

**Improving
communication
networks in the
Australian Vegetable
Industry**

Lisa Maguire
AUSVEG Ltd

Project Number: VG03094

VG03094

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VG03094

Improving Communication Networks in the Australian Vegetable Industry

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January 2007



VG03094

Improving Communication Networks in the Australian Vegetable Industry

The purpose of this final report is to communicate the successful delivery of project VG03094, *Improving Communication Networks in the Australian Vegetable Industry*.

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Contents

Media Summary.....	4
Technical Summary.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Materials & Method.....	7
-The Communications Audit.....	7
- Construction of the Communication Strategy.....	8
Results.....	9
-Communication Audit Results.....	9
-Communication Plan Effectiveness.....	10
-Communication Tools.....	11
Discussion.....	13
Technology Transfer.....	14
Recommendations.....	15
Acknowledgements.....	16
Appendix A: Communication Audit Report.....	17
Appendix B: Vegetables Industry Communication Strategy.....	38

Media Summary

A low awareness by vegetable growers of the Research and Development (R&D) program funded by the National vegetable levy and matched Australian Government dollars was seen by the industry, in 2004, as a serious impediment to growth.

To improve awareness and overall communication, the vegetable industry invested in a National communication program. This program employed a Communications Manager to conduct a communication audit, develop and implement a communication strategy.

The vegetable industry audit, completed in late 2004, revealed that the industry faced many communication challenges. Up until that time there had been little formal or coordinated communication to industry and as a result awareness levels of the National Vegetable Levy and its research and development outcomes remained very low.

Over the last two years, the vegetable industry has significantly increased its focus on formal communication. This was based on a communication strategy that was approved under the National Vegetable Levy with funding commencing in 2005. The main objective was to establish a number of communication frameworks from which to promote the National Vegetable Industry and its investments, particularly to growers.

The vegetable industry now has a bi-monthly Vegetables Australia Magazine delivering up-to-date research and development information to growers, an R&D brand to unify and promote levy-funded projects, a website to house R&D outcomes and industry news, a successful industry conference, awards process and a coordinated media strategy.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the current communication strategy and make sure it was on track, a telephone survey of vegetable growers was conducted in August 2006. The results clearly show that these communication tools and strategies are making a positive difference and that there have been significant improvements in communication to growers.

It is recommended that the vegetable industry continue the National communication program.

Technical Summary

The vegetable industry has applied rigour and practical communication theory to understanding and addressing communication issues within the industry. In 2004, the Vegetable IAC decided that poor communication was a significant impediment to industry growth.

A communication audit was conducted following strict communication principles. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to ensure that a reasonable perspective of the industry was gathered. The random telephone survey of vegetable growers also provided a benchmark to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Other communication research methods were also used to study communication networks and to analyse the content and readability of existing communication mediums. Feedback from this research was used to assist in the development of communication tools.

A gap analysis was conducted following the communication audit and a comprehensive communication strategy was developed following existing communication industry principles and standards.

It was important to find the root of communication issues within the industry to ensure the strategy addressed the 'impediment to growth' and did not just develop a series of 'attractive communication tools'. It is important to note that low awareness by growers that the levy paid on vegetable sales was invested in research and development was the most significant issue discovered and required addressing before uptake levels could ever hope to be improved, especially because it involves long term behavioural change that cannot be achieved over a short time frame.

Another significant issue that was discovered during the audit was the inability of the vegetable industry to communicate with LOTE growers who make up 40 percent of industry members. This requires urgent address if the industry is to radically improve communication levels overall. A strategy to overcome this has been developed under this project but implementation remains unfunded.

Based on this research, a set of communication tools were developed, including a bi-monthly magazine, branding strategy, password protected website, industry conference, awards program and media strategy. All tools also underwent individual assessment to ensure they were meeting the needs of the target audience and overall goals of the communication strategy.

It is recommended that the National communication program should continue but be revised based on the random telephone survey conducted to evaluate the current program.

Introduction

‘Improving Communication Networks in the Australian Vegetable Industry’ (VG03094) was a project identified as a priority by the vegetable industry in 2003. The vegetable IAC identified that one of the key impediments to industry growth was the lack of adequate communication and collaboration in the industry.

In August 2004, a Communications Manager was employed to undertake a comprehensive communications audit, develop a communications strategy and implement it. The audit was completed in January 2005 and the strategy completed in March 2005. A Communications Officer was employed in September 2005 to assist with implementation and the position of Communications Manager was later shared with the Potato Industry to implement the Potato Industry Communication strategy to the benefit of both industries from shared resources and collaboration.

The purpose of the communication audit was: to identify weaknesses in existing vegetable industry communication structures and strategies and recommend positive changes. These recommendations were used as the basis of the vegetable industry communication plan.

The overarching aim of the communication strategy was to address the gaps identified in the communication audit to ultimately assist in the uptake of R&D outcomes by vegetable growers.

More specifically the aims of the Communication Strategy were to:

1. Improve grower satisfaction levels with the information received on National Vegetable Levy funded projects.
2. Reduce the level of apathy among the majority of vegetable growers which leads to a low activity level to seek out information.
3. Improve grower satisfaction with the National Vegetable Levy funded R&D program
4. Improve the profile of the Australian vegetable industry in relation to the world class research and modern industry practices used.

To achieve these aims, target audiences were clearly defined, key messages were developed and a communication framework was built involving the development and implementation of key communication tools including: a vegetable grower magazine (a part-time editor was employed to support this), a vegetable grower conference, a vegetable grower recognition program, a password protected grower website, branding for the R&D program, media strategy, LOTE grower communication strategy and a comprehensive R&D annual report.

A significant issue arose during the target audience definition aspect of the communication audit. It was found that a large number of vegetable growers (40 percent) were not being communicated with adequately due to the fact that they did not speak English as a first language. To address this issue a comprehensive Language Other than English (LOTE) scoping study was conducted and a subsequent communication strategy developed to overcome the issues. However, funds to implement this strategy were not within this communication project and need to be pursued.

Using this framework key campaigns and messages were distributed to growers such as the new vegetable industry strategic plan VegVision 2020.

The communication strategy was then evaluated through another random telephone survey of National Vegetable Levy payers in late 2006.

Materials and Method

The Communication Audit

A communication audit is a broad research based study that identifies strengths and weaknesses in the way an organisation or whole industry/sector communicates.

The audit used in this case refers to internal communication (communication within the vegetable industry). External communication which involves increasing the profile of the vegetable industry and marketing vegetables to consumers is outside the scope of this study.

What is communication?

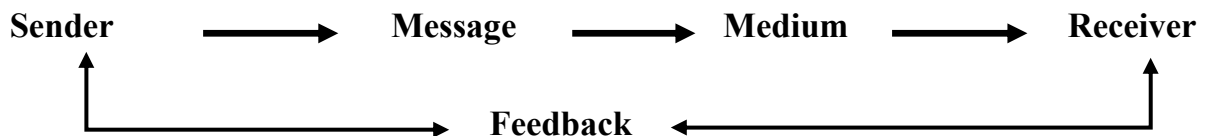
In an essence, to communicate effectively the sender of the message must use words and terms that mean the same thing to the receiver as they do the sender. In other words it establishes commonness between parties.

Sound simple? Unfortunately not. Messages are easily distorted as they pass through various mediums. Very much like the childhood game of Chinese Whispers, where the initial phrase is distorted as it is whispered from child to child. If the message is not understood the communication will fail.

