stakeholders outside of the horticulture industry supply chain,” he said.

“This could be achieved by establishing a stakeholder alliance to include those within and outside of the vegetable industry that would link into existing networks to leverage funding and knowledge.

“The development of a joint agenda and activities with stakeholders within the alliance could then help it to achieve its goals, while promoting the sharing of the effective design of initiatives, evaluation and research findings.”

Dr Cox said the second priority area identified by the project focused on developing and implementing initiatives designed to engage children and increase their vegetable consumption.

“Evidence suggests that targeting children between two and six may provide the best opportunity to intervene, helping to create life-long vegetable consumption habits,” he said.

A number of action-focused objectives have been suggested in this priority area, including publishing and endorsing best-practice guidelines for the development and implementation of new community initiatives.

“This feeds into the third priority area, which is continued research into new initiatives,” Dr Cox said.

“This project identified initiatives that led to an increase in vegetable intake in children, but there was a clear shortage of initiatives that were effective in increasing intake by more than one and a half serves of vegetable per day.”

Dr Cox said there was scope for new research that aimed to determine whether larger increases in vegetable intake could be achieved and sustained.

“Research could also be commissioned into new initiatives focused at peri-natal, weaning and early childhood, as well as direct industry involvement in supplying vegetables to community and schools to increase exposure to vegetables.”

The fourth priority area recognises a potential opportunity to increase intake of vegetables by influencing policy changes.



THE BOTTOM LINE: VG13090

- Australian children are not meeting the recommended daily intake of vegetables.
- To increase demand for vegetables among children and their families, ongoing investment in stakeholder engagement, community initiatives, continued research and policy change is required.

Acknowledgements

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*Please contact Alexander Nugent at AUSVEG on 03 9882 0277 or email alexander.nugent@ausveg.com.au to submit topics for potential inclusion in future editions of **vegenotes**.*

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