

Workforce development case studies in the Agri- Food Industry

Peter Clack
Agri-Food Industry Skills Council

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Horticulture Australia Ltd

Level 7

179 Elizabeth Street

Sydney NSW 2000

Telephone: (02) 8295 2300

Fax: (02) 8295 2399

E-Mail: horticulture@horticulture.com.au

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Project Code MTO6065

**Final Report – Workforce development case studies in the
Agri-Food Industry**

JOBS FOR LIFE

**Author: Peter Clack
Agri-Food Industry Skills Council**

Final Report - Workforce development case studies in the Agri-Food Industry

Project leader: Peter Clack
Manager National Communications and Promotions
Agri-Food Industry Skills Council
Telephone: 02 6163 7228

Key personnel: Arthur Blewitt
Chief Executive Officer
Agri-Food Industry Skills Council
Telephone: 02 6163 7200

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

This project was designed to prepare and present case studies from the horticulture industry in a suitable video format for use on national television and also to be suitable for a video format.

These were intended for national broadcast in a current affairs context. The broader purpose was to document the strong themes from work-like environments to reflect the large variety of industries that comprise horticulture.

This would subsequently be achieved in a number of important mediums:

- on the web platform of SkillsOne Television, where they can be accessed by tens of thousands of people on line each week
- through national broadcasts of the case studies in documentary format on the Aurora Channel of the Fox Network
- As a DVD and booklet set, made available across industry through the stakeholder capacity of the Agri-Food Industry Skills Council

A number of themes were developed centred on key horticulture industries: almonds; Asian vegetables in the Sydney Basin; citrus and wine grapes; retail nursery; floristry; tomatoes produced from hydroponics; seedling production; and commercial vegetable operations.

The project was to reflect current industry perspectives, and this led to engagement with national peak bodies: the Horticulture Australia Council; AUSVEG Ltd; Nursery and Garden Industry Association; and Growcom Qld. Individual enterprises were given context and explanation through the involvement of these organisations, state vegetable industry development officers and TAFE NSW.

FUNDING SOURCES

The funding sources for this project include Horticulture Australia Limited and the Agri-Food Industry Skills Council.

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JOBS FOR LIFE

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SUMMARY

The *Jobs for life* workforce development project (MTO6065) successfully presented horticulture as an industry of worth and integrity that offers attractive career opportunities. *Jobs for life* comprised case studies where employers, managers, employees and industry experts discuss the workplace environment, career options and training needs.

Jobs for life was designed to advance public awareness of career choices and career paths in the horticulture industry through the presentation of individual case studies in video format, produced for national television broadcast in a current affairs context and on DVD for distribution to the wider agri-food industry.

It portrayed industry workplaces as positive, productive and rewarding, with employers who told how much they cared about their industry and their employees. *Jobs for life* boosted the industry's image and promoted an appreciation of its sheer scale and diversity and its importance to the national economy.

As project manager the Agri-Food Industry Skills Council consulted and collaborated with industry through members of its board and standing committee structure and through its network of industry peak organisations. These key industry bodies were: Horticulture Australia Council; AUSVEG Ltd; Nursery and Garden Industry Association; and Growcom Qld.

This collaboration allowed the council to assemble detailed contemporary research about the industry and to select case study candidates from NSW, Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania. TAFE NSW was invited to participate to provide a strong training context and this led to a case study on floristry

The council contracted SkillsOne Television through its parent body, the Institute for Trade Skills Excellence, to record interviews and carry out final television production and editing. SkillsOne broadcast the two half-hour documentaries (on three occasions) on the Fox Aurora Channel during March 2008.

The council produced DVDs and an accompanying booklet for distribution to industry. The promotion and marketing coupled with the TV broadcast gave the horticulture industry national exposure as a valuable source of jobs.

The *Jobs for Life* documentary and the DVD/booklet set have established a precedent and a vital new medium for the way that industries promote themselves by giving fresh, contemporary insights into horticultural workplaces, work practices and training – stories told largely by the horticulturalists themselves.

Individual case studies that explore career options and workplace sustainability practices are provided and presented by industry practitioners, trainers, industry development officers and peak horticultural organisations.

The availability of the DVD and booklets meant the case studies will continue to provide information, resources and working tools for training organisations and enterprises into the foreseeable future.

INTRODUCTION

In June 2007, the Agri-Food Industry Skills Council, under an agreement with Horticulture Australia Limited, undertook to produce video case studies in horticulture that would promote people and careers in a variety of horticultural industries.

The ensuing industry engagement and collaboration ensured that the case studies and accompanying comment accurately reflected industry views and workplace environments. The DVD/booklet set *Jobs for life* provides a valuable resource for trainers and assessors seeking to give students insights and exposure to actual work-like environments and to the enormous variety and range of horticultural industries. They also serve for horticultural and non-horticultural enterprises with a means to demonstrate insights in the horticulture industry through the case studies.

The DVD and Directions booklet were made available throughout the agri-food industry and many industry sectors sought copies as an educational tool and as a guide to workplace practices in a horticulture context. The council undertook a substantial direct marketing and promotional campaign to the council's stakeholder list of 3,000 organisations, through a national media release, website promotion and on-line bulletins.

In 2006, an industry development needs assessment by the council had revealed serious challenges to the sustainability of the horticulture industry and for the broader agri-food industry more generally. The agri-food industry continued to experience major skills and workforce shortages in a number of key industries and locations. Sustainability and economic growth potential for these industries were being constrained by a lack of capacity to attract and then retain people of working age, most especially skilled people.

Historical context

Attracting and retaining capable workers was dependent on better knowledge of jobs, careers and lifestyle opportunities and the availability of and access to quality training and education, according to the council's analysis. It showed that skills development needed to be addressed to alleviate critical workforce shortage forecasts across agri-food to remove barriers to economic sustainability and to the growth on industries in rural and regional areas.

In 2006, the council had researched and produced its *Industry Skills Report* showing critical relationship problems between the 'drivers' – major trends and issues affecting agri-food – and the industry's skill needs.

These barriers were described as 'critical for the rural industries' for the development of regions, worker attraction and retention, business compliance, and innovation and technical advancement.

The council estimated that the agri-food sector nationally would require approximately 130,000 new workers over the ensuing five years to maintain and grow the existing workforce and to enable it to respond to natural attrition, labour turnover, and industry expansion.

The identification and design of industry-wide skills, attractive jobs and vocational careers and their development profile must become a priority. This would then underpin the articulation and promotion of work (jobs) to career opportunities to attract new workers to rural industries.

Skilling Australia for the future

The Australian Government highlighted the need for a national skills campaign with the *Skilling Australia for the future* initiative. The Government said that it was committed to increasing investment in training and ensuring this was targeted to address skills shortages across the Australian economy.

Skilling Australia for the future outlined the Government's commitment to provide an additional 450,000 training places over the next four years and as a roadmap for reform. This increased investment in skills training was targeted at lifting workforce participation and productivity in Australia — allowing the Australian economy to continue to expand and deliver prosperity to future generations of Australians.

Skilling Australia for the future's investment in skills formation is designed to boost Australia's potential growth rate while maintaining steady inflation outcomes over the medium- to long-term.

The limited supply of skilled labour in Australia represented a major constraint on the capacity of industry to keep pace with increasing demand and intensifying international competition. The new policy adopts a demand driven approach to training delivery, in contrast to past supply driven approaches.

Areas of skills needs are being identified through consultation with industry, and then addressed through prioritising training in those areas. A new national body, Skills Australia, has been established as an independent, high level body to provide the Government with advice about the future skills needs of the country and to help to inform public investment in training.

The Government said, "The skills capacity of the Australian workforce will be increased, improved and deepened, to ensure that the skills that industry requires are matched with appropriate training through Australia's national training system."

National Training Taskforce

A report prepared for the National Training Reform Taskforce by Shah and Burke in November 2006, examined Australia's training efforts and modelled future demands of its economy. While the report noted that there had been considerable skills deepening based on the ABS Education and work survey data from 2001 to 2005, it predicted that ongoing growth in the Australian labour market would require 4 million workers (2.25 million new entrants and 1.78 million existing workers) to acquire qualifications prior to 2016. A substantial proportion of the vocational qualifications (36 per cent) would be required at the higher level Diploma and Advanced Diploma levels.

The report also indicated that continuing the existing level of training outcomes in vocational education and training (VET) would result in a shortfall of 240,000 in the VET trained workforce over the 10 years to 2016. This growing awareness has shifted the focus to skilling as a means of strengthening workplace and industry capacity.

Missing link

The *Jobs for life* provided a means to address awareness of opportunities in horticulture. It sought to assist in promoting career choices and workplace diversity in horticulture both nationally and through direct industry contact with enterprises, training organisations, industry decision-makers, thought leaders and people and organisations of influence, including governments.

The national broadcasts and distribution of the DVD/booklet set served to provide a new and positive outlook for horticulture while circumscribing career choices and options.

Jobs for life demonstrated horticulture's vast diversity, comprising more than 40 individual industries/commodities, covering fruit, cut flowers, nuts, vegetables, turf, nursery, and garden and extractive crops.

It is the second largest agricultural industry and the gross value of production (GVP) at farm gate is \$7 billion (2004-05). When multipliers associated with processing, wholesaling, distribution and retailing are included; the total value of horticulture to the economy is estimated at approximately \$20 billion.

Nor is the industry static. Horticulture's GVP has grown 31 per cent in the past five years, and there are 30,000 individual enterprises employing 30 per cent of overall agricultural sector employment.

The size, scale and diversity of horticulture and the dominance of family run enterprises make it vulnerable to pressures on skills, understanding, training and employment. *Jobs for life* is a powerful

tool for promoting and marketing horticulture as a preferred career option. It has crystallised career options and industry diversity, giving powerful support to the candid observations of case study participants and industry experts.

Jobs for life describes what horticulture is and does, and who can and should work in the industry. It is the missing link in the industry efforts to promote itself as a preferred career option.

METHOD AND ACTIVITIES

The council was well informed about the challenges facing agri-food when it undertook to produce the *Jobs for life* case studies under the agreement with HAL. The council was developing strong ties with key industry players and was emerging as a unifying force in the agri-food industry's clear need to overhaul its approach to workplace skills and training needs.

The council's industry-led identity – through its board and five industry standing committees - gave strong material presence across agri-food.

One of the first tasks facing the council with *Jobs for life* was to seek engagement with the horticulture industry itself, through the Horticulture Australia Council, AUSVEG Ltd, Nursery and Garden Industry Association, Growcom Qld and TAFE NSW. These organisations provided invaluable support and industry intelligence. With their support, the council was able to identify suitable case study enterprises and to assemble a contemporary picture of the industry and its career opportunities.

The final case study topics and organisations are as follows:

- Almonds – Select Harvests, Robinvale, Victoria
- Asian vegetables – Tony Har, Sydney Basin
- Citrus and wine grapes – L&K Cock Orchards, Buronga, Victoria
- Production and retail nursery – Newtown Station Nursery, Hobart, Tasmania
- Floristry – South Western Sydney Institute, Padstow College
- Tomatoes – J&A Brandsema, Turners Beach, Tasmania
- Seedling production – Withcott Seedlings, Lockyer Valley, Queensland
- Commercial vegetable production – Harslett farm, Amiens near Stanthorpe, Queensland

Additional interviews were provided by:

- Ross Ord, Industry Development Manager, AUSVEG Ltd
- Kris Newton, CEO Horticulture Australia Council
- Dr Allison Anderson, NSW Vegetable Industry Development Officer
- Steve Honeywood, Education Officer, NSW Department of Primary Industries

The council was most grateful to obtain the participation of SkillsOne Television, an arm of the Institute for Trade Skills Excellence, to carry out the video recordings and television production. The council and SkillsOne negotiated a fee to record case studies and to assemble them into a documentary program to be broadcast on the Fox Network.

The council accepted six (6) minute case studies as the length of interviews that SkillsOne used successfully in its current television format. This, however, limited the number of case studies in a 30 minute documentary to no more than four.

The council then sought to produce two half-hour documentaries to allow for eight case studies. This involved a higher fee from SkillsOne, and the council and SkillsOne negotiated a reduced fee.

The council carried out extensive preliminary research through its stakeholders list, members of the board and standing committees and peak industry organisations. This involved arranging topic choices, selecting case studies, suitable industry representatives, locations and availability.

Recording sessions involved interstate travel and complex logistical arrangements. The council prepared broad essential industry information and candidate choices to enable SkillsOne staff to carry out interviews.

In the period between December 2007 and February 2008, SkillsOne video journalists carried out the interviews in four states, NSW, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania. This involved travelling to each location, with one or two video journalists. Each six minute case study entailed a full day of recording and interviewing.

The council arranged also for industry representatives to take part in recordings on site to ensure the broader industry context was not lost. This is especially evident in the Asian vegetables case study in the Sydney Basin. AUSVEG and the Horticulture Australia Council were interviewed and included in the documentaries, providing their expertise and knowledge and giving industry perspective.

Marketing and promotion

The council in partnership with SkillsOne began a marketing and promotion campaign in February 2008. SkillsOne distributed an advance Media Release designed for magazine coverage and this was widely distributed.

A joint national Media Release featuring the Agri-Food Industry Skills Council, SkillsOne and was produced and distributed nationally by the council. The council also strongly marketed the documentaries on its website www.agrifoodskills.net.au and through its strategic stakeholder data base of approximately 3,000 organisations.