Secret to good communication.

To be good communicators there are many aspects to consider. The simplest way to view this is using a basic communication pathways diagram.

Basic communication pathway model



To communicate successfully each step in this pathway is equally important. If there is a weakness in the circuit such as the message not clearly defined or the medium (magazine, newsletter etc) is poor the effectiveness of the overall communication will decrease.

Historically many communication programs place an emphasis on the communication medium (what brochure, how many pages and what colours to use) and forget all about the content and the messages they are trying to convey to the reader.

Methods used to conduct the audit

The communication audit was conducted using the following techniques:

- *industry consultation*: personal interviews, group discussion, written survey and random telephone survey
- *network analysis*: a study of current communication channels and how messages are sent around the vegetable industry
- *readership analysis*: a study of which communication tools are listened to/read most frequently
- *content analysis*: a study of individual communication tools, including readability levels and quality of message.
- *benchmarking*: three industries were selected which were considered to communicate more efficiently than the vegetable industry. Comparisons were subjectively made with these industries
- *gap analysis*: Summary of the industry's communications strengths/weaknesses.

Construction of the Communication Strategy

The communication strategy is based on modern communication planning techniques set out by the Australian Institute of Public Relations and the various universities that have industry recognised public relations and communication qualification courses.

These sections are:

1. Situation Analysis- a brief overview of issues the communication strategy can assist to solve.
2. Research- a summary of research undertaken prior to forming this strategy.
3. Problems- a list of issues the communication strategy addresses.
4. Goals/Objectives- the top line goals of this strategy. These are high level and often difficult to measure on evaluation. Objectives are measurable and specific to address each of the problems identified.
5. Key messages- the foundation of the strategy. These outline what we are trying to communicate.
6. Target Audiences- the groups of people the vegetable industry is communicating with.
7. Strategy- the broad outline of the entire communications strategy.
8. Tools- this is a list of communication tools (mediums) that will be used to carry the key messages.
9. Timing- this is a time table of activity for the two year program.
10. Budget – approximate costs to run the program.
11. Evaluation- outlines how the communication strategy will be evaluated

Results

Communications Audit Results

The communication audit involved several areas of communication research including a random telephone survey of National Vegetable Levy payers, a written survey of key industry members (such as IAC, AUSVEG Board), face to face interviews, network analysis, publication readership and content analysis and benchmarking with three other agriculture industries.

The summary results of this audit were:

- Current communication levels within the industry are very low and require radical changes to ensure the vegetable industry can meet the demanding challenges of the future.
- Although the majority of growers are aware there is a National levy on vegetable sales there is still about 20 percent that don't. Also the overwhelming majority of growers don't know what the levy money is spent on (low awareness of research projects and outcomes), who makes the decisions on where it is spent and how they can make a suggestion.
- The vegetable industry also lacks specific direction in its communication efforts and therefore the ability to distribute important key messages on time (both to vegetable growers and the general public) is very difficult. There is little collaboration between states and the information received by growers varies greatly between them. The role of Industry Development Officers in communications is very unclear and exacerbates these issues.
- Growers not involved directly in industry committees or State vegetable associations often receive very little information about the industry and the outcomes of the research and development program. More frequent communication materials are required by mail.
- Although the current use of internet and email is very low, growers must be encouraged to use the internet for information on research and development outcomes to reduce the costs involved with a dependence on printed materials and to take the vegetable industry into a more modern communication mind set.
- The industry also fails to adequately communicate with a large group of growers who are from Non-English speaking backgrounds and may have limited English skills.
- Current communication materials produced by the industry are of a poor standard and require basic improvements which will increase readability levels and give a more professional image to the industry. Distribution of communication materials is inefficient and often misses expected deadlines.
- Face to face communication opportunities provided for growers have low attendance rates and lack coordination across Australia.
- The vegetable industry levy funded research and development program doesn't have a clear identity. The use of various industry, state, government and research provider logos is inconsistent, varying significantly from project to project. This and the various qualities of communication efforts and outputs from specific research projects further undermine the value perception of the National Vegetable levy R&D program. Many research providers do not adequately communicate (nor see it as a priority) the outcomes of their project.
- There is a significant amount of information on research and development outcomes for growers but they are often very technical in nature (and therefore hard to read and apply to the

farm) and difficult to find. Many growers are unaware of information available and either do not know where to go to find it or are not inclined to seek it out.

See Appendix A for The Australian Vegetable Industry Communication Audit Report (2005), AUSVEG Ltd.

Communication Plan Effectiveness

In August 2006, a follow-up survey of National Vegetable Levy Payers was conducted to assess levels of industry awareness and the effectiveness of current communication tools. While there is still a long way to go, the results clearly show that the communication strategy is making a positive difference in grower's understanding of the National Vegetable Levy and the organisations and personnel involved. The issue of adequate communication to LOTE growers also remains unfunded and also significantly impacted these results.

The following are highlights of results from the "Australian Vegetable Industry Telephone Communication Survey 2006", conducted by Ruralscope with 359 vegetable growers. A copy of this report can be found in Appendix A.

1. Levy Information

- 96% of growers know they pay a National Vegetable Levy (an increase from 85% in 2005).
- 65% of growers can recall something the levy was spent on (however 32% gave incorrect answers such as promotion, advertising & lobbying).

2. Awareness of How/Who Decides Where Levy is Spent

- 66% growers do not know how or who decides where levy money is spent (down from 70% in 2005)
- 16% gave incorrect answers (down from 95% in 2005)
- 73% growers do not know how to make a suggestion on where levy should be spent (80% didn't know in 2005)

3. Satisfaction With Information on How the Levy is Spent

- The majority were neutral or dissatisfied with information on how the levy is spent (the same result as in 2005, but higher in satisfied and lower in dissatisfied)
- 60% growers would like to receive more information on the levy
- 81% prefer to receive information in the mail

See Appendix B for The Australian Vegetable Industry Communication Strategy (2005), AUSVEG Ltd.

Communication Tools

Effective communication tools are a critical part of any communication program. The key tools have also been evaluated as part of this project. The results of these are as follows:

Vegetables Australia Magazine

Vegetables Australia is a 56-page, full colour bi-monthly magazine mailed directly to Australian Vegetable growers, researchers and other key members of the vegetable industry. Launched in July 2005, Vegetables Australia was initiated as the key print vehicle for the dissemination of information on the Vegetable R&D program,

Feedback was sought on the publication through two mechanisms: focus groups and a readership survey distributed in the magazine.

Readers indicated a high level of acceptance of the magazine, and a high level of interest in the R&D component of the publication (77% of survey respondents nominated R&D findings as their favourite magazine section)

Survey results also indicated 69% recognition of the Vegetable R&D Program and National Vegetable Levy.

A full evaluation of the magazine can be found in the Horticulture Australia Final Report on VG04086- Communicating R&D outcomes through Vegetables Australia magazine. Available on www.ausveg.com.au.

National Vegetable Industry Conference 2006.

The 2006 National Vegetable Industry Conference was held in Brisbane (May 10 -12) was highly successful and provided an excellent method for transfer of the results of this R&D to levy payers and those that service the vegetable industry. The overarching results for the conference were:

- Attendance of 501 delegates from throughout the industry and supply-chain, and over 32 trade displays.
- From a sample size of 117, 60% of conference delegates rated the conference as excellent, 36% as good, 4% as average and 0% as poor.
- From a sample size of 115 conference delegates, 90% of respondents indicated that they would attend another vegetable conference, 10% responded that they would consider attending another conference and 0% of respondents felt that they would not attend another vegetable conference.