The council prepared a feature article – with assistance from the Institute for Trade Skills Excellence - that was published in the March edition of Rotarian Life.

This involved partner organisation in the production of the documentaries, strongly marketed the case studies on its web platform, in magazines and newspapers, and on its television channel, the Aurora Channel (183) on the Fox Network.

In collaboration with peak industry organisation, the council researched the horticulture industry and several industries and case study candidates were selected.

SkillsOne Television produced the case studies and they were made available progressively on the SkillsOne as they were edited: www.skillsone.com.au

The website attracts a very large number of visitors. In April, the SkillsOne website received approximately 136,000 page impressions and more than 50,000 people viewed SkillsOne streaming videos.

The website has also won wide recognition. In May, SkillsOne won the prestigious ‘Associations’ section of the 12th Annual Webby Awards. On 11 March, the Illawarra Mercury published a feature story about SkillsOne titled ‘Apprenticeships have never looked so good’.

“The Federal Government is tapping into the digital age to give trades an image makeover, with the launch of a new television series and YouTube-style website. The SkillsOne website (www.skillsone.com.au) and television program has been created to cater to those already in a trade or vocational career, as well as those thinking about an apprenticeship or traineeship. It is a portal for interested students and career changers and is continually updated with new articles, profiles and video providing career information and insights into trade and vocational careers.”

Television broadcast

SkillsOne Television broadcast the two documentaries on the Aurora channel (Fox Channel 183) at 3pm on Saturday and Sunday (22-23 March). They were re-broadcast at 5pm on Saturday, 29 March and 4.30pm Sunday, 30 March, 5pm on Tuesday, 1 of April and 9.30am on Thursday, 3 April.

DVD/booklet production

The council's project manager attended recording sessions in Queensland and obtained many of the still photographs that are used in the *Jobs for life* booklet. At other locations, the council contracted local photographers, sought photos from the interviewees, or was provided in two cases by still photos taken by SkillsOne staff.

The photograph selection was obtained at all locations in anticipation of a final full-colour *Jobs for life* booklet to be printed and distributed as part of a DVD/booklet set.

A *Jobs for life* booklet was compiled from edited transcripts from the DVDs and submitted articles and materials. The booklet was printed in full colour with appropriate design, positioning of logos and recognition of contributors. It made a 20-page booklet plus cover in A4 size.

Using a master DVD, the council then arranged for copies to be produced and printed and they were attached to the attached to the inside front cover. A total of 2,000 DVD sets were produced and orders for approximately 1,000 sets were received as a result of eBulletin items on the Agri-Food stakeholder list. The balance of *Jobs for life* sets will be retained and made available on request.

They are expected to be distributed during the Agri-Food National Conference 2008 at Rydges Melbourne in September.

EVALUATION

The *Jobs for life* documentary gives fresh and contemporary insights into jobs and careers in horticulture, its people and workplaces and the endless range and diversity of produce, from the food we eat to flowers and the large-scale production of seedlings for farmers and horticulturalists from a variety of geographic locations and backgrounds. The cameras went to Queensland, NSW, Victoria and Tasmania where employers, owners, managers, students and trainers discussed various career options.

Horticulture provides a framework of jobs, careers, infrastructure, services and people in the agricultural sector. The industry is a vital mainstay for the economies of Australia's rural, regional and remote local communities.

These are a selection of submitted views provided to the council for inclusion in the *Jobs for life* booklet.

Arthur Blewitt CEO, Agrifood Industry Skills Council

The Agri-Food Industry Skills Council proudly presented this second edition of 'Directions' with its distinctive focus on horticulture and the range of challenging and rewarding careers this large and dynamic agri-food industry offered Australians.

The booklet and accompanying DVD were designed to provide a useful and highly interesting series of insights into horticulture, its people, industries, jobs and career opportunities.

"These case studies into horticultural practices and the detailed footage and observations will assist training organisations, schools, careers advisors, students, agri-food enterprises and industry groups to describe the ready career opportunities that exist in horticulture today," he said.

“AFISC draws on significant industry networks and encourages active stakeholder engagement. The council works in a highly collaborative way with industry, training organisations and governments, and it operates strategically to identify and understand current and future skills and workforce needs of agri-food industry and its more than 130,000 individual enterprises.

“This is done principally through partnerships with key industry groups and specialist contacts, education experts, relevant government agencies and enterprises. In turn, we have experienced the growth of diverse industry networks working with us to deliver advances in expertise and innovation in vocational and technical education.

“The council strives to reflect the aspirations of policy and decision makers from across Australia’s agri-food infrastructure, incorporating broad-acre agriculture, horticulture, food processing, beverages, pharmaceuticals, racing, meat and seafood. We marry these views with other influential researchers and thought leaders so we can aim for the right skills, the most effective training and, ultimately, highly capable and innovative people who are available to work in our industries.”

Ross Ord
Industry Development Manager
AUSVEG Ltd

Ross said the key issues today were water, climate change, labour cost and shortage, environmental sustainability, trade relations and bio-security.

“We are looking beyond the farm gate as far as the research and development activities to where the vegetable growers levy is spent,” Ross said.

One initiative in the last 12 months was the appointment of a full-time development coordinator to identify training needs and any barriers for people engaging in training. The training officer assessed training programs, ranging from traineeships to apprenticeships.

These were at the upper end the continuum of training and education to prepare our future leaders. In between there was a program to enable vegetable growers to deliver a better product on time, as needed.

“If we haven’t got water then we can’t grow our products, so access to water of a sufficient quality is an ongoing issue for our industry,” he said. “Related to that of course is climate change, we are not immune from that. Therefore we must adjust, predict and put in strategies to reflect what’s happening in a global sense.”

The third issue was labour. “We talk about having a skills shortage in Australia,” he said. “Well my feeling is we have a labour shortage, both the cost of labour and one which is reflected in the shortage of labourers. It’s a very important one and we’re emphasising better and increased access to training for our industry workers.”

Only four per cent of our fresh vegetables were being exported due to huge domestic demand in Australia. International trade and the increase in the Australian dollar were hurting farmers and countries like China were entering some of Australia’s traditional markets in South-East Asia. China was now the largest exporter of vegetable product to Australia. Bio-security was extremely important.

“Our consumers and markets demand a fresh and safe product. We’re achieving that and will continue making efforts to maintain that status.”

He said it was important that industry went down the road of more structured training for its workers, both for those doing the more straightforward work of perhaps driving the tractor, which is still required, to those who were actually owning and operating the business skills.

There had been a clear increase in Asian vegetables but that the consumer was not quite certain what to call them, how to prepare them, what the difference was and that has led to putting an effort into identifying consumer requirements, demands and expectations.

Products such as broccolini were relatively new on the market, yet there was an excellent consumer response to it. Other products included baby corn where the consumer was looking for a different presentation of the traditional vegetables they had been used to for twenty or thirty years. Linked with that was the presentation. The consumer was looking for presentation to be visually appealing and to ensure they were getting a healthy and safety product.

“There are many ways to get involved in our industry,” Ross said. “We employ more than 7,000 people so if you live in one of the large city areas there is a local vegetable grower next door to you.”

AUSVEG is the national body for the Australian potato and vegetable industry and its chief role is to represent the industry in national forums and to present the views of the vegetable growers on national issues in particular.

Brian Wexham
CEO, The Institute for Trade Skills Excellence

Brian said *Jobs for Life* was the result of a partnership between the Agri-Food Industry Skills Council, Horticulture Australia Limited and SkillsOne, demonstrating to Australians how far a career in horticulture could take you.

SkillsOne’s entrance into producing our inaugural full-length documentary was built on the five hours of new content produced each week and delivered via Foxtel and Austar on the Aurora Channel. It was available also on Skillsone.com.au which was being widely accessed by career counsellors, students, parents, educators and employers alike.

SkillsOne Television and the council had produced these two landmark series with funding support from Horticulture Australia Limited and contributions from major horticulture peak organisations: Horticulture Australia Council, the Nursery and Garden Industry Association, Growcom Queensland, AUSVEG Ltd and TAFE NSW.

Kris Newton
CEO, Horticulture Australia Council

“As you will see from this Directions booklet and the DVD, careers in the industry range from those working in the field, to the managers of the business – and all roles in between,” she said.

“There are interesting and varied careers available in our many horticultural industries to suit everyone – from working in the city or town, to regional Australia. The only pre-requisites are a willingness to be open-minded and flexible, to keep learning, and to enjoy creating top quality food to eat – or things of beauty in the form of flowers and our green spaces. We have a saying: “Agriculture makes life possible: horticulture makes it worthwhile!”

Also in desperately short supply were researchers (for example, in soil health, plant breeding, adapting to climate change, or entomology), food scientists, agronomists, and agri-business consultants. Some work in the field, others make their contribution from the laboratory. “If you’re looking for a career that combines a fantastic lifestyle with the knowledge that you are contributing to a better world, then this is an industry well worth exploring,” she said.

CASE STUDY 1

Tony Har

**Asian vegetable producer
Leppington in the Sydney Basin**

Tony Har began farming in the Sydney Basin after coming to Australia from China thirty years ago. He grows shallots, English spinach, baby radish, Tong Ho (succulent edible leaves from *Chrysanthemum* genus) some Coriander, and some Chinese celery (using hydroponics). Tony sells all his produce at the Flemington Markets for grocery shops across Sydney.

“I think the best that we market gardeners get from farming is that we can operate under our own time schedule,” he said. “It’s more flexible and easy. We can also eat our own freshly grown produce and breathe fresh air. We don’t have to be compliant in a workplace like a factory. If they would like to start a vegetable farm, I think perhaps they should approach DPI and attend some training courses. In this way they can be more knowledgeable.”

**Dr Alison Anderson
NSW Vegetable Industry Development Officer**

Tony’s farm was at Leppington in Sydney’s south-west and the major growing areas in Sydney are in the south-west around Rossmore, Leppington and Camden and in the north-west.

The majority of Asian vegetables in NSW and Australia were grown in the Sydney basin where they had ready access to the markets. These were products that needed to be close to market.

“It’s about learning how to identify beneficial pests on your farm, monitor for the pests so that you only act when needed – and learning how to recognise the beneficial insects on the farm and get them to breed up. This way they are doing the job for you. Thus, farmers are less reliant on chemicals.”

“We work with farmers in our state and work out where their needs and priorities for research and development are; and we then work with researchers to help develop projects that meet the needs of farmers.

“When there are outcomes from research projects we help to facilitate the delivery of outcomes to the farmers, so we’re really assisting the Australian vegetable industry to adopt good agricultural practices and to make sure we have world best standards here in Australia.

“It’s all about giving them the tools they need to manage their farms.”

**Steve Honeywood
Education Officer for the NSW Department of Primary Industries**

He said the program in the Sydney Basin was funded by the NSW Department of Education and training and they support farmers in their training.

“Basically, we are working with the farmers to give them what we call skills recognition, so although a lot of the farmers have a lot of experience it never got formal recognition.

“So we are able to come out to the farmers and to basically get the farmers to demonstrate their skills by doing a Certificate 3 in Agriculture. This is a very important area for vegetable markets and market gardens for the Sydney produce. It’s under a lot of pressure at the moment because of the new highway and a lot more urbanisation is occurring.

“When their skills are formalised because it is a recognition that they have got the right qualifications to do their farming. Therefore, the consumer can be a lot more confident that the produce they are getting is actually coming to them in the optimum condition.”

CASE STUDY 2

Tim Millen
Head Horticulture Manager
Select Harvests
Robinvale, Victoria

This is an area 16 kilometres wide by 6 kilometres long and it's the largest plantation of almonds in the world in one specific area. In the next few years we're going to be developing more almonds here in north-west Victoria and its going to be heading over to Western Australia.

"We grow all our almonds on the sandy soils and they're very deep sands which allow for good root systems and establishing good healthy trees," he said. "Almonds are very efficient at using water and if you're able to get good soils to do that, which we want to grow our almonds on, you get very few root disorders or root diseases.

"These are the almonds that have just been swept off the shaken trees and they're windrowed into this line. The harvesters will come along and basically scoop it up by beating the ground with rubber belts. Then it's offloaded to carts that then go down to the stock pad."

Select Harvests began ten years ago with a base of 1,900 acres. Since then it has grown to 38,000 acres. With the business growing so rapidly there have been opportunities for different specialities, particularly in maintenance and farm management, water management and tree technology, which is tree husbandry.

There were all sorts of specialised roles involved and a lot of younger people were now recognising that there were opportunities at Robinvale.

This year Select Harvests forecasts 16,000 tonnes of finished product (kernel) and that should peak in the next five years to 50,000 tonnes. This year had been one of the better harvests.

"We are focussing a lot on training our staff, recognising that that's an important part if you have a lot of machines and different managers involved. This is one of the unique horticultural industries. It is growing and a very profitable business to be in.

We're lucky that every major farm is a workshop and we've been encouraging them over the last few years to set up apprenticeships for young people. We have metal fabrication apprenticeships and mechanical apprenticeships and we're running a lot of TAFE courses through our business, nursery, irrigation and horticulture. We're currently running more than 25 different courses from first aid to chemical safety, apprenticeships. It's all part of running a business and growing a business."

IMPLICATIONS

The key implication from the production of the *Jobs for life* suite of materials comes to the success of the promotional activities and the penetration of industry. The DVD and booklet are ideally suited as a learning and educational tool in a workplace and in a learning environment to place the industry in a most positive light.

This comes from the comments by case study participants.

The industry and government spokesmen and women ensure that the case studies are put in context and given direction and relevance. Yet, each case study retains its own particular identity and style.

A very large number of stakeholders have requested copies of the *Jobs for life* sets, in the order of 700 organisations. As a direct consequence of promoting the DVDs, some 60 high schools have asked for copies, and have now joined the agri-food stakeholder list.

It has presented an opportunity for the council to build stronger ties with horticulture and some 200 to 300 new stakeholders have been added as a direct result of this project.

Having a national organisation like SkillsOne and The Institute for Trade Skills Excellence as a partner, added considerably to the prestige and promotional opportunities.

SkillsOne also gave access to the national broadcasting channel with the Fox Network. By way of contrast, other public affairs stations indicated that they would want to research and record their own documentary products, thus opening the door to critical analysis and a loss of editorial control.

Other industries – meat and wine – have since indicated their wish to produce similar case study documentaries for their own industries, and these projects are currently under discussion.

There are some lessons to be learned. Closer editorial control by the council during final production could assist with a more focussed product and the addition of a voice-over monologue would impart a stronger overall message.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This first *Jobs for life* documentary with its component case studies provide a new and useful learning tool and resource that has been well received by the agrifood industry. The positive response from agri-food indicates the usefulness of material like *Jobs for life* for use in work-like learning environments and for introduction to horticulture and to explain career options.

Thus, there is an argument that the horticulture industry should consider producing work-like case studies for broadcast and distribution on a more regular basis. The industry is so extensive and there are many different industries and geographical locations that there is virtually an endless supply of case studies..

By their nature, documentaries for television broadcast can only be used once or twice. But the DVD and booklet have a more lasting value for the industry to promote careers and workplace environments.

The *Jobs for life* concept has been very successful by current measures, by industry interest and uptake. But it contains no more than seven case studies of a total of some 40 industries, and these are from only four states.

It would be possible to focus on a documentary in the tropical north, on vegetable production, or other broad industry groups. Or, a selection of different industries could be selected, offering different insights and perspectives.

This then creates an industry promotional product that can be marketed over a full year for each year, and provide an available resource that remains contemporary and one that industry and training organisations would subscribe to, as they have with *Jobs for life*.

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SkillsOne Television (The Institute for Trade Skills Excellence)

CEO Brian Wexham
Operations Manager Kathryn Lees
Video journalists
SkillsOne editorial and production staff

Horticulture Australia Council

CEO Kris Newton

AUSVEG Ltd

Industry Development Manager Ross Ord

Growcom Queensland

Industry Services Manager
George McDonald

Nursery and Garden Industry

Board member, Geoff Richards

South Western Sydney Institute

Head Teacher, Padstow College
Dave Winner

CASE STUDIES

Tim Millen

Head Horticulture Manager
Select Harvests
Robinvale, Victoria

Tony Har

Farmer, Leppington

Dr Alison Anderson

NSW Vegetable Industry Development Officer

Steve Honeywood,

Education Officer for the NSW Department of Primary Industries

Kevin Cock

L & K Cock Orchards
Buronga, Victoria

Greg Kerin

Newtown Station Nursery
Hobart.

Angela Tsoukatos

South Western Sydney Institute

Padstow College

Anthony Brandsema

J & A Brandsema
Turners Beach, Tasmania

Wendy Erhart

Withcott Seedlings
Lockyer Valley, Queensland

Glenn Geitz

Withcott's Crop Protection Manager

Jamie Lee

Withcott's Grafting Crop Manager.

Tim Harslett

Amiens, near Stanthorpe in Queensland

The Australian Agricultural College Corporation

Queensland

APPENDICES

1. PDF Directions *Jobs for life*
2. CD artwork
3. Illawarra Mercury article on The Institute for Trade Skills Excellence
4. Article from Rotarian Life
5. Media Release Agri-Food Industry Skills Council – 20 March
6. Industry eBulletin – 20 March
7. Careers in Horticulture – SkillsOne Media Release – March
8. Web page – 12th Annual Webby Awards
9. SkillsOne press adverts:
 - Want to learn more about a career in horticulture?
 - Chinese greens, seedlings, almonds, fruit, vegies... a career in horticulture?

DIRECTIONS

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY SKILLS COUNCIL
ISSUE 2, MAY 2008



jobs for life

Case studies into careers
in horticulture

DVD + BOOKLET SET



AGRI-FOOD
INDUSTRY SKILLS
COUNCIL

skillsone
.com.au

Television

sponsors



Know-how for Horticulture™

DIRECTIONS is designed to highlight important new directions and advances in agri-food skills and workforce development. This edition provides detailed case studies into careers in horticulture. It aims to assist students, training organisations and industry enterprises to gain a fuller appreciation of career paths in horticulture, the nature of workplaces and how they operate.



Australian Government

**Department of Education, Employment
and Workplace Relations**

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Mainstay of the rural economy

The *Jobs for life* documentary gives fresh and contemporary insights into jobs and careers in horticulture, its people and workplaces and the endless range and diversity of produce, from the food we eat to flowers and the large-scale production of seedlings for farmers and horticulturalists from a variety of geographic locations and backgrounds.

The cameras go to Queensland, NSW, Victoria and Tasmania where employers, owners, managers, students and trainers discuss various career options.

Horticulture provides a framework of jobs, careers, infrastructure, services and people in the agricultural sector.

The industry is a vital mainstay for the economies of Australia's rural, regional and remote local communities.

Tony Har came to Australia from Hong Kong 30 years ago and began growing Asian vegetables in the Sydney Basin.

Today, the Sydney Basin produces the bulk of fresh Asian vegetables consumed by the city's four million residents, where some 600 small farms grow almost 100 per cent of its Asian greens.

Withcott Seedlings in Queensland's Lockyer Valley, the major supplier of vegetable seedlings to the east coast of Australia and the Asia Pacific, producing more than 400 million vegetable seedlings each year.

As many as 30,000 individual horticultural enterprises in Australia employ more than 100,000 people. The industry comprises more than 40 individual industries/commodities, such as fruit, vegetables, cut flowers, nuts, turf, nursery and garden.

Snap-shot

- > Horticulture in Australia is extremely diverse, comprising more than 40 individual industries/commodities
 - covering fruit, cut flowers, nuts, vegetables, turf, nursery and garden, and extractive crops.
- > Horticulture is the second largest agricultural industry.
- > The gross value of production (GVP) of horticulture at farm gate is around \$7 billion (2004-05).
- > When multipliers associated with processing, wholesaling, distribution and retailing are included, the total value of horticulture to the economy is estimated to be approximately \$20 billion.
- > Horticulture is also the fastest growing agricultural industry
 - in the last five years the GVP increased by 31 per cent.
- > Over 30,000 horticultural enterprises nationally employ around 30 per cent of overall agricultural sector employment;
 - increasing employment and economic growth from horticulture are providing great opportunities for rural communities.
- > Horticulture generates exports worth around \$800 million a year.
- > Horticultural crops use around 17 per cent of total irrigation use and produce around 40-50 per cent of Australia's irrigated produce
 - every 100ML of water used in horticulture generates \$250,000 and four jobs on-farm;
 - every 100ML of water used in horticulture generates approximately \$0.5 billion for the economy.

Brian Wexham
Chief Executive Officer
The Institute for Trade
Skills Excellence



skillsone
.com.au

Television

A landmark series

Jobs for Life is the result of a partnership between the Agri-Food Industry Skills Council, Horticulture Australia Limited and SkillsOne, demonstrating to Australians how far a career in horticulture can take you.

SkillsOne's entrance into producing our inaugural full-length documentary builds on the five hours of new content produced each week and delivered via Foxtel and Austar on the Aurora Channel. It is available also on skillsone.com.au which is being widely accessed by career counselors, students, parents, educators and employers alike.

SkillsOne Television and the Agri-Food Industry Skills Council have produced

these two landmark series with funding support from Horticulture Australia Limited and contributions from major horticulture peak organisations: Horticulture Australia Council, the Nursery and Garden Industry Association, Growcom Queensland, AUSVEG Ltd and TAFE NSW, and to them we say thank you.

All the stories featured on the accompanying DVD can be viewed any time at skillsone.com.au.

I trust you will enjoy getting an insight into Australia's diverse horticultural industry and the many exciting jobs on offer.

Careers in horticulture

Welcome to a quick tour of some of the careers available in Australia's most exciting agricultural industry – horticulture!

Horticulture comprises an extremely diverse set of industries, covering fruit, nursery and garden, nuts, vegetables, turf, and extractive crops (such as ti-tree oil, or pyrethrum). The industry is Australia's second-largest agricultural industry and its fastest growing – which makes it vibrant, exciting, and focussed on world's best practice and the future. Australia's horticultural industries have an enviable 'clean and green' reputation, and work hard to stay ahead of the game in our globalised Australian economy.

Despite the fact that approximately a third of all those employed in agriculture work in horticulture, many of our industries are still experiencing significant labour and skills shortages.

As you will see from this DIRECTIONS booklet and the DVD, careers in the industry range from those working in the field, to the managers of the business – and all roles in between. There are interesting and varied careers available in our many horticultural

industries to suit everyone – from working in the city or town, to regional Australia. The only pre-requisites are a willingness to be open-minded and flexible, to keep learning, and to enjoy creating top quality food to eat - or things of beauty in the form of flowers and our green spaces. We have a saying: "Agriculture makes life possible: horticulture makes it worthwhile!"

Also in desperately short supply are researchers (for example, in soil health, plant breeding, adapting to climate change, or entomology), food scientists, agronomists, and agri-business consultants. Some work in the field, others make their contribution from the laboratory.

If you're looking for a career that combines a fantastic lifestyle with the knowledge that you are contributing to a better world, then this is an industry well worth exploring.

Kris Newton
CEO of the
Horticulture
Australia Council



John Webster
Managing Director
Horticulture Australia
Limited



Know-how for Horticulture™

A critical step

Horticulture is a labour intensive industry operating in a very competitive commercial environment.

One of the big challenges in today's tight labour market is to attract young people into horticulture. A critical step in achieving this is raising awareness about the whole range of career opportunities that exist in the industry.

Jobs For Life promotes potential careers in the horticulture industry and I am pleased it has found an audience on SkillsOne Television on Foxtel's Aurora and Austar channels and through DVD release.

Horticulture Australia Limited is a national research, development and marketing organisation that works in partnership with the horticulture sector to invest in programs that provide benefit to Australian horticulture industries.

HAL invests almost \$80 million annually in projects in partnership with the horticulture sector. During the year HAL runs more than 1,200 research, development and marketing projects covering a diversity of topics including: market access, market research, export marketing, domestic marketing, supply chain management, quality assurance, food safety, skills development, industry communication, biotechnology, biosecurity, breeding, plant health, pesticide regulation, agronomy, crop regulation, physiology, irrigation and sustainable practices.

Working in partnership

The Agri-Food Industry Skills Council (AFISC) proudly presents this second edition of DIRECTIONS and its distinctive focus on horticulture and the range of challenging and rewarding careers this large and dynamic agri-food industry offers to Australians.

The booklet and accompanying DVD are designed to provide a useful and highly interesting series of insights into horticulture, its people, industries, jobs and career opportunities.

These case studies into horticultural practices and the detailed footage and observations will assist training organisations, schools, careers advisors, students, agri-food enterprises and industry groups to describe the ready career opportunities that exist in horticulture today.

AFISC draws on significant industry networks and encourages active stakeholder engagement. The council works in a highly collaborative way with industry, training organisations and governments, and it operates strategically to identify and understand current and future skills and workforce needs of agri-food industry and its more than 130,000 individual enterprises.

This is done principally through partnerships with key industry groups and specialist contacts, education experts, relevant government agencies and enterprises.

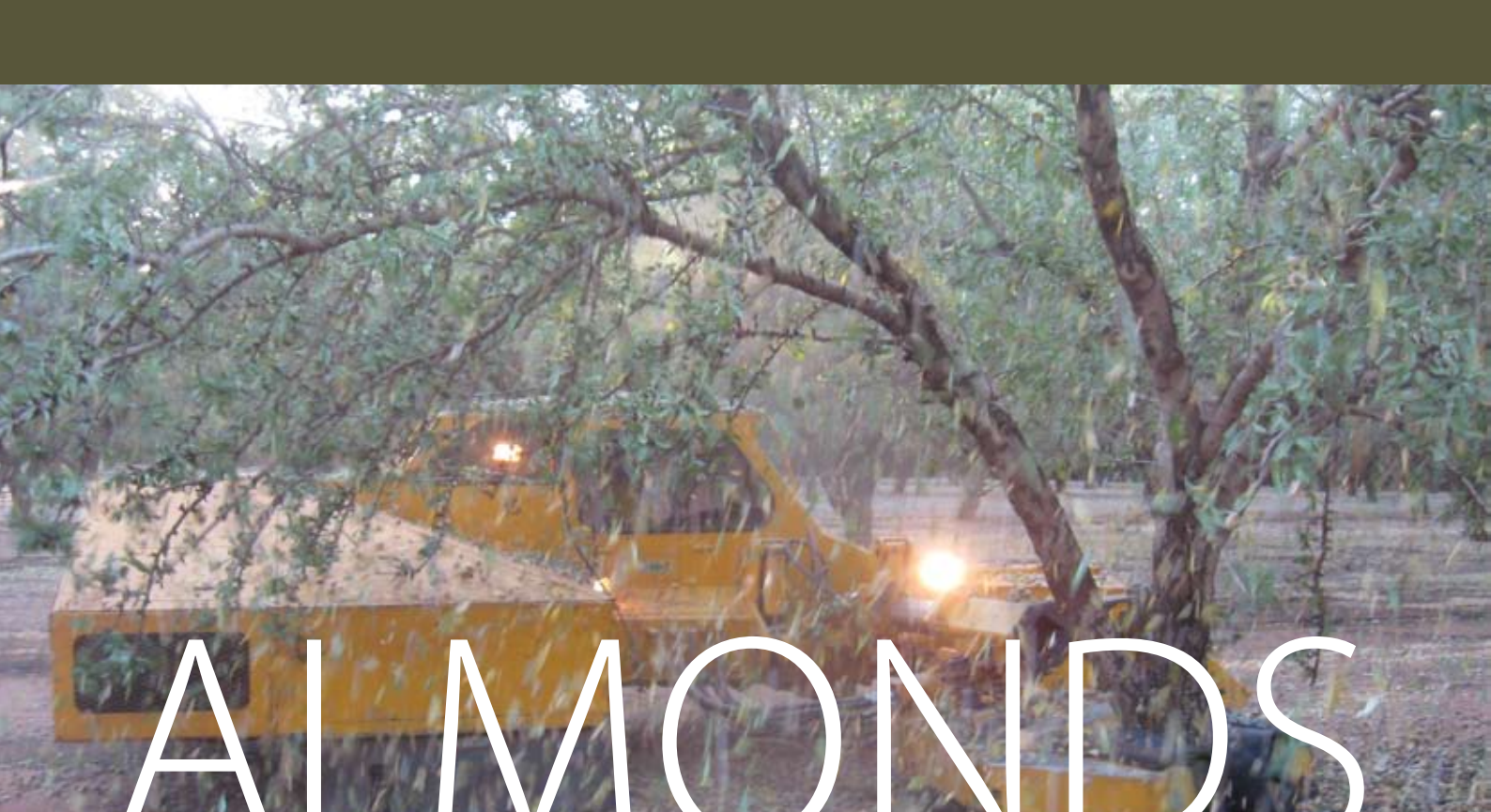
In turn, we have experienced the growth of diverse industry networks working with us to deliver advances in expertise and innovation in vocational and technical education.

The council strives to reflect the aspirations of policy and decision makers from across Australia's agri-food infrastructure, incorporating broad-acre agriculture, horticulture, food processing, beverages, pharmaceuticals, racing, meat and seafood.

We marry these views with other influential researchers and thought leaders so we can aim for the right skills, the most effective training and, ultimately, highly capable and innovative people who are available to work in our industries.

Arthur Blewitt
CEO Agri-Food
Industry Skills Council





ALMONDS

WE'RE IN NORTH-WEST VICTORIA up on the Murray, a district called Robinvale which is about 110 kilometres from Mildura. This is an area 16 kilometres wide by 6 kilometres long and it's the largest plantation of almonds in the world in one specific area.

In the next few years we're going to be developing more almonds here in north-west Victoria and we're going to be heading over to Western Australia. We have some properties over there that we want to expand. That's pretty exciting for the business.

We grow all our almonds on the sandy soils and they're very deep sands which allow for good root systems and establishing good healthy trees. Almonds are very efficient at using water and if you're able to get good soils to do that, which we want to grow our almonds on, you get very few root disorders or root diseases.

These are the almonds that have just been swept off the shaken trees and they're windrowed into this line. The harvesters will come along and basically scoop it up by beating the ground with rubber belts. Then it's offloaded to carts that then go down to the stock pad.

Select Harvests began ten years ago and we had a base of 1,900 acres. Since then we have grown to 38,000 acres. It's been a fantastic journey.

With our business growing so rapidly there have been opportunities for different specialities, particularly in maintenance and farm management, water management and tree technology, which is tree husbandry. There are all sorts of specialised roles involved and a lot of younger people are now recognising that there are opportunities here at Robinvale, and it's exciting for us all.

Every day is different and Mother Nature always throws a curve ball at you. You can be cruising along beautifully and suddenly something happens that might be a rain event, or the drought, and it always adds something different. Learning about people and dealing with people is always something that's difficult and it's also the challenge. Obviously I enjoy working outdoors and growing plants.



Tim Millen
Head Horticulture Manager
Select Harvests
Robinvale, Victoria



This year we're forecasting 16,000 tonnes of finished product (kernel) and that should peak in say the next five years to 50,000 tonnes - so it's a big job in front of us. This year has been one of the better harvests. We are focussing a lot on training our staff, recognising that that's an important part if you have a lot of machines and different managers involved.

This is one of the unique horticultural industries. It is growing and a very profitable business to be in. The yields over the last few years have increased to make it more profitable. The one thing that's unique about almonds is that they are mechanically shaken and harvested and the fact that they're not perishable like soft fruits.

I think that helps with broad acre management, which is what Select Harvests are currently involved in. You are able to shake them to the ground and leave them on the ground and windrow them. They can sit here for a few days and when you are ready you can pick them up. I think that's quite unique. Many other nut crops are like that.

We're lucky that every major farm is a workshop and we've been encouraging them over the last few years to set up apprenticeships for young people. We have metal fabrication apprenticeships and mechanical apprenticeships and we're running a lot of TAFE courses through our business, nursery, irrigation and horticulture. We're currently running more than 25 different courses from first aid to chemical safety, apprenticeships. It's all part of running a business and growing a business. It's new and unique in the isolated environment where we are.

We have been harvesting for the last three weeks. We have another six or so weeks to go before we get the harvest in. The almonds are coming in off the field, off our harvesters and they are dumped here on the stock pads ready for processing through the plant.

Part of our success has been to bring in someone who's been a wheat farmer or a librarian and put them through intensive training here on the farms with our manuals, and skill them up.

As long as they can deal with staff and are prepared to put in an effort they turn out to be really good managers, and that's how we built our business.



VEGETABLES

CHINESE

TONY HAR began farming in the Sydney Basin after coming to Australia from China thirty years ago. He grows shallots, English spinach, baby radish, Tong Ho (succulent edible leaves from *Chrysanthemum* genus) some Coriander, and some Chinese celery (using hydroponics). Tony sells all his produce at the Flemington Markets for grocery shops across Sydney.



Tony Har
Sydney Basin
Leppington, NSW

Dr Alison Anderson is the NSW Vegetable Industry Development Officer.

Tony's farm is at Leppington in Sydney's south-west. The major growing areas in Sydney are in the south-west around Rossmore, Leppington and Camden and in the north-west.

The majority of Asian vegetables in NSW and Australia are grown in the Sydney basin where they have ready access to the markets. These are products that need to be close to market.

One of the problems for farmers when it comes to pest and disease management has been access to chemicals so one of the major things we've been focussing on in our research and development program over the last ten years is integrative pest management.

We provide the farmers with more tools than just chemicals. It is about learning how to identify beneficial pests on your farm, monitor for the pests so that you only act when needed – and learning how to recognise the beneficial insects on the farm and get them to breed up. This way they are doing the job for you. Thus, farmers are less reliant on chemicals.

The chemicals used these days are very targeted, they are much softer. We've done a lot of research into how best to use those sort of chemicals, and farmers have also had a lot of older chemistry taken from them, or pressure from the community to manage their spray applications. Through the R&D programmes we've given them the tools they need.

We work with farmers in our state and work out where their needs and priorities for research and development are and we then work with researchers to help develop projects that meet the needs of farmers.

When there are outcomes from research projects we help to facilitate the delivery of outcomes to the farmers, so we're really assisting the Australian vegetable industry to adopt good agricultural practices and to make sure we have world best standards here in Australia.

It's all about giving them the tools they need to manage their farms. So if they do have a major pest they can use the information that we have. We produce fact sheets and booklets.



The *Healthy Soils for Sustainable Vegetable Farms* booklet is an example of one of the publications we have put together for farmers, particularly the Chinese vegetable growers in the Sydney Basin.

We have provided a Chinese-language book is a handbook on how to manage pests. It was thought that it would be best to also translate it into Chinese so growers who can only read Chinese also benefit from the information.

These tools give growers background information they also need when they go for their Certificate III in Agriculture.

Tony's been great and over the years he's let us hold many workshops here at his farm.

I'd say we've probably had about ten here in the last five years where we've organised with the Chinese vegetable farmers in Sydney to come here. We usually have a group of about sixty to eighty turn up for our workshops.

The sort of things we've been doing here are based on the national vegetable research and development program and we have done a lot of research in pest and disease management. I think that consumers wouldn't have the quality of vegetables we do have here in NSW and Australia.

Australians are very lucky with the quality of vegetables and through the R & D program that we do have the quality of vegetables has improved over the last ten years.

I think the best that we market gardeners get from farming is that we can operate under our own time schedule. It's more flexible and easy. We can also eat our own freshly grown produce and breathe fresh air. We don't have to be compliant in a workplace like a factory.

If they would like to start a vegetable farm, I think perhaps they should approach DPI and attend some training courses. In this way they can be more knowledgeable. – **Tony Har**

If growers have things like their pest and disease management correct, the product is going to look better and it's not going to have holes in the leaves or the product from grubs. That's definitely improved the situation for consumers in Australia.

Steve Honeywood, Education Officer for the NSW Department of Primary Industries

The program in the Sydney Basin is funded by the NSW Department of Education and training and they support farmers in their training.

Basically, we are working with the farmers to give them what we call skills recognition, so although a lot of the farmers have a lot of experience it never got formal recognition.

So we are able to come out to the farmers and to basically get the farmers to demonstrate their skills by doing a Certificate 3 in Agriculture.

This is a very important area for vegetable markets and market gardens for the Sydney produce. It's under a lot of pressure at the moment because of the new highway and a lot more urbanisation is occurring.

When their skills are formalised because it is a recognition that they have got the right qualifications to do their farming. Therefore, the consumer can be a lot more confident that the produce they are getting is actually coming to them in the optimum condition.

CITRUS AND WINE G

MY MUM AND DAD moved up to Buronga in 1958 when I was four and we lived in a shed with five kids. Dad cleared the land and planted the trees and we grew a lot of them from seed. It was a bit of a struggle in the early days but we got there.



Kevin Cock
L & K Cock Orchards
Buronga, Victoria

Dad developed the first part of the property. Then, when I showed an interest in farming, I went to an agricultural course at the end of my schooling.

Later, he bought the property next door but it was too much work for him so I came home and worked on the property with him. Then I bought the property that I'm on now.

Altogether there are 34 hectares of citrus and wine grapes, mainly navel oranges, Valencia oranges, mandarins and wine grapes. At last count there were about fifteen and a half thousand trees.

That number changes all the time because we are pulling out old ones and replacing them with new ones, new varieties, and keeping up with consumer trends.

The vineyard covers about ten acres. It's not a big vineyard but it's enough to keep us picking and it's a variety that people want. It's pretty easy to manage, pretty easy to run.

We do have a hassle with the very hot days early in January and that causes a bit of sunburn on the grapes so some of the grapes got a bit shrivelled, but there are still plenty of good grapes.

How many oranges do you think you'd produce each year?

I've never counted them but I know some of my orange pickers have. Millions and millions of them really, I couldn't say. In tonnes it would be probably about two and a half to three thousand tonnes of oranges.

Up until the drought my son Nathan was here. He took a course in Horticulture Certificate III and when he finished we were unsure how many trees we could keep alive or how the water situation was going. Nathan had an opportunity to work off-farm on a big citrus hedging machine so he took that opportunity and he worked there for six months.

My daughter and her husband are in horticulture as well. They have two hundred acres of wine grapes, ten thousand acres of wheat.

What impact have water restrictions had?

It's a challenge. We were cut by fifty per cent last year so we've run our orchard on fifty per cent of the water that we normally use. We've had to cut down even further to save some to carry over for the following year.

But yes, it does affect our crops and if we don't put on adequate water to push down the salts our trees defoliate, they flower out of season, they go into shutdown mode.

RAPEES

What do you look for in the best quality fruit?

Usually the smooth skinned ones are good quality with internal colour and flavour. (Kevin peels open an orange). So if I just peel this one open you'll see the colour of the fruit in there. They're full of juice. They have juice all the way around. That makes a good orange and a great taste.

Why do the smaller ones get used for juicing purposes?

Usually it's because they're a little bit harder to peel and some of these are quite sweet and juicy inside. Some are for juicing at home but most will go into the juice factories that produce fresh juice.

What are some of the more technical tasks on your farm?

One is insect monitoring. We need to ensure that we don't send any bad pests overseas on our fruit. We do a check about once a month.

What are some of the more common pests that you find here?

We are pretty lucky having a hot dry climate. A few little beetles cause a problem overseas but that's about all. We might have a few mealy bugs.

But because of our climate we're pretty lucky. It's mostly insect-free. But we have to do it. We have to write down exactly when we checked, what we find and each sample. We do that in different parts of the orchard. We also check the fruit on the tree. We make sure there's nothing on the oranges in the packing sheds so we can have got the confidence to send them to some of the more sensitive markets like Japan, America and Korea.

Can you explain the sunburn?

The really hot days actually burnt the stem – you can see there - the stem has died and that's caused the whole bunch to collapse and go dry. That will just fall off eventually. It's not too big a problem but it is a waste. We've got them to that stage and then that happens. But that's farming.

We keep the grass cover down and irrigate at night to keep the moisture up to the vines. There's not much you can do about forty or forty-two degree heat. You just hope you miss it or it doesn't come at the wrong time or the right time.

Which grapes do you grow?

These are known as Gordo, a muscat-flavoured wine. It is a sweetener base wine for a lot of grape and wine varieties. As I said, they're pretty easy to grow, pretty easy to manage. There's not much that worries them except for really hot days.

What's the best thing about your job?

It keeps me fit, it's a healthy lifestyle, it's a business. You have to think ahead, you have to plan ahead. There's always something different on a daily basis or a weekly basis. It sharpens up your senses in marketing, what consumers want in fruit is a fashion, and if the fashion changes, and we have to change ten years before.

What advice can you give to people who wish to become involved in farming?

There is a great future in horticulture but it is a business and you have to treat it like a business. There is always something new and something exciting to do, not only in the farming side of things but in the supportive industries such as packing, processing, marketing, and the scientific world. We use a lot of research and development on the orchard, so get in and give it a go. It's full of opportunities.



PRODUCTION AND

RETAIL NURS



Greg Kerin
Newtown Station Nursery
Hobart.

I REALLY ENJOY WORKING

with plants and I love serving the public as well, so just watching people buying plants and getting satisfaction out of gardening gives me a real buzz.

I studied horticulture in Hobart and retail horticulture in Victoria. I learned about the botany aspect of plants, plant identification, pests and diseases, turf care, plant care and irrigation.

I learned about retailing in Victoria, with customer flows throughout the nursery, signage, ticketing and marketing the business. There are many different components to horticulture. For example, people can learn to landscape and apply that to retailing or they might get into turf and apply that to landscaping or tree surgery for example. There are plenty of different areas that you can evolve from after you've done a basic horticulture course.

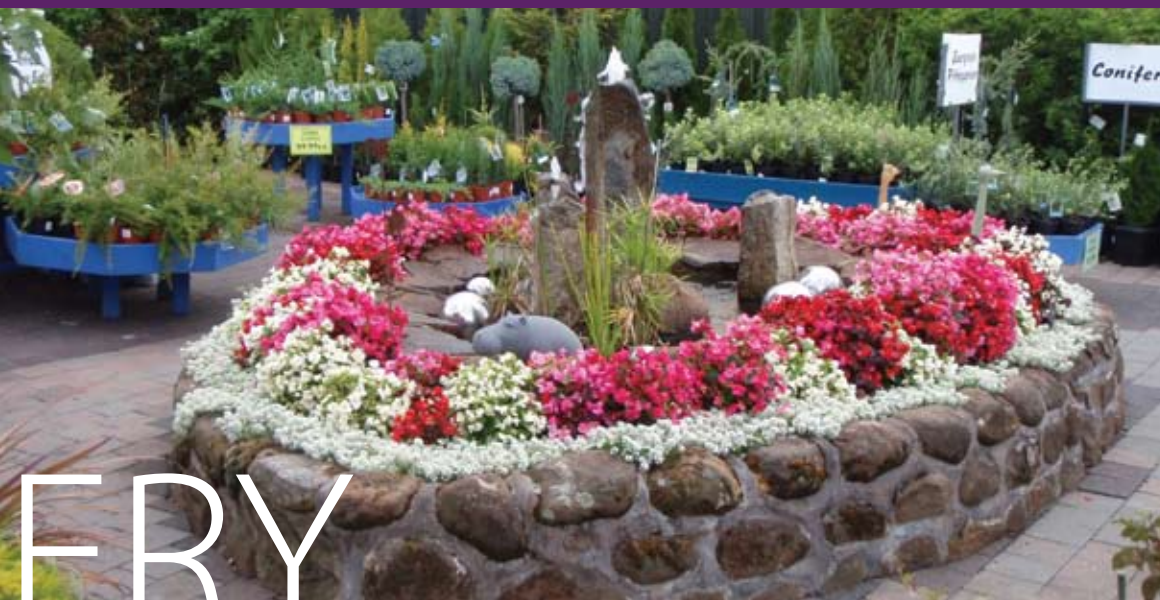
What would you suggest to a young person who wants to run their own nursery business?

It's important to gain as much knowledge and skills as you possibly can, spending time working in the industry getting to know the industry and the demands of the public.

It's important if you want to run your own nursery business to gain as much knowledge and skills as you possibly can, spending time working in the industry getting to know the industry, and also getting to know the demands of the public.

The next thing would be to find a site in an area where there is a demand for gardens and a demand for plants, for example, in newer suburbs around Australia. I guess the most important thing is to ask a lot of questions. So it's about understanding the need and fulfilling the need but the main thing is to have that basic grounding in horticulture.

ERY



You mentioned that young people should ask lots of questions when they're starting out. Do you take any trainees or young people on yourself?

Yes, we do. We are always on the lookout for young enthusiastic people in our industries. We take on trainees every two or three years. After the first twelve months, usually a young person would come out with a Level II Certificate in Horticulture.

We always like to encourage people to keep studying right up to the Diploma of Horticulture and then become a nursery expert. That will take four or five years. It doesn't have to be four or five consecutive years.

It's good to do it slowly as well and build your knowledge base from there. But the great thing about it is, it's all hands-on so you are gaining the knowledge in the nursery but you're also studying externally on block release for two to three block releases per year. All the trainees go away together, they all study together, they come back, they have tasks that they have to do within the nursery, for example, report writing, and also showing us that they are competent in basic fundamental skills of horticulture.

Where can a career in horticulture lead to?

Just about anywhere in the world. I think that's one of the best things about horticulture. You're not locked in to just doing horticulture in Australia, you could end up in a large garden. You could go to Kew Gardens in the United Kingdom, for example. Or you could end up running a city council gardening section. You could run a landscaping business. You could end up being like one of the famous people on TV, like Don Burke. It all comes down to self motivation and where you want to finish and what you're happy with doing.

What do you look for when you're taking on a trainee?

They have to be enthusiastic, to have a bit of a spring in their step. They have to be keen to learn and also have a smile. Greeting customers at the front door and creating the atmosphere is really important. But I guess you have to be self-motivated as well because there are times when you would be working in our business without another member of staff around. It's important to be self-motivated and genuinely happy with what you're doing.



Is there much ongoing training in being a horticulturalist?

There is actually. And we can obtain this information through our national peak body and our state body well. We have information nights and they might be hosted by companies that sell us gardening products right through to giving retail training.

What do you enjoy most about running a nursery?

Well, the thrill of selling and seeing people take a lot of joy out of what we do for a living and that to me is really everything.

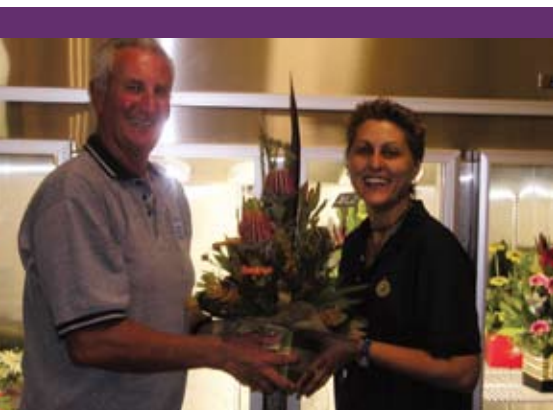
What better job could you have?

We're working outside, we're working with the environment, and things are always changing, so people that join our industry get a real overview of absolutely every aspect of horticulture. So it's wonderful.

In Full Bloom

FLORISTRY

FLOWERS ARE MOTHER NATURE'S and Mother Nature can't supply anything better. Flowers make people happy. Flowers celebrate occasions. Flowers grow from foliage.



Angela Tsoukatos
South Western Sydney Institute
Padstow College

My name is Angela Tsoukatos and I have a property in south-western Sydney and my aim is to provide foliage to florists in Sydney.

I started in floristry by going to the shops as I didn't understand what things were. I knew what gum was. I knew what certain plants or flowers were. But I didn't know the rest. I decided to come to TAFE mainly so I could identify what was on my property and to see what they use in the market and what I could supply.

Supplying florists gave me an idea of the work they were doing and most of them attended Padstow College. I thought I might as well go there and see what I can learn. I'd heard that they had excellent facilities, teaching grounds.

Dave Winner, Head Teacher at Padstow College

We have just got new facilities here. Our T-Block which is a \$6.5 million dollar building, opened a fortnight ago. It is a terrific horticultural learning facility complete with computer rooms for doing computer-animated drafting.

We are looking at developing our courses now so people can do training courses at Padstow from Certificate training level all the way through to the higher levels of a diploma.

Horticulture is divided into various sector areas, horticulture general, parks and gardens, landscaping, arboriculture, wholesale and retail nursery, conservation and land management and floristry. Now we look like delivering turf training as well.

The plants we use on the college grounds are all here for student learning, either for practical work or for studying plants. Students built



I tell students that what they're doing at TAFE is a springboard to further learning.

the vegetable gardens and the roses are pruned and managed by students, so we use the grounds as an outdoor learning area as much as we use the classroom.

Angela is one of our star floristry students. When I say we, floristry here at Padstow is a very large section and we've gained numerous awards with our students. One of our students recently won the original work skills competition in floristry so we're training some really good florists, and Angela's one of the top of that bunch.

She has completed Certificate II and Certificate III in floristry and is back this year doing Advanced design. It's great to see people who have that passion to go on and succeed in the industry.

I tell students that what they're doing at TAFE is a springboard to further learning.

Learning comes from getting out there and getting industry experience. TAFE provides the educational background and the qualifications that allow people to go on further and gain skills out in the industry because we all realise you need the qualifications to be placed in positions. And so I find the role of training, particularly from the TAFE perspective, is providing that avenue for people to gain the qualifications which allow them to go on.

We were fortunate to get this floristry shopfront so now we actually run this as a commercial floristry outlet. Students do the merchandising, sales, dealing with cash registers, dealing with the public, selling etc.

It's a great feature to have, particularly at the college to further enhance the quality of what our students are able to achieve.

It's a very rewarding experience to see people coming in with a passion to learn and then to see them progress through their training and end up being out in the field, being very successful in the areas that they go onto. Teaching is very rewarding when you can see people go on and achieve. Dealing with people is a very fulfilling experience. I'm a strong believer in TAFE and TAFE training and I'm a strong believer in what we achieve here at Padstow.

Angela

Dave is the man to go to when I need advice on what to do. After floristry I'm thinking of doing a horticulture course and Dave said it would provide options, telling me what I can do, what I can't do, what I should be doing. He's there for all the right reasons, helping me choose and decide what I can do to further myself.

What I wanted to do was create something that was modern, bold. Less is more in floristry. Modern designs use less flowers, whereas you've got the more traditional arrangement which starts from the top like a triangle, and is just packed full of flowers, so less is more in floristry.

Inspiration is a theme; but you have to know if it's for an engagement, a wedding, a party, if they have a colour combination of their choice, and you work from that. So then you see what colours are available in what season and you go from there. But season, texture, shape, style all those factors come into it.

A big factor of helping my business is that each week I come to TAFE and I see what all the other girls bring. I know what they're using at the market. I know what girls mix with their flowers, what foliage is used, what you can use and can't use, what lasts and what doesn't last. Coming to TAFE helped me identify things and how to look after them, so if I cut something, I know how to store it, I know how to keep it in prime condition for clients.

USING HYDROPONICS

TOMATOES



Anthony Brandsema,
J & A Brandsema
Turners Beach, Tasmania

HYDROPONICS IS ACTUALLY growing a plant without soil, that's purely and simply what it is. The benefit is that we have control over all the nutrients that go in all the time, which means we can grow our tomato crop for up to twelve months.

We are on a small property here at Turners Beach. My father moved onto the property in 1958. He began growing a lot of different vegetables mainly for the fresh market and he always had an interest in tomatoes.

But in the last ten to fifteen years my brother and I came back to the family property after gaining a trade skill elsewhere and then we just started focussing on growing tomatoes. And now we have 1.2 hectares of tomatoes, of which 6,000 square metres is for cherry tomatoes.

This is a 6,000 square metre greenhouse built about ten years ago and there are two reasons we went into hydroponics: the first was that we couldn't afford to fumigate our soil with methyl bromide anymore.

Tomatoes will develop pathogens in the soil after two years so it's a little bit of a problem for us to grow tomatoes in the soil for too long. So we had to move away from methyl bromide because of the worries it was giving us, but also the cost.

Another reason was that hydroponics means that we have a fixed system. We have a heap of heating pipes, irrigation units and so on in this structure. We have to consistently produce tomatoes to pay for all that sort of infrastructure.

Over here we have a gas-fired boiler using liquified petroleum gas. The beauty of a gas-fired boiler is that none of the emissions go out to the atmosphere. We actually take all the emissions through this fan and the emissions, which are carbon dioxide, enrich the whole greenhouse environment of these two greenhouses. That encourages the plants to grow faster and stronger.

How do you grow tomatoes using hydroponics?

We start with our own nursery plants. We grow a plant for about four weeks before we introduce it into this big greenhouse and it is grown in seedling boxes linked by piping at ground level among the larger tomato plants.



Then it is transplanted into the coconut fibre and eventually after about eight or nine weeks of growing in the greenhouse we manage to get to the point where we have fruit covering the plant and ripening, ready for picking.

The pack house is the fun end of the business, where we see all this lovely produce.

You can see the tomatoes packed in the trays here and you can see that we're grading off at the moment.

My brother Marcus and I, have recently bought the business from our parents and we have run the business for about eighteen months. Dad obviously is still very much involved in the business, which is great because there's a fantastic wealth of experience in growing, marketing.

Initially I didn't want anything to do with growing vegetables at all so I left home, and I was trained as a fitter and turner in one of the factories on the coast here. After about eight years my father said to me, "I want you to come and work back in the family business. What do you think?"

He said we should go and do some formal training first. So he sent me to NSW for two years where I did an Associate Diploma in Horticulture at Hawkesbury College.

How has the technology helped you to manage the workflow better?

This is really important technology for us. We found that when we started growing a lot more cherry tomatoes we had to rely on these sorts of technological systems to help us eliminate the variables in what the pickers were doing. Before, we used to grade by colour while we were picking but now we're relying on the computer and the cameras to sort out the fruit for colour, rather than relying on the pickers.

What do you love about tomatoes?

I think the nature of the product itself and the volatility of the product. It ripens so fast and we have to get it off the bush and we have to market it. At times this is a very fast process. If there's a disaster somewhere else in Australia, like the floods in Queensland at the moment, then the price goes up and everybody wants to buy tomatoes from you. You're suddenly a friend to everybody.

Would you say you are passionate about tomatoes?

I'm definitely passionate about tomatoes. There's nothing better than coming home after a hard day and sitting down with a slice of toast and some tomatoes and getting stuck into it. It's lovely.



SEEDLING

WE PRODUCE ABOUT 480 million vegetable seedlings a year for Australia, including capsicums, tomatoes, zucchinis, lettuce, broccoli, leek crops, and onion crops. They are supplied to farmers. We also have a company called Smart Salads growing salads for fast-food outlets and premium food service industry.



Wendy Erhart
Withcott Seedlings
Lockyer Valley, Queensland

The employment opportunities here are really quite good. Most people who have reached the management level have been able to create their own path, tell us what excites them, and we help them get to there.

Training in this business has been an absolute priority from day one, training and communicating to our people when they first start and then refresher training for anyone who tends to get a bit complacent or a bit bored in their positions. So we're always trying to offer something new and exciting ahead.

There's just a vast group of trades and skills here. We have nursing sisters who now work here and thin out seedlings, they love that, top level engineers who do not want a high pressure corporate position. Also, we have young people who want to get their first experience in employment.

We offer a lot of holiday work here and I get lots of comments from mums and dads that, 'Gee, that was the best apprenticeship my kids have ever had.' You know they really appreciate now that it's good to come home and they appreciate mum and dad more, so it's also teaching them the work ethic.

Glenn Geitz, Withcott's Crop Protection Manager.

I look after all the pest control from insects, diseases and weed control throughout the whole nursery. Our aim is to provide a disease and insect-free – the perfect plant. To be able to do that you need the crop that is disease-free and insect-free. So by going around and monitoring and doing all those type of things, we provide that service.

It's very important for me to constantly have new training and every year we get new pests come in and we get new chemicals being registered. Having up-to-date training allows me to gain better skills to do my job better. It also allows me better management skills to actually train my staff better.



PRODUCTION

I actually look forward to coming to work. It's exciting to know what you're going to find, either in the nursery or just the job I do on a daily basis. And with the way technology goes, the way all the improvements that are happening, I think it's a very positive future indeed.

Jamie Lee, Withcott's Grafting Crop Manager.

I've been at Withcott Seedlings for the past eleven years and I look after grafting greenhouse speciality lines. This is where a scion of a plant is grafted on to the root stock of a separate disease-resistant variety. You could say the fruit that they're aiming for will give the rootstock tolerance to disease.

You do need to have a certain technique and a passion for the job. You have to want to see results and be really fussy in the way you work, so you make sure the graft does actually line up, and does actually take.

It's challenging at times, too, as with different varieties, different techniques we use to help supply the customers with that perfect plant.

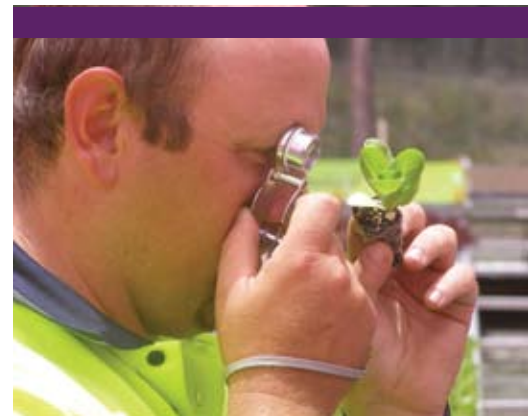
I love working with plants to start with. I love working outside, outdoors, seeing the crop go from whoa to go, from seedling stage to farmer stage.

Wendy

Jamie and Glenn have worked here for quite a number of years now and they have thrown themselves into this business. They came here with certain skills but have just added to them tremendously. Earlier this year we sent them to the Second International Symposium on Tomato Diseases in Kusadasi, Turkey.

In-house training is essential but you also need external training where people are exposed to other ideas and attitudes. That external training also gives them the opportunity; they can challenge the status quo here and actually bring back excitement and innovate.

But it's the excitement they bring back to the whole team, in sharing that knowledge again. And it's absolutely unassessed value in the business, of that emotional energy.



HARSLETT

FARM



Tim Harslett
Amiens, near Stanthorpe
in Queensland

TIM HARSLETT PART-OWNS and manages his family's commercial vegetable operation at Amiens near Stanthorpe in Queensland. He is confident that an industry-wide focus on integrated crop management will help producers grow better crops with lower input costs and positive environmental outcomes.

Tim completed an agricultural science degree at the University of Queensland and he has since been awarded the Nuffield Australia Farming Scholarship, the only recipient in Queensland.

He won a place on the Challenge of Rural Leadership course, a 13-day course developed by the Worshipful Company of Farmers, the Duchy College and the University of Plymouth. His focus was on 'mechanical harvest'.

"Mechanical harvesting also presents opportunities for efficiency improvements; labor costs constitute one third of our total expenses and that figure has climbed steadily for years."

The farm employs 20-25 permanent staff, only four of whom (including Tim himself) are under the age of 40. A large percentage of this workforce has been with the business for over 20 years.

Further expansion of their current property was not possible due to ongoing water restrictions. With environmental and now workforce issues, Tim faces some challenges for the future.

He is concerned about attracting competent, permanent staff in the future especially, he says, as he describes 80 per cent of the work done in vegetable production to be 'hard yakka' - which isn't necessarily attractive to young people considering careers.

Although Tim advocates that young people considering careers in agriculture should complete tertiary education to improve problem solving skills etc. the reality is that in his industry it is very hard to retain permanent staff.

This is one reason why Tim chose mechanical harvesting as his key area of study. He is 'future proofing' his business by 'up-skilling' himself to deal with skills shortages. Within this context, the focus is his family-run agricultural operation that is producing a significant crop for the consumer vegetable industry.

The 85-year-old property has undergone a few changes since 2004, and ventures into apples and wine grapes have been discontinued. The family now concentrates on Chinese cabbage, celery, cos and mini cos lettuces.



Harslett Farm produces around 180,000 boxes of Chinese cabbage each year, together with 150,000 boxes of celery and 50,000 mini cos plants per week, which are sold to Perfection Fresh for sale as Sweet Gems™ baby cos lettuce hearts.

“Celery has always been our backbone crop but we are now among the biggest summer growers of Chinese cabbage in Australia,” Tim said. “In the past few years, we’ve concentrated on producing fewer lines while trying to do a better job at growing them.”

That strategy has paid off. The past two years having been particularly rewarding thanks to good prices and consistent quality. Even at only 25 per cent capacity currently the family’s five dams have helped considerably to secure supply to their customers.

With 150 hectares of vegetables now in production annually, further expansion is limited by available water. Tim said he could see only opportunities. He could see a day when attracting competent permanent young labour to farms would become a problem.

Tim believes young growers who want to have a career in the industry should complete tertiary education if they are able to.

“It opens up your mind. You learn how to analyse problems and to reason things through which is helpful back on the farm.”

As part of the same philosophy, Tim tries to get overseas every year. In 2007, he attended the AUSVEG Young Farmers Tour to New Zealand and last year the AUSVEG Young Farmers Tour of America.

Considering himself a life-long student, Tim is interested in finding out more about mechanical harvesting and integrated pest management (IPM) in horticulture.

“ Mechanical harvesting would obviously be of benefit in solving any future labour problems we might have,” he said.

“We introduced IPM years ago on the farm and we’re doing a much better job in controlling insects because of it. But there’s potential to do a lot more, particularly with diseases.

“We have no problems getting backpackers and university students to work for us. But it is hard to attract a young person to a full-time career in horticulture. That will be a problem for our industry when the older generation starts to retire.

“I’ve always loved farming and the challenge of growing a good crop. It’s a lifestyle I’ve chosen and a job I want to do.”



MAPPING OUT THE FUTURE

“WE ARE LOOKING BEYOND THE FARM GATE as far as the research and development activities to where the vegetable growers levy is spent,” Ross said.



Ross Ord
Industry
Development
Manager
AUSVEG Ltd

“One initiative in the last 12 months is the appointment of a full-time development coordinator to identify training needs and any barriers for people engaging in training.

“The training officer assesses training programs, ranging from traineeships to apprenticeships.

“These are at the upper end the continuum of training and education to prepare our future leaders. In between we have program to enable our vegetable growers to deliver a better product to you, on time as you want it.”

AUSVEG is the national body for the Australian potato and vegetable industry and its chief role is to represent the industry in national forums and to present the views of the vegetable growers on national issues in particular.

Ross says the key issues are water, climate change, labour cost and shortage, environmental sustainability, trade relations and bio-security.

“If we haven’t got water then we can’t grow our products, so access to water of a sufficient quality is an ongoing issue for our industry.

“Related to that of course is climate change. We are not immune from that, therefore we must adjust, predict and put in strategies to reflect what’s happening in a global sense.

“The third issue is labour. We talk about having a skills shortage in Australia. Well my feeling is we have a labour shortage, both the cost of labour and one which is reflected in the shortage of labourers.

It’s a very important one and we’re emphasising better and increased access to training for our industry workers.”

Environmental sustainability was an emerging issue and the industry wished to be seen as a responsible member of the community. “We are putting into place actions and activities which complement initiatives from the government in being environmentally responsible workers.”

Only four per cent of our fresh vegetables were being exported due to huge domestic demand in Australia.

But international trade and the increase in the Australian dollar were hurting farmers. Countries like China were entering some of Australia’s traditional markets in South-East Asia and China was now the largest exporter of vegetable product to Australia.

Bio-security was extremely important. “Our consumers and markets demand a fresh and safe product. We’re achieving that and will continue making efforts to maintain that status.”

With increased sophistication and increased mechanisation on farms, farmers were using GPS to ensure that every inch of the farm went to its best economical use, such as laser levelling.

The cost of labour meant increased mechanisation. Mechanisation meant much larger machinery, more sophisticated machinery. Automation meant more knowledge and understanding of computers was required now. “You can’t do this just by going to the local football team and learning from dad in half an hour after work once a week” he said.

“It’s important that industry goes down the road of more structured training for our workers, both for those doing the more straightforward work of perhaps driving the tractor, which is still required, to those who are actually owning and operating the business skills.”

There had been a clear increase in Asian vegetables. But the consumer was not quite certain what to call them, how to prepare them, what the difference was and that has led to putting an effort into identifying consumer requirements, demands and expectations.

Products such as broccolini were relatively new on the market, yet there was an excellent consumer response to it. Other products included baby corn where the consumer was looking for a different presentation of the traditional vegetables they had been used to for twenty or thirty years.

Linked with that was the presentation. The consumer was looking for presentation to be visually appealing and to ensure they were getting a healthy and safety product.

“There are many ways to get involved in our industry,” Ross said. “We employ more than 7,000 people so if you live in one of the large city areas there is a local vegetable grower next door to you.”



CADETSHIPS IN QUEENSLAND'S production horticulture and agriculture industries

THE AUSTRALIAN AGRICULTURE COLLEGE CORPORATION (AACC) in Queensland is running a pilot program of cadetships in production horticulture and agriculture.

The cadetships provide additional work-based training options for 26 people already working in Bundaberg's flourishing rural and smallcrops industries.

AACC's commercial training coordinator, Jillian Condell said the cadetships would allow the employees to upgrade their skills and qualifications to a Certificate IV in Agriculture or Certificate IV in Production Horticulture.

They gave recognition for prior learning and industry experiences and would help to bridge any skills gaps and develop leadership and supervisory abilities.

The cadetship program lasts for 18 months and includes off-site and on-site training and assessment, recognition of prior learning and workplace projects.

"The cadetships are designed to appeal to people with broad industry experience, but who do not have existing qualifications and want to upgrade their hands-on skills to support their progress into supervisory roles," Ms Condell said.

"Employers already say they are seeing improved performance and production outcomes as the cadets put into practice their new skills and knowledge."

The initiative is funded by the Queensland Department of Employment, Training and Arts (DETA).

For more information about AACC visit www.aacc.edu.au.

To obtain a free copy of the College DVD, phone: (07) 4672 3000 or email: dalby@aacc.edu.au



**AGRI-FOOD
INDUSTRY SKILLS
COUNCIL**

AGRI-FOOD NATIONAL CONFERENCE Rydges Melbourne 25-26 September 2008

The National Conference brings together representatives from the national agri-food industry, training organisations, enterprises, community networks, governments and decision-makers. The conference helps to set new targets and allows sharing of ideas and forming friendship and professional networks.

It is the only VET oriented conference of its type to provide this interaction for the multi-faceted industry at a national forum.

The theme of the conference this year is 'It's all about skills' - reflecting the council's strong focus on providing intelligence and advice to industry, Skills Australia and the Australian Government.

- > Cabaret style seating
- > Take your laptop - Broadband provided in session.
- > Conference dinner, Workshops, Hypothetical

It's all about *Skills*
NATIONAL CONFERENCE

2008

CONTACT **PETER CLACK**

P: 02 6163 7228 M: 0418 978 090

E: peter.clack@agrifoodskills.net.au

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planning skills regional career
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Agri-Food production and food processing are vast enterprises providing around 880,000 jobs. They make critical contributions to Australia's economy, generating some \$208 billion each year. This represents about 20 per cent of gross domestic product and more than a quarter of Australia's exports.

Arthur Blewitt Chief Executive Officer

The Agri-Food Industry Skills Council (AFISC) is an independent, not-for-profit company. The Australian Government provides funding to AFISC to:

- provide industry intelligence and advice to Skills Australia, government and enterprises on workforce development and skills needs;
- actively support the development, implementation and continuous improvement of high quality training and workforce development products and services including training packages;
- provide independent skills and training advice to enterprises, including matching identified training needs with appropriate training solutions; and
- work with enterprises, employment service providers, training providers and government to allocate training places.

In undertaking these roles, AFISC will draw on widespread industry networks and active stakeholder engagement.

Nowhere is the impact of skill shortages more acutely felt than in regional, rural and remote communities, having to compete in increasing intensity with metropolitan and urban Australia for their fair 'share' of a shrinking or static workforce.



**AGRI-FOOD
INDUSTRY SKILLS
COUNCIL**

Be informed, participate **JOIN OUR AGRI-FOOD STAKEHOLDER LIST**

Address: Level 1 John McEwen House 7 National Circuit Barton ACT 2600

T: 02 6163 7200 **F:** 02 6163 7299 **E:** reception@agrifoodskills.net.au

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jobs for life

Case studies into careers
in horticulture



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Television





Illawarra Mercury

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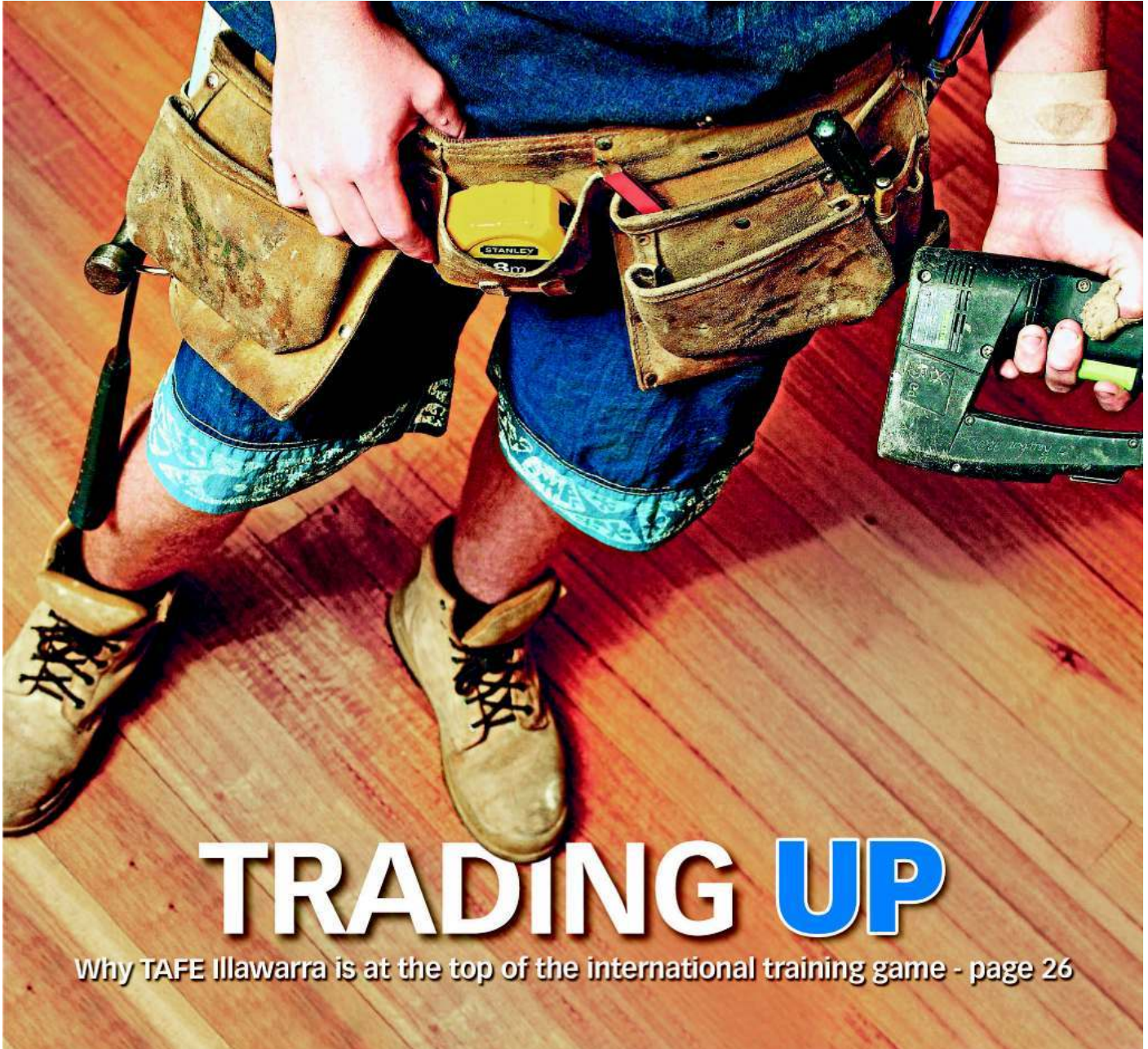
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Page 1 of 3



TRADING UP

Why TAFE Illawarra is at the top of the international training game - page 26



Cover story

Apprenticeships have never looked so good

A new national initiative is giving traditional trades a heightened appeal and the peak trades training body has NSW TAFE Illawarra Institute at the top of the international training game, writes KATELIN MCINERNEY.

The Federal Government is tapping into the digital age to give trades an image makeover, with the launch of a new television series and YouTube-style website.

The SkillsOne website (www.skillsone.com.au) and television program has been created to cater to those already in a trade or vocational career, as well as those thinking about an apprenticeship or traineeship.

It is a portal for interested students and career changers and is continually updated with new articles, profiles and video providing career information and insights into trade and vocational careers.

Site visitors can send in their own user-generated career profile videos.

The website is a collaboration between SkillsOne TV, which airs on pay television station the Australian Channel, and the Institute for Trade Skills Excellence.

The Institute was established with funding from the Australian Government and is a partnership between the Government and Australian business groups, including the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Australian Industry Group and the National Farmers Federation.

Its primary aim is to promote and advance learning, teaching and training in Australian trades education and has introduced the Star Rating Scheme to recognising and rate high performing Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).

Wollongong is already leading the charge.

The Illawarra Institute of TAFE has been recognised as a leading registered training organisation with a Three Gold Star Rating for its Certificate III courses in carpentry, shopfitting and detailed joinery, painting and decorating and bricklaying/blocklaying

at Wollongong Campus.

Setting a new standard of regulation was a great way to recognise excellence and stop shonky "back-yard" training organisations, according to Wollongong trade teacher George Dragovic.

"I think it puts everyone on an even keel and gives consistency so we have a fair system," he said.

"The backyard schools will be out because they do not comply."

Mr Dragovic was one of three teachers from the Illawarra Institute who were named inaugural winners of the Institute of Trade Skills Excellence Trade Teacher of the Year award last year.

"I think if you are about to be rated then naturally you will be tempted to lift your game," he said.

The Star Ratings System recognises the quality of RTOs on an incremental scale, with schools or faculties who demonstrate potential to achieve a one gold star, two gold star or three gold star level of recognition. It is subject to a site visit by an evaluation team before preferred provider status is conferred on them.

Director of TAFE NSW Illawarra Institute Dianne Murray said she was thrilled with Wollongong's strong start under the new ratings system.

"In the changing trade market employers are looking to ensure that training is done by the very best professional trainers," she said.

"Employers have a choice where they are going to train - and they want to make sure they're making the right choice - we're really thrilled to have these three gold stars in our construction training area, because it means we are recognised as being among the best in the country."

Ms Murray said having three teachers awarded the inaugural Trade Teacher of the Year Award was good

for their image as well.

"The fact some of our staff have been independently recognised as being the best in their trade means that people can be confident that the skills are going to be at the highest level."

Ms Murray said broader perceptions of trades were changing in Australian society and it was important to strike while trades were a national focus.

"The ratings system and SkillsOne initiative are a recognition of the valuable contribution tradespeople make to the Australian economy," she said.

"TAFE knows for over 100 years we've actually been the basis of the growth of the Australian economy - all the areas of growth in the economy rely on highly skilled and professional tradespeople."

She believes the promotion of trades through vehicles like the SkillsOne website and television show are important ways of demonstrating to young people and their families that trades offer many serious career prospects.

"We are trying to engage employers in promoting the career opportunities for people because sometimes young people see entering the trades area as "oh well this is the best job I can get when I leave school" and we want to show them that a trade is not just an entry point but a career path," Ms Murray said.

"We want them to see the longer term benefits and I think parents, who of course have aspirations for their young people, need to see past that first year of employment and first entry stage of apprenticeship through to the long term career prospects."

"If you have high level building companies in town, chances are the people running and directing those companies undertook an apprenticeship or started in the industry as a labourer



who then moved into an apprenticeship.

“So it is about showing young people the possibilities for them in the trades industry.”

Ms Murray believes the website and television show will counter negative perceptions of trades and offer “real world” proof that trades are a legitimate and valued career choice.

“I think we’re also busting some of the myths about working in a trades area and seeing the success people have out of a great career in trade,” she said.

“It no longer means you are working in a dirty workshop, with not very good conditions and not very good pay.”

While the television show was a good way of taking prospective students inside the modern facilities in their workplace and at TAFE, Ms Murray said more students need first-hand experience of what working in a trade in 2008 entails.

“We need to get people into our training workshops and inside the workshops of our really high performing industry partners so that they can actually see the quality of the workplace and quality of the standards of the work that these people undertake.” she said.



Students Julie Hughes and Mitchell O’Neill polish their skills under the guidance of paint and decorating trade teacher Fiona Shewring at the Wollongong TAFE campus. Pictures: KEN ROBERTSON

‘We’re really thrilled to have these three gold stars in our construction training area, because it means we are recognised as being among the best in the country.’



Irrigator

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Page: 4

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TAFE given pat on back

TAFE NSW Riverina Institute has been recognised by industry as a leading provider of training in the areas of automotive, construction, metals and engineering.

The institute received a gold star rating from the Institute of Trade Skills Excellence in recognition of outstanding trade skills training.

This scheme identifies the best training providers in each industry, enabling employers, career counsellors, potential students, and parents to distinguish excellence in trade training.

Riverina Institute's director of educational delivery Graeme Stuchbery said the gold star rating was recognition of the high quality of teaching that is delivered.

Honing in on HORTICULTURE



Horticulture is a rich source of skilled jobs and career pathways for anyone with a passion to be part of this rapidly growing industry, Australia's second biggest agricultural sector.

[Words] Peter Clack

BUT horticulture is more than just a source of jobs and careers. It is a vital mainstay for the economies of Australia's rural, regional and remote local communities, ensuring their survival by providing a framework of jobs, careers, infrastructure, services and people.

Fresh and compelling insights into careers in this dynamic yet low-profile industry will be available in March with the production of a series of real life video case studies about career paths in the booming horticulture industry.

The case studies by the Agri-Food Industry Skills Council (AFISC), The Institute for Trade Skills Excellence (ITSE) and

Horticulture Australia Ltd (HAL) seek to generate a wider appreciation of jobs and career pathways in horticulture.

Horticulture is one of Australia's least understood success stories. Yet everywhere you go, you will find nurseries, farms and food and plant producers in abundance. There are as many as 30,000 individual horticultural enterprises in Australia employing more than 100,000 people. The industry comprises more than 40 individual industries/commodities, such as fruit, vegetables, cut flowers, nuts, turf, nursery and garden. In volume of sales, horticulture is second only to the grains industry, with gross value

at farm gate of around \$7 billion (2004-05). When all multipliers associated with processing, wholesaling, distribution and retailing are included, the total value of horticulture to the economy is estimated to be approximately \$20 billion.

Horticulture represents 31 per cent of all jobs in agriculture. It is the nation's fastest growing industry with the GVP (gross value of product) increasing 31 per cent over the past five years.

The industry continues to expand despite the challenges and set-backs of worker and skills shortages, drought and floods, crop diseases, pests and infestations. In many cases, horticultural enterprises are family-run operations that must compete on domestic and international markets.

An example of a successful family operation is Withcott Seedlings in Queensland's Lockyer Valley, now employing about 200 staff and producing 480 million vegetable seedlings a year to farmers, including capsicums, tomatoes, zucchinis, lettuce, broccoli, leeks and onions.

At the other end of the scale, Tony Har has a 5 acre property at Leppington, an area known as the Sydney Basin. He is a Chinese vegetable grower who has been producing vegetables for the Sydney Markets for 25 years, including bok choy, pak choy, English spinach, Chinese cabbage and shallots.

Like many other growers in the area, Tony has taken certificate courses in horticulture, provided under arrangements with the NSW Government, where teachers visit the farms to deliver the training on site.

The case studies also present insights into citrus and nut growing in Victoria, glass house production of tomatoes in Tasmania and floriculture in NSW.

The case studies aim to encourage people to understand and take up careers in horticulture and to persuade all agri-food industries of the benefits of better designed jobs and workplaces and job planning and personal encouragement.

Better training, well designed jobs and productive and positive work environments, all combine to sustain Australia's regional workforce and the national economy. Training and workplace skills give people the capacity and mobility to be deployed in a range of horticulture environments, to attract workers from local (regional), urban and metropolitan centres and for enterprising individuals to branch out and set up their own farms or nurseries.

Obtaining the video case studies

The case studies will be recorded and made available by The Institute for Trade Skills Excellence through its SkillsOne Television network and will be available through its website and broadcast on its national television program on Fox Skills Channel 183. Go to www.skillsone.com.au to view individual case studies or for information about when the case studies will be broadcast on Fox Aurora Community Channel 183.

The Agri-Food Industry Skills Council will produce a combined DVD and booklet and this set will be made available on request

from March onwards at no cost to training organisations, enterprises, individuals and communities.

In order to be informed about progress on this project and to seek copies of the booklet and DVD (at no cost), please provide your details to peter.clack@agrifoodskills.net.au or write to the Agri-Food Industry Skills Council at PO Box 5450, Kingston ACT 2604. ■



A Passion for Produce

An hour's drive from Sydney's CBD, just past Liverpool in suburbs such as Leppington and Austral, Catherine Field and Bringelly, lies the Sydney Basin where the bulk of fresh vegetables consumed by the city's four million residents are produced.

Some 2,000 small farms grow 90 per cent of Sydney's perishable vegetables, almost 100 per cent of its Asian greens, 80 per cent of its mushrooms and most of the tomatoes, snow peas, Lebanese cucumbers, herbs, spring onions and shallots. The farm-gate value of these crops is about \$250 million a year. The trade in broccoli, eggplant, cabbage and capsicum, grown with compost made from recycled garden offcuts, generates more than \$1 billion a year.

There are around 8,000 farmers in the Sydney Basin and their backgrounds are as diverse as the produce they send to market: Italy, Malta, Lebanon, China, the former Yugoslavia, Vietnam, Cambodia and beyond. The farms are mostly tiny, generally two hectares or less, but incredibly productive. Many farms are family concerns, relying on the extended family to work long hours growing, harvesting and transporting the crops.

Associate professor Frances Parker from the University of Western Sydney's School of Social Sciences says, "The Sydney Basin has the largest number of horticulturalists of any region in Australia and the largest proportion from non-English speaking backgrounds.

"It really is a migrant success story. They have contributed so much to Australia with very little help from government. These people have a great passion for farming and a great belief that what they do is valuable.

"Their importance is that they provide local, fresh food to Sydney. Where else would you have food produced one day and available to the consumer the next? It is phenomenal."

Media Release



20 March 2008

[CLICK HERE](#) to read on-line

Careers in horticulture - jobs for life

The Agri-Food Industry Skills Council (AFISC) is alerting you to a vital new documentary series on careers in horticulture to be broadcast this coming weekend on the Aurora channel - Fox Channel 183 - at 3pm on Saturday and Sunday (22-23 March).

Horticulture is Australia's second-largest agricultural industry with gross value at the farm gate of around \$7 billion and with more than 100,000 workers.

SkillsOne and the Agri-Food Industry Skills Council have collaborated on the research and production of the two half-hour documentaries, giving fresh insights into careers in horticulture, its people and workplaces and the endless range and volume of produce, from the food we eat to flowers and the large-scale production of seedlings for farmers and horticulturalists from a variety of geographic locations and backgrounds.

The cameras go to Queensland, NSW, Victoria and Tasmania where employers, owners, managers, students and trainers discuss various career options in an industry that is a vital mainstay for the economies of Australia's rural, regional and remote local communities.

Horticulture provides a framework of jobs, careers, infrastructure, services and people in the agricultural sector.

AFISC CEO Arthur Blewitt said, "This production demonstrates a rich vein of career opportunities in the agricultural industry and the vital need to have the right training and the right skills sets in place.

"The insights into horticultural practices and the graphic footage will assist training organisations, schools, careers advisors, agri-food enterprises and industry groups to see the ready career opportunities that exist in horticulture today.

"According to the managing director of Horticulture Australia Limited, John Webster, horticulture is a growth industry with a myriad of career opportunities.

"The program highlights some of the careers available in the horticulture industry and I hope it will inspire young people when considering their career options," Mr Webster said.

[CLICK HERE](#) to visit the SkillsOne web page and view selected case studies from the documentaries.

[CLICK HERE](#) to see an article about the project in the March edition of Rotarian Life.

[CLICK HERE](#) to read latest AFISC eBulletin.

BACKGROUND

The 'Jobs for life' documentaries give fresh and contemporary insights into careers in horticulture, its people and workplaces and the endless range and volume of produce, from the food we eat to flowers and the large-scale production of seedlings for farmers and horticulturalists from a variety of geographic locations and backgrounds.

One case study features Tony Har, who came to Australia from Hong Kong 30 years ago and began growing Asian vegetables in the Sydney Basin. Today, the Sydney Basin produces the bulk of fresh Asian vegetables consumed by the city's four million residents, where some 600 small farms grow almost 100 per cent of its Asian greens.

Like many other growers in the area, Tony took certificate courses in horticulture provided under arrangements with the NSW Government, where teachers visit the farms to deliver the training on site.

Another study explores careers at Withcott Seedlings in Queensland's Lockyer Valley, the major supplier of vegetable seedlings to the east coast of Australia and the Asia Pacific, producing more than 400 million vegetable seedlings each year.

As many as 30,000 individual horticultural enterprises in Australia employ more than 100,000 people. The industry comprises more than 40 individual industries/commodities, such as fruit, vegetables, cut flowers, nuts, turf, nursery and garden.

In volume of sales, horticulture is second only to the grains industry with gross value at farm gate of around \$7 billion (2004-05). When all multipliers associated with processing, wholesaling, distribution and retailing are included the total value of horticulture to the economy is estimated to be approximately \$20 billion.

Horticulture represents 31 per cent of all jobs in agriculture. It is the nation's fastest growing industry with the GVP (gross value of product) increasing 31 per cent over the past five years.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SkillsOne television and the Agri-Food Industry Skills Council have produced these two landmark documentaries with funding from Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL). The Australian Government provides matched funds for all HAL's R&D activities.

In researching these case studies, the council recognises the assistance with research and background from major national horticultural organisations: AUSVEG Ltd, Horticulture Australia Council, GrowCom (Qld) and the Nursery and Garden Industry Association.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Peter Clack
Agri-Food Industry Skills Council
0418 978 090

Kathryn Lees
SkillsOne
0424 173 330

ABOUT THE AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY SKILLS COUNCIL

The Agri-Food Industry Skills Council (AFISC) is a private sector company that works in collaboration with the agri-food industry and governments to support the development of quality training products and services, including training

packages.

AFISC is mainly funded through the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

ABOUT SKILLSONE

SkillsOne is the multi-media platform of The Institute for Trade Skills Excellence and Australia's first interactive information channel.

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ABOUT HORTICULTURE AUSTRALIA LIMITED (HAL)

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Peter Clack

Agri-Food Industry Skills Council

P: +61 02 6163 7228F: +61 02 6163 7299M: 0418 978 090

E: peter.clack@agrifoodskills.net.au

W: www.agrifoodskills.net.au



Agri-Food Industry Skills Council

19 March 2008

Careers in horticulture - jobs for life

(DVD set available on request – see below)

[CLICK HERE](#) to read on-line

The Agri-Food Industry Skills Council (AFISC) is proud to announce the broadcast of a vital new documentary series on careers in horticulture this coming weekend on the Aurora channel - Fox Channel 183 - at 3pm on Saturday and Sunday (22-23 March).

[CLICK HERE TO ORDER YOUR DVD SET](#)

Register with us to [obtain](#) a copy/copies of the DVD and printed descriptive booklet. These will be made available on request to all enterprises, industry bodies, governments, training organisations, councils and schools. The final sets should be printed and available for mailing in early April.

SkillsOne and the Agri-Food Industry Skills Council have collaborated on the research and production of the two half-hour documentaries, giving fresh insights into careers in horticulture, its people and workplaces and the endless range and volume of produce, from the food we eat to flowers and the large-scale production of seedlings for farmers and horticulturalists from a variety of geographic locations and backgrounds.

The cameras go to Queensland, NSW, Victoria and Tasmania where employers, owners, managers, students and trainers discuss various career options in an industry that is a vital mainstay for the economies of Australia's rural, regional and remote local communities. Horticulture provides a framework of jobs, careers, infrastructure, services and people in the agricultural sector.

Horticulture is Australia's second-largest agricultural industry with gross value at the farm gate of around \$7 billion and with more than 100,000 workers.

AFISC CEO Arthur Blewitt said the production demonstrated a rich vein of career opportunities in the agricultural industry and the vital need to have the right training and the right skills sets in place.

"The insights into horticultural practices and the graphic footage will assist training organisations, schools, careers advisors, agri-food enterprises and industry groups to see the ready career opportunities that exist in horticulture today," Mr Blewitt said."

According to the managing director of Horticulture Australia Limited, John Webster, horticulture is a growth industry with a myriad of career opportunities.

"The program highlights some of the careers available in the horticulture industry and I hope it will inspire young people when considering their career options," Mr Webster said.

[CLICK HERE](#) to visit the SkillsOne web page and view selected case studies from the documentaries.

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Life.

BACKGROUND

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The Australian Government through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations provides funding for AFISC.

JOIN OUR STAKEHOLDER LIST

We encourage all industry enterprises and individuals not on our stakeholder list to send us a note with these details. We also ask industry peak bodies already on

our stakeholder list to relay this message out to their membership lists - [CLICK
HERE](#)

Peter Clack
Agri-Food Industry Skills Council
P: +61 02 6163 7228F: +61 02 6163 7299M: 0418 978 090
E: peter.clack@agrifoodskills.net.au
W: www.agrifoodskills.net.au



Careers in horticulture - skills for life

SkillsOne Television will premier an exciting new documentary series, “Jobs for Life”, examining careers in horticulture, Australia’s second-largest agricultural industry with a gross value at the farm gate of around \$7 billion and with more than 64,000 workers.

Eight case studies filmed across four states will be broadcast as two 30-minute documentaries at 3pm on the weekend of 22-23 March on the Aurora channel (Fox Channel 183).

SkillsOne and the Agri-Food Industry Skills Council have collaborated on the research and production of the two documentaries. They offer fresh insights into careers in horticulture, its people and workplaces and the endless range and volume of produce, from the food we eat to flowers and the large-scale production of seedlings for farmers and horticulturalists from a variety of geographic locations and backgrounds.

SkillsOne showcases the entrepreneurial horticulturists who have found a niche and in many cases created a family business spanning generations.

One case study features Tony Har, who came to Australia from Hong Kong 30 years ago and began growing Asian vegetables in the Sydney Basin. Today, the Sydney Basin produces the bulk of fresh Asian vegetables consumed by the city’s four million residents, where some 600 small farms grow almost 100 per cent of its Asian greens.

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ENDS

Further Information:

Kathryn Lees
SkillsOne
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About SkillsOne

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About SkillsOne Television

SkillsOne Television is a series of short television interviews and case studies showcasing inspiring content for career counselors, parents and students interested in skilled trades. SkillsOne screens on the Aurora Community Channel (Channel 183 on Foxtel) 2-6pm on Saturday's and Sunday's and Monday to Friday between 9-10am and 5-6pm.

About skillsone.com.au

SkillsOne.com.au allows viewers and web users to access content from SkillsOne Television anytime, anywhere with the click of a mouse.

About the Agri-Food Industry Skills Council

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A CAREER IN HORTICULTURE?

TUNE TO **AURORA**
CHANNEL 183
ON AUSTAR/FOXTEL

3PM MARCH 22 & 23

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