A full evaluation of the conference can be found in the Horticulture Australia Final Report on VGO5079 - Australian Vegetable Industry Conference, Brisbane, May 2006. Available on www.ausveg.com.au.

Password Protected Vegetable Grower Website

The levy payer password protected site can be found on www.ausveg.com.au (grower portal). It has grown considerably since development in August 2005. All current (219) National vegetable levy funded projects have been loaded and can be viewed live on line.

Populating each project with a project summary and article has been tracking well and is 80% complete for 04,05,06 projects.

Researchers have also begun to recognise the levy-payer website as an important tool to communicate research outcomes to growers, with many providing project information, photos and relevant material relating to their own projects.

Membership of the site has also grown steadily with every outgoing magazine issue attracting growers to join following an article they have read. As it stands we have 300 registered members of the levy payer site.

LOTE Scoping Study and Communication Strategy

A large number of vegetable growers (40 percent) are not being communicated with adequately due to the fact that they do not speak English as a first language. To address this issue a comprehensive Language Other than English (LOTE) scoping study was conducted and a subsequent communication strategy developed to overcome the issues. However, funds to implement this strategy were not within this communication project and need to be pursued.

Overarching results of this scoping study:

- Over 2000 or almost 40% of vegetable growers in Australia are LOTE growers
- There are many more people involved in the vegetable growing industry, mainly farm who can be classified as LOTE workers
- The largest numbers of LOTE growers are located in the Sydney Basin, the Northern Plains and Brisbane
- The states and/or territories with the largest percentage of LOTE growers are the Northern Territory (83%), New South Wales (81%) and South Australia (57%)
- The main language groups are Vietnamese, Cantonese, Arabic and Cambodian

A copy of the 'Vegetable Growers with a Language Other Than English - A Snap Shot Report October 2005' and communication strategy to address these gaps can be found on www.ausveg.com.au.

R&D Branding Strategy

A visual identity for the R&D program funded by the levy and supporting style guide for implementation was developed to create an easy to recognised link between the levy and R&D outcomes. The logo developed is as follows:



Discussion

The Communication Audit proved to be a very worthwhile exercise to pinpoint the communication issues within the Australian Vegetable Industry. The results of the audit presented some significant challenges for the industry that only long term communication commitment could resolve.

Most significantly was the lack of awareness overall that the National Vegetable Levy paid by growers was used to fund a research and development program for the industry. Although there was some recognition of specific research outcomes, it was often thought by growers to be funded by local government agencies and not the levy. Therefore the value of the levy they paid was not well recognised. There was also low awareness of research outcomes and it could be surmised that uptake of R&D outcomes could be significantly improved.

The audit found that while communication in the industry has occurred previously via the Industry Development Officer network and state based research providers, it has been inconsistent across projects and in timing, quality and messaging causing considerable confusion across the industry.

The audit provided a sound basis for the development of the National Vegetable Industry Communication strategy. This strategy was starting from scratch and was about developing a communication framework including a set of tools to reach vegetable growers. The emphasis of the tools was print based and interpersonal as electronic communication (internet and email) is not used greatly in the vegetable industry. However to encourage the use of new technology in line with other agriculture industries and reduce communication costs in the long term, growers were encourage to use electronic communication mediums from cross promotion with more familiar tools such as print media.

Once the framework is set key messages can be relayed to growers easily and efficiently and a good example of this was the communication of the vegetable industry strategic plan- VegVision 2020.

The set up of this framework and communication tool development has taken up the majority of this project's time frame. There was a significant delay to the commencement of the project due to the timeframe of hiring a communication specialist to manage the project. However the communication tools and supporting projects were developed quickly and have shown to be popular with growers and successful in distributing key messages.

However, there has been some significant impediments to the Vegetable Industry Communication program that still require addressing to ensure the most cost efficient and effective communication program can be established for the vegetable industry. These are a lack of a National Vegetable Levy Payer database, lack of adherence to the branding strategy by research service providers and the LOTE communication strategy unfunded.

A National Vegetable Levy Payer database is required for the distribution of communication materials. Currently the magazine is mailed to growers using individual state databases controlled by state vegetable growing associations via the IDO network. Unfortunately the random telephone surveys have found this data to be of varying quality between states and there has been frustration expressed by many growers about their details not being correct despite reporting the inaccuracies several times. The politics surrounding the use of this data also greatly delayed the commencement of Vegetables Australia magazine.

Although the branding strategy has been developed for the industry, coordination and implementation with service providers across the R&D program has been difficult and will require more time to become adequately established.

The issue of 40 percent of vegetable growers falling into the LOTE category has also provided a significant challenge and requires funding to resolve.

However, despite these issues there has been an overall improvement in Vegetable Industry communications. Both in general awareness issues and quality of materials produced. And there has been a very favourable response to communication tools such as the Vegetables Australia magazine, website and conference.

The overall communication investment in the vegetable industry appears to be at the right level although significant cost savings can still be made by better coordination of communication materials produced by individual project service providers. There is also increasing support by the wider industry through advertising and sponsorship which will also assist the industry to maintain an effective communication program.

Technology Transfer

Industry consultation has been a critical component of developing and implementing this project. Through the communication audit and subsequent strategy development and communication tool production engagement of vegetable growers and other vegetable industry members was made.

This engagement was through the various R&D advisory committee meetings, IDO workshops, state visits and surveys. Presentations at all critical stages of the project were made to garner feedback and provide direction.

All outcomes of this project have also been promoted and communicated to growers using the tools developed, through state vegetable growing associations, media and IDO network. Information has been cross promoted through various mediums to create greater awareness. For example the new R&D brand has been explained regularly in the Vegetables Australia Magazine and R&D annual report and the website has promoted Vegetables Australia magazine.

Recommendations

Over the last two years, the vegetable industry has significantly increased its focus on formal communication, based on the communication strategy developed under this project. The main objective was to establish a number of communication frameworks from which to promote levy investments in R&D, particularly to growers.

The vegetable industry now has a bi-monthly Vegetables Australia Magazine delivering up-to-date research and development information to growers, an R&D brand to unify and promote levy-funded projects, a website to house R&D outcomes and industry news, a successful industry conference, awards process and a coordinated media strategy.

The evaluation of the strategy using a random telephone survey clearly shows that these communication tools and strategies are making a positive difference and that there have been significant improvements in communication to growers. However, growers still do not feel they are getting enough information on the National Vegetable Levy investment.

Therefore it is recommended that:

- A revised communication strategy be developed for the next three years and evaluated at the end of this period using a similar telephone survey to compare results.
- A part time Communications Manager and full time Communications Officer are employed to manage the communication capability for the vegetable industry.
- A national database of vegetable levy payers is developed
- The branding strategy is intensified and implemented more strongly across the R&D program in consultation with HAL.
- The branding requirements are written into R&D project milestone requirements.
- Funding for the LOTE grower communication strategy is strongly pursued.
- Vegetables Australia continues in the current format as a bi-monthly publication.
- The levy payer website continues to be developed and strongly promoted.
- Two annual publications are produced: 1) outlines the levy investment for the coming year and 2) Annual report on levy investment for the year, highlighting significant results.
- Media strategy is strengthened to promote R&D in collaboration with HAL and service providers.
- A National conference is run every second year, in conjunction with other vegetable levy paying industries
- The awards program continues annually.
- Joint communication activities are pursued with other vegetable levy paying industries.

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- Matt Dent, Former QLD Industry Development Officer
- Jack Millbank, Former QLD Industry Development Officer
- Patrick Ulloa, VIC Industry Development Officer
- Craig Feutrill, SA Industry Development Officer
- Stephen Welsh, TAS Industry Development Officer
- Jonathan Eccles, Former Industry Development Manager, AUSVEG
- Youna Angevin-Castro, Editor Vegetables Australia, AUSVEG
- Stephen Zelez, Communication Officer AUSVEG
- Stuart Silver, Communications Manager, HAL

Appendix:

- A. Australian Vegetable Industry Communication Audit Report, 2005. AUSVEG Ltd
- B. Vegetable Industry Communication Strategy, 2005. AUSVEG Ltd.

Australian Vegetable Industry Communication Audit Report

A report for AUSVEG levy funded project
'Improving Communication Networks in the Australian Vegetable
Industry' (VG03094).

February 2005

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Index

<u>Executive Summary</u>	19
<u>Introduction</u>	20
<u>Purpose</u>	20
<u>Definition of a Communication Audit</u>	20
<u>Background</u>	20
<u>What is communication?</u>	7
<u>Secret to good communication.</u>	7
<u>Basic communication pathway model</u>	7
<u>Methods used to conduct the audit</u>	8
<u>Discussion</u>	21
<u>Industry Consultation</u>	21
<u>Written Survey</u>	21
<u>Telephone Survey</u>	22
<u>Networks</u>	23
<u>Audiences</u>	23
<u>Opinion leaders</u>	25
<u>Communication Channels</u>	25
<u>Diagram of dominant communication channels</u>	27
<u>Communication Tools</u>	27
<u>Readership Analysis</u>	28
<u>Content Analysis:</u>	30
<u>Understanding the message</u>	30
<u>Believing the message</u>	30
<u>Remembering the message.</u>	30
<u>Five stages in the R&D adoption process.</u>	31
<u>What about content of vegetable industry communications.</u>	31
<u>Benchmarking</u>	33
<u>Meat & Livestock Australia</u>	33
<u>Cotton Australia</u>	34
<u>Nursery Industry Australia</u>	35
<u>Gap Analysis (SWOT)</u>	36
<u>Strengths</u>	36
<u>Weakness</u>	36
<u>Opportunities</u>	36
<u>Threats</u>	36
<u>Conclusions</u>	37
<u>Appendix</u>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>

Executive Summary

Communication in the vegetable industry is facing many challenges over the next few years. Current communication levels within the industry are very low and require radical changes to ensure the vegetable industry can meet the demanding challenges of the future.

Although the majority of growers are aware there is a National levy on vegetable sales there is still about 20% that don't. Also the overwhelming majority of growers don't know what the levy money is spent on, who makes the decisions on where it is spent and how they can make a suggestion. It is critical that this awareness is raised before association between the AUSVEG levy and the research and development program can lead to an increase in the uptake of R&D outcomes by growers.

The vegetable industry also lacks specific direction in its communication efforts and therefore the ability to distribute important key messages on time (both to vegetable growers and the general public) is very difficult. There is little collaboration between states and the information received by growers varies greatly between them. The role of Industry Development Officers in communications is very unclear and exacerbates these issues.

Growers not involved directly in industry committees or State vegetable associations often receive very little information about the industry and the outcomes of the research and development program. More frequent communication materials are required by mail.

Although the current use of internet and email is very low, growers must be encouraged to use the internet for information on research and development outcomes to reduce the costs involved with a dependence on printed materials and to take the vegetable industry into a more modern communication mind set.

The industry also fails to adequately communicate with a large group of growers who are from Non-English speaking backgrounds and may have limited English skills.

Current communication materials produced by the industry are of a poor standard and require basic improvements which will increase readability levels and give a more professional image to the industry. Distribution of communication materials is inefficient and often miss expected deadlines.

Face to face communication opportunities provided for growers have low attendance rates and lack coordination across Australia.

The vegetable industry levy funded research and development program doesn't have a clear identity. The use of various industry, state, government and research provider logos is inconsistent, varying significantly from project to project. This and the various qualities of communication efforts and outputs from specific research projects further undermine the value perception of the AUSVEG levy R&D program. Many research providers do not adequately communicate (nor see it as a priority) the outcomes of their project.

There is a significant amount of information on research and development outcomes for growers but they are often very technical in nature (and therefore hard to read and apply to the farm) and difficult to find. Many growers are unaware of information available and either do not know where to go to find it or are not inclined to seek it out.

Although communication in the vegetable industry is poor, the likelihood of improvement is high because the industry consistently shows commitment to improving it. However, the change will take some time as large shifts in both attitude and behaviour are required.

Introduction

'Improving Communication Networks in the Australian Vegetable Industry' (VG03094) was a project identified as a priority by the vegetable industry in 2003. Vegetable IAC identified that one of the key impediments to industry growth was the lack of adequate communication and collaboration in the industry.

To improve communications a strategy is required but before one can be developed a comprehensive research study is needed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of current communication practices. This research study is referred to as a communication audit.

Purpose

To undertake a comprehensive scoping study (referred to as a communication audit), to identify weaknesses in existing vegetable industry communication structures and recommend positive changes. These recommendations will be the basis of the vegetable industry communication plan.

Definition of a Communication Audit

A communication audit is a broad research based study that identifies strengths and weaknesses in the way an organisation or whole industry/sector communicates.

This audit refers to internal communication (communication within the vegetable industry). External communication which involves increasing the profile of the vegetable industry and marketing vegetables to consumers is outside the scope of this study.

Background

What is communication?

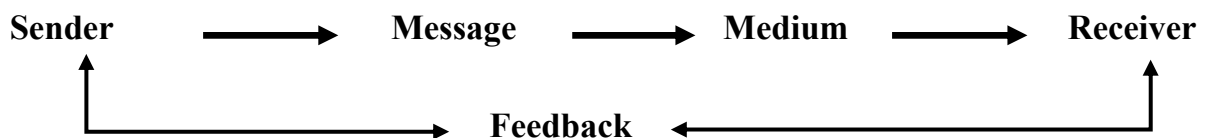
In an essence, to communicate effectively the sender of the message must use words and terms that mean the same thing to the receiver as they do the sender. In other words it establishes commonness between parties.

Sound simple? Unfortunately not. Messages are easily distorted as they pass through various mediums. Very much like the childhood game of Chinese Whispers, where the initial phrase is distorted as it is whispered from child to child. If the message is not understood the communication will fail.

Secret to good communication.

To be good communicators there are many aspects to consider. The simplest way to view this is using a basic communication pathways diagram.

Basic communication pathway model



To communicate successfully each step in this pathway is equally important. If there is a weakness in the circuit such as the message not clearly defined or the medium (magazine, newsletter etc) is poor the effectiveness of the overall communication will decrease.

Historically many communication programs place an emphasis on the communication medium (what brochure, how many pages and what colours to use) and forget all about the content and the messages they are trying to convey to the reader.

Methods used to conduct the audit

The communication audit was conducted using the following techniques:

- *industry consultation*: personal interviews, group discussion, written survey and random telephone survey
- *network analysis*: a study of current communication channels and how messages are sent around the vegetable industry
- *readership analysis*: a study of which communication tools are listened to/read most frequently
- *content analysis*: a study of individual communication tools, including readability levels and quality of message.
- *benchmarking*: three industries were selected which were considered to communicate more efficiently than the vegetable industry. Comparisons were subjectively made with these industries
- *gap analysis*: Summary of the industry's communications strengths/weaknesses.

Discussion

Industry Consultation

Extensive consultation with the vegetable industry was conducted using a written survey, a random telephone survey, group discussions and personal interviews.

Written Survey

The written survey was sent to a small number of vegetable industry members (64) drawn from product and key investment group members, IAC, state association executive committees and the AUSVEG Board. The response rate was 70 per cent.

The overall results showed that respondents were dissatisfied with current communication in the vegetable industry. However, following IAC, group and individual discussions with industry it was agreed that the results were bias and not representative of the industry as a whole. A random telephone survey was conducted across the wider vegetable grower audience for a statistically accurate and clear picture of communications in the vegetable industry.

Top line results for the written survey were:

- overall, respondents were not satisfied with communication in the vegetable industry
- respondents felt that other levy payers were more dissatisfied than themselves (as industry representatives) with communication on the AUSVEG levy and R&D outcomes
- national vegetable industry magazine wanted by growers – 91% yes
- one-stop -shop website wanted- 78% yes
- increase communication with consumers wanted - 84% yes
- IDO newsletters was the only communication medium to receive an “Excellent” vote
- IDO publications VegeLink and VegeNotes most positively received
- IDO newsletters wanted in states other than own- 60%
- misinformation high in vegetable industry- 65% of people thinking some statements were true such as vegetable growers cannot work together for global outcomes and vegetable growers use pesticides unnecessary

Please refer to **Appendix B** for the report on the written survey.

Telephone Survey

A random telephone survey was conducted across the vegetable industry using an independent market research company Australian Survey Research.

The purpose of the survey was to research:

- Grower awareness about of R&D outcomes funded by the AUSVEG Levy , and who makes the decisions on how it is spent.
- Grower awareness on vegetable industry grower organisations such as AUSVEG, HAL and State Associations.
- Where growers went to find out the latest information in the vegetable industry.
- If growers were using the internet for information.

Vegetable grower contact details were sourced independently to the industry from the National farmer's database. This database is developed by a list marketing agency 'Impact Lists' and is used predominantly by supermarket chains, chemical companies and the government. AUSVEG purchased a random sample of 4000 names from this list for a one off use for the purpose of the survey. This sample was evenly stratified to represent the differences in actual number of growers in each State. For example States with a greater number of growers had a slightly bigger sample taken. This stratification remained throughout the entire survey, with South Australia the most difficult to achieve the required response levels. The survey was well received with only two recorded complaints from those contacted.

To verify that the people surveyed were actually current vegetable growers, qualifying questions were used. These questions asked if the respondent was a vegetable grower, what crops they grew and how long they had been growing. Growers were also asked to nominate their major crops, if respondents nominated potatoes, onions or tomatoes as their only crop they were not included. However, those growing these crops as well as others were included.

Also, before the survey was considered complete the respondent had to reach the final questions with a maximum of only three unanswered.

This proved to be difficult but quality responses were paramount to the accuracy of the survey results. Therefore the survey was conducted over a period of one month to reach the statistically accurate sample size of 400 (actual response 416) full responses from a total data list of 7500.

The summary of results of the phone survey are as follows:

1. The overwhelming majority of growers knew they were paying a National levy on vegetable sales.
2. The majority of growers who knew they were paying a levy thought they could recall something the levy was spent on. However, many (38%) of these answers were incorrect. The most common incorrect response was that the levy was spent on the marketing and promotion of vegetable consumption to consumers. Growers in Tasmania, Victoria and Queensland gave the most number of incorrect responses.
3. The overwhelming majority of growers did NOT know how the decision was made on where the levy money was spent or who made it. Of the growers that did think they knew, more than half gave incorrect responses. The most common incorrect response was HAL and research institutes.
4. The majority of growers did NOT know how or where to make a suggestion on where the levy was spent. Of those that thought they knew about half gave incorrect responses.
5. The majority of growers were NOT satisfied or didn't care either way about the level of information they received on where the levy was spent.
6. The majority of growers wanted more information on where the levy money was spent, with the greatest requirement nominated by Queensland and Western Australian growers.
7. The majority of growers wanted more general information on vegetable growing. The greatest requirement in Queensland and Western Australia.
8. The majority of growers wanted to receive more information by mail.
9. The majority of growers sought information from own experience (trial and error). Other sources of information were other farmers, internet, regional farmers associations and agronomists.

10. The majority of vegetable growers did not use the internet for information on vegetable growing.
11. The majority of growers have never used the internet to access professional information. The lowest internet use rate was in Tasmania and Queensland. The highest users of the internet were growers in South Australia and Western Australia.
12. The majority of growers were unlikely to use the internet or email to access information on vegetable growing in the next year. There is however a small increase in the desire to use it in the future than the level of use now.
13. The majority of growers never physically meet their Industry Development Officer or know one exists. Less than 11% of growers see them once a month or more.
14. The majority of growers who are aware of IDOs receive information in the mail from them a few times a year or monthly.
15. Of the growers that knew the IDO existed and received information from them the majority felt the quality of information was good to reasonable.
16. The majority of growers had heard of HAL.
17. The majority of growers had NOT heard of AUSVEG prior to this survey.
18. The majority of growers are members of some sort of vegetable growing association. Most of these were regional or local associations (not state associations).
19. The overwhelming majority of growers felt that the industry should make an effort marketing vegetable consumption to consumers.

Networks

The first step in analysing communication networks was to examine exactly what audiences the industry is trying to target. Then the method of communication and types of tools used to reach these audiences was considered.

Audiences

The current audience for communication in the vegetable industry is poorly defined. A poorly defined audience makes developing suitable messages, using the right mediums very difficult.

Also, more importantly there is no complete list of vegetable growers that can be used for quick and regular communication. Currently, it is impossible to know exactly who the target audience is for communications because the industry does not know who many of the 'vegetable growers' are.

It is not sufficient to say 'vegetable grower' as our target audience because there is a mosaic of different behavioural, ethnic, geographic and special interest groupings that make up the 'vegetable grower' audience. Also there are different levels of involvement by growers in the industry such as those highly active and those that are completely apathetic. Good communications requires reaching these audiences using different techniques.

Currently audience is broken predominantly into what state a grower is in and to some degree what crop they grow, ethnicity and industry representation. However, the latter are also dependent on what state the grower is in. While these different groupings are relevant they are not clearly defined and therefore adding to the disjointed nature of current communication activities.

Communication will never be sufficient if the target audience can not be clearly defined.

Current audience groups identified include:

- Industry representatives
- QLD- other levy payers
- NSW- other levy payers
- Vic- association members
- SA- association members
- NSW-NESB

- Vic- other levy payers
- SA- other levy payers
- NSW- association members
- QLD- association members
- SA- NESB*
- Tas- association members
- WA- association members
- WA- other levy payers
- Tas- other levy payers.
- Vic- NESB

* NESB- Non-English speaking backgrounds

For effective communications the audience breakdown needs to change, it is recommended that this is completed in the following way:

Behavioral similarities using the following three categories:

- Latent growers- a group that face a similar problem but they are not aware of it (passive audience)
- Aware grower- The group recognise a problem they become aware (passive audience)
- Active grower- the group become active and want to do something about the problem.
- Opinion Leader

Communication materials should also be tailored to send specific information based on:

- Crops grown- for specific R&D outcomes,
- Geographic- region, state
- Ethnicity (language)

Audience breakdown greatly affects what methods and messages are used to communicate with them. Vegetable grower communication will greatly improve if their behavioral characteristics are considered.

Currently growers tend to fall into the latent and aware groups, very few growers are in the active communication stage and even those involved in industry meetings are not always actively seeking information.

The vegetable industry communication strategy should aim to move growers towards being an active audience or at the very least the aware audience. At present there is too much emphasis placed on communication tools for active audiences and not enough on the passive ones. Work needs to be done to encourage growers to become a more active audience as well as providing the more detailed information for actual active audiences. This balance is not achieved.

Opinion leaders

Opinion leaders are very active audiences and are extremely important to reach. Opinion leaders are catalysts of public opinion because the largely apathetic audience (natural state in Australia) relies heavily on them for information and direction. Opinion leaders, by definition, are knowledgeable about issues and articulate on their point of view.

The vegetable industry has both formal (elected/appointed) officials such as industry representatives and state association executive and informal ones not currently clearly defined. It would be worthwhile to make the effort to identify some of these people in the vegetable industry.

Other audiences important to dissemination of R&D information

Growers receive information from a wide variety of third parties. The telephone survey and feedback from the IDO network indicated that agronomists and field officers employed by exporters, processors, allied trades etc, played a significant role in the dissemination of information to growers. Tasmania and Queensland seems to have the highest occurrence of this and the lowest in NSW. It was noted that often IDOs fed information into these agronomists/field officers to reach growers.

State departments of agriculture and primary industries also appeared to disseminate a wide variety of information to growers; however growers in the telephone survey did not source these organisations as a place to find out information related to the vegetable industry. The hypothesis here is that this is due to the vast reduction in extension based positions in these organisations.

These communication channels are important and any information (especially industry key messages) must be disseminated through them. A database of these contacts is required and information disseminated to them on a regular basis.

Some of these third party audiences are:

- Agronomists/Field Officers
- State Departments of Agriculture
- Agricultural consultancies
- Allied Trades
- External Interest groups (ie, EPA, Workcover etc)
- Universities TAFES (agriculture and horticulture courses).

Communication Channels

The vegetable industry has many communication channels through which growers find out information on the vegetable industry. These include communication between:

- growers in the same state
- growers in different states
- growers and state/regional associations
- growers and the IAC
- growers and the media
- growers and consultants
- AUSVEG and state associations
- HAL and growers
- AUSVEG and growers
- growers and IDOs
- growers and State DPIs
- growers and suppliers (agronomists employed by chemical companies etc.)
- growers and research institutes
- growers and processors
- growers and wholesalers
- growers and retailers
- growers and suppliers

Communication to vegetable growers from industry is currently heavily reliant on the Industry Development Officer Network (IDOs). Problems identified with this system include:

- Accuracy and extent of individual IDO state databases for dissemination of information. This is dependent on growers registering with IDOs and the diligence of the IDO to correct changes of address (good in some states, poor in others).
- Communication to growers varies greatly between states.
- Key message release, as a whole industry, is haphazard. There is no coordinated approach for what should be released.
- There is much duplication of material between states and doubling up of work- like mail outs
- Limited by IDO individual skills.
- Limited by IDO personality and interests.
- Limited by IDO willingness/ability to travel and network with growers.
- State related agendas.
- Relationship with state based associations

Although the IDO network does collaborate on many issues the message release and communication methods is individualised dependent on specific skills of the IDO. One person cannot be everything and relying predominantly on six individuals for an entire industry communication effort is not recommended. Critical key message release to growers does not occur in a timely way.

Not only are key messages disjointed in release or don't get out there at all, much time and money is wasted with duplicating things 6 times in 6 different ways, in 6 varying qualities.

The telephone survey also noted that the majority of growers did not know an IDO existed and those that heard of them received various frequencies of information (face to face and mailed communication).

The role of the IDO in communication needs urgent clarification and the role more clearly defined.

The other most common communication channels were word of mouth from grower to grower in the same state, growers and state associations (only relevant to growers who are members and also dependent on IDO network) and AUSVEG and state associations.

There is some collaboration between growers in the same state but very little between growers in different states. Some representatives from the IAC communicate outcomes back to other growers not in these groups, however this is not consistent and there are no formal mechanisms for this to occur.

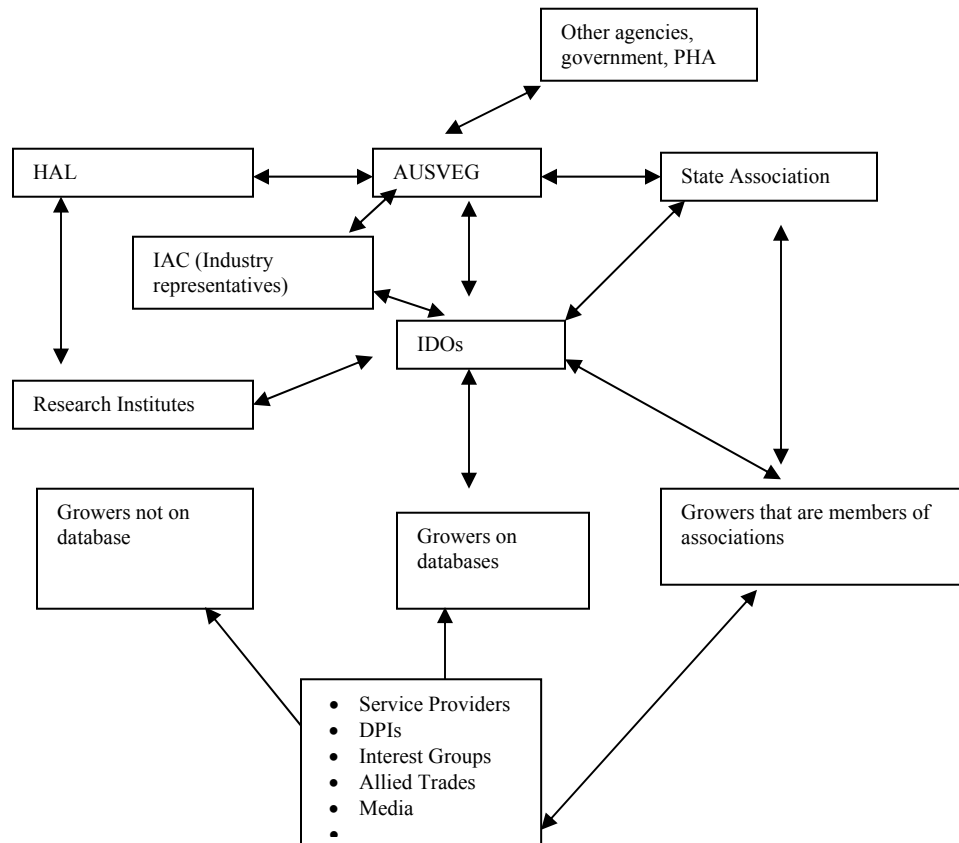
The effectiveness of communication channels was dependent on which state a grower resided in and on the communication methods used by state IDOs and associations. There is no message coordination between communication channels and much is informal between growers.

Growers who are not a member of the association, not part of the IDO database or are not in the area that the IDO visits frequently miss out on regular communications. This lack of communication is exacerbated if the grower is not a member of the state association.

Personal interviews revealed the view that the growers who were not members of their state association or on IDO database lists were not active growers in the industry and therefore it didn't matter if communications didn't reach them because they were small and going to leave the industry anyway. There was also the contradicting view that growers not on these lists were in fact the bigger ones who felt the associations were irrelevant and that they didn't need the information the IDOs had.

Despite all of this for good communication it is best to communicate to as many members of the industry as possible, especially for a more cohesive and effective uptake of R&D outcomes. The level of communication to these audiences will vary.

Diagram of dominant communication channels



Communication Tools

Considering audience breakdown is a very important part in deciding which communication tools to use. Broadly defined, communication tools are the mediums used to carry messages to growers. In general, passive audiences are reached by radio, television, posters, catchy slogans, dramatic pictures, bumper stickers and special events. These methods do not require a great deal of involvement or concentration by the audience.

Active information seeking audiences on the other hand are reached by brochures, in-depth magazine articles, presentations, CDs, DVDs (about 30 mins to 1 hr), conferences, meetings and the internet.

People understand and retain more information if they can see and hear it. Passive audiences need more stimulation, radio announcements, slogans, symbols while information seekers need more detail, hence the brochures and in depth magazine articles.

Message penetration (which is what communication is all about) is increased when steps are taken to repeat the message in several ways suitable to different audience requirements. This is one of the main reasons a mix of communication efforts are recommended.

. Broadly communication tools can be broken into three main areas:

1. face to face communication- meetings, seminars
2. printed- magazines, brochures, newspapers
3. electronic- web, radio, television.

The vegetable industry relies heavily on printed material to communicate to growers because the uptake of internet is slow. The telephone survey showed that the use of the internet and email was very low and likely to change marginally over the next year. Face to face communication opportunities are often poorly attended and are less frequent than desired due to the tyranny of distance and time.

The written survey found that Industry Development Officers (IDOs) meetings were the most common way

of hearing about what was happening in the vegetable industry followed closely by Word of Mouth , Good Fruit and Vegetables newspaper and the VegeLink IDO newsletter.

However the random telephone survey found that the majority of growers did not know an IDO existed and relied on themselves, other farmers and agronomists for the information they needed. This reinforced that the majority of the vegetable industry is out of the communications loop.

Readership Analysis

Readership levels of industry publications are mostly dependent on the accuracy of state based grower databases.

The media included below is not an exhaustive list of media that growers could receive information from but included are those most commonly read and seen as part of internal industry communication. A full media strategy should be developed as part of the industry communication strategy, especially for external communication purposes.

The following table outlines the identified communication tools in the vegetable industry by audience.

Category	Name	Classification*	Audience	Timing	**Circulation
Australia Wide					
Face to Face	Industry meetings	industry	Industry representatives, Association Executives	3-6 times a year	approx. 50
Face to Face	Annual Levy Payers meeting	industry	Levy payers	annually	20
Face to Face Printed	AUSVEG AGM Good Fruit & Vegetables	industry media	Levy payers Australian fruit and vegetable growers, processors, marketers and sellers	annually Monthly (beginning of month)	30 6,500 (including fruit and wholesalers)
Printed	National Marketplace News	media	Fruit, vegetable, nut, herb and flower industries	Monthly	11,000
Electronic	AUSVEG website	industry	Levy payers	ongoing	200 per week
Electronic	HAL website	industry	Industry members	ongoing	Not defined
Victoria					
Face to Face	IDO grower meetings-	industry	Levy Payers	? per year	approx ? per session
Face to Face Printed	Association AGM VegeLink (embedded in VGA newsletter)	industry industry	Association members Industry representatives, Growers on Vic IDO database	annually quarterly	approx. 30 600
Printed	VGA newsletter	industry	Growers on Vic IDO database	quarterly	600
Electronic	VGA website	industry	Victorian growers	ongoing	Not defined
NSW					
Face to Face	IDO grower meetings	industry	Levy payers	About 10- 11 per year	between 5-100.
Face to Face	Annual Horticultural Conference	Industry	Levy Payers	annual	10
Printed	VEGELink NSW	industry	Vegetable growers on NSW IDO state database	Quarterly	approx. 1200
WA					
Face to Face	IDO grower meetings	industry	Levy payers	-	-
Printed	VegeLink (embedded in WA Grower)	industry	Vegetable growers on WA IDO state database	Quarterly	approx. 500
Printed	WA grower	industry	Vegetable growers on WA IDO database	Quarterly	approx. 500
Electronic	Email service	industry	Vegetable growers on WA IDO database with	Various- ongoing	approx. 50

Queensland					
Face to face	IDO grower meetings	industry	Levy payers	12-20 per year	About 10-20 average
Printed	Vegetable News (IDO newsletter)	industry	Vegetable growers on IDO/Growcom database	quarterly	approx. 1700
Printed	Queensland fruit and Vegetable News	industry	Horticulture- fruit and vegetables	monthly	Not available
Electronic	Growcom website	industry	Levy Payers	ongoing	Not defined
South Australia					
Face to face	IDO grower meetings	industry	Levy payers	Various-weekly/monthly depending on the issue	Average 6-8 but can have up to 160 for contentious issues.
Face to face	SAFF Horticulture AGM	industry	Vegetable growers that are members of SAFF	Annual	Only a few. Numbers low.
Face to Face	ARAC meetings	industry	Levy payers	Twice a year	14
Printed	VegeLink SA	industry	Vegetable growers on SA IDO database	quarterly	1200
Printed	The Grower	media	SA Horticulture industry	monthly	8,500 (including fruit).
Electronic					
Tasmania					
Face to face	IDO grower meetings (R&D)	industry	Levy payers	15-20	8-20
Face to Face	R&D Extension day	industry	Levy payers	annual	150
Face to Face	ARAC meetings	industry	Levy payers	4	8
Face to Face	Agronomy providers/field officers	Other	Levy Payers	-	-
Printed	Getting Results- IDO newsletter	industry	Vegetable growers on Tas IDO database.	Quarterly	600
Electronic	TFGA website	industry	Levy payers	ongoing	Not defined

* classification refers to who produces the publication, industry or media. Media content is not controlled by the industry.

** Circulation figures for media from 'Margaret Gee's Australian Media Guide, July 2004 – 76th Edition. Other figures as quoted by industry representatives.

Content Analysis:

Content analysis for the purpose of this audit was conducted around messages the vegetable industry is trying to communicate to growers. This part of the audit was difficult to complete as the industry does not have a coordinated broad set of messages, nor project specific messages clearly defined. This clarification is recommended.

However, simple content analysis was based around the concepts of message penetration. The assumption made that any information on research and development outcomes was a message. It is not recommended that such a broad definition be used heading into the future.

Understanding the message

Clear, simple messages are more likely to succeed with audiences who vary in literacy and verbal proficiency. When writing messages for clarity it is best to avoid jargon and complex concepts.

There are many scientific tests and formulas used to test 'readability of writing'. These tests are based on evidence that readers retain more information out of short prose which has shorter sentences and fewer long or difficult words. However it is also found that prose should vary in sentence length and vocabulary to create interest. Readability also depends on layout and design, the rule of thumb- 'the more clean the layout with consistency and good use of white space the easier the publications is to read'.

Jargon specific to an industry should be avoided even when writing for the industry, one person's grasp of the jargon may differ greatly from another. Also the use of acronyms should be done with care. Overuse can make a simple concept very complex.

Other tendencies to be avoid are clichés and hype because power words such as 'cutting edge and unique' quickly become diluted when over used. Language should always be inclusive.

Believing the message

Believability of message has a great effect on message penetration, and is having a significant impact on communications in the vegetable industry. If the audience doesn't believe what they are reading they won't act on it. There are three main variables in the believability of the message, source credibility, context and audience predisposition. In the vegetable industry there seems to be a mix of credibility. In general the results produced by research organisations are seen as credible and that information provided by them truthful. This does not apply however to some organisations involved in the industry.

From observation, organisations associated with the AUSVEG levy are seen as less credible and in it for themselves. This needs to be rectified, especially for the bodies AUSVEG and HAL if messages they release are to be seen as credible. This also seems to apply to state associations; if a grower is not a member then the messages provided by the association are seen as less credible because there is a perceived political agenda. This does not seem to apply for members of associations.

In relation to IDOs, the level of credibility seemed to vary between state. However in general information provided by IDOS was seen as credible but influenced by state based and national agendas of related organisations. For example how closely aligned the IDO was to the state association or employing organization.

Overall, surprisingly, this suspicion does not seem to influence message believability on the outcomes of research and development projects, more in relation to what projects the levy was spent on and which were chosen as a priority for the industry. This seems to be the greater problem because often much of the research undertaken is seen as irrelevant.

One explanation for poor message penetration could be that growers feel the project outcomes are not worth listening to because while the outcomes might be factual they don't see the value in the project in the first place. More work is needed in informing growers how and why certain projects are chosen over others. This would help improve the credibility of the entire R&D program and improve message penetration.

Remembering the message.

For an audience to remember a message repetition and multiple channels are recommended. Repetition of messages increases the chances of reaching audience members who may miss a newscast or article that appears only once. Repeated messages break through clutter and also make sure a message stays true.

Conflicting concepts occur less often.

Five stages in the R&D adoption process.

Getting a message through to the audience is only the first stage in actually integrating R&D outcomes into the industry. There are actually five stages, awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and finally adoption,

There are some excellent examples in the vegetable industry of some research and development projects which have successfully made it to the adoption process on a small scale. Success here was greatly influenced by the face to face efforts and support of the IDO.

This process needs to be greatly enhanced to improve communication and collaboration in the vegetable industry. The communication strategy must address some of the issues to encourage this process.

What about content of vegetable industry communications.

A snapshot of the content in current vegetable industry communication mediums was based around a sample of the most popular publications were chosen for examination (two editions were chosen at random). The results are in the table below.

Overall the quality, readability and message content of vegetable industry communication tools vary significantly between states. The most reader friendly and professional publications produced by the industry were Vegetable News from QLD IDO and WA grower magazine. However no publications had all the elements needed to achieve the highest level of readability and message penetration for the vegetable industry- especially on R&D outcomes. It is also worth noting that IDO newsletters in other publications had lower reader recognition, often becoming lost in the publication it was inserted in.

Medium	Readability- writing	Readability- design elements	Messages
Good Fruit & Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of editorial depended on source of article. Varied greatly. Some very technical. Feature material generally simple and easy to understand in a friendly editorial style. Some interesting news type stories relevant to growers. Articles tended to be aimed more at the wholesale, supply level than at growers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advertorial and advertising dominant which detracts from the publication. Layout lacks white space and is somewhat cluttered. Fairly low grade reproduction of images but standard with newspaper. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated section- Vegetable Platter (compiled by IDOs see later for a closer examination) Fruit stories dominate over vegetable stories by far (For example are screening of 12 editions pulled from two years the average dedicated vegetable to fruit story was 1 to 5). Some good feature articles with broad interest.
IDO newsletter – Vic (VegeLink)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Material easy to understand. Good length sentences and explanations of technical information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Layout inconsistent- poor use of white space and other graphic design tools that increase readability such as consistent heading styles, appropriate use of colour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tends to be lost as it is inserted into VGA newsletter. Other brands such as R&D shop used which may be confusing.

Medium	Readability- writing	Readability- design elements	Messages
IDO newsletter – NSW (VEGELink)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stories lean towards being complex- verbose and long sentences. Some good colour articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very basic design but consistent, clean and easy to read. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good opportunities for feedback. Some positive R&D information
IDO newsletter –	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing leans towards the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design reasonable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some good positive

Tas (Getting Results)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> technical side. Sometimes verbose with poor sentence usage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> and consistent with styles. • Could use white space better and font styles that are easier to read. Colour selection could be better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R&D messages. • Good opportunities to engage interest and achieve feedback.
IDO newsletter – QLD (Vegetable News)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articles tend to lack colour and are more report like which reduces readability. • Sentence length long and verbose which reduces readability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent layout with lots of white space and good use of design elements which improves readability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very heavily branded Growcom. • Good opportunities for grower feedback
IDO newsletter – SA (Veglink SA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large use of jargon, acronyms, technical terms without explanation and long sentences. All these elements reduce readability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No design elements included except banner. • A large block of text reduces readability. No consistent style. Reduces readability. • Some good clear pictures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separate branding which is confusing
IDO newsletter – WA (Veglink embedded in WA Grower magazine)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of articles varies greatly. Some short sentences, other technical. • Tends to be on the heavy side of acronyms, jargon and difficult scientific concepts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same comments as WA grower • The design really lets this publication down. Poor use of white space and crowded column design makes it look cluttered and uninviting to read. • Lack of standard heading sizes and text styles, no consistent application of design styles (colour, borders etc) as well as low grade reproduction of adverts and photos reduces the quality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some good messages in this publication about keeping growers aware of what the Levy is spent on and how decisions are made. • Some good summaries on R&D project outcomes. • Tends to get lost in magazine. • Good opportunity for grower feedback
WA Grower magazine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent easy to read features on growers. Information is presented in an easy to read friendly style 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The design really lets this publication down. Poor use of white space and crowded column design makes it look cluttered and uninviting to read. • Lack of standard heading sizes and text styles, no consistent application of design styles (colour, borders etc) as well as low grade reproduction of adverts and photos reduces the quality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some excellent content in this publication. Especially grower based features. • Tends to be a lack of R&D information except for the VegeLink insert. • Used to circulate agri-political messages.
Vegenotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality varies between separate fact sheets. • Jargon, long sentences, and acronyms reduce readability levels of these fact sheets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Layout, use of white space and print quality let this publication down. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept of providing top level information to growers on R&D is a good one. Use of the bottom line section effective. • Problem is distribution

-
- and decision of which projects are featured over others.
 - No message coordination of project outcomes with other communication mediums.
-

Overall, the quality of publications tends to be low with poor design elements such as consistent style and good use of white space. The content is often with complex, long verbose sentences and written in a report style that is not lively to read. For these reasons it is concluded that readability level of most publications in the vegetable industry is low when compared against good communication standards.

Other issues uncovered with message content were that there was not consistent terms used when referring to the vegetable levy and no consistent use of logos and brands in the industry. This was especially true for communication materials produced by individual research projects. This is one of the factors that would lead to a low recognition of the value of the AUSVEG levy funded R&D program.

Benchmarking

Comparing the communication activities of the vegetable industry to other industries perceived as successful communicators is an efficient way to learn from others successes and apply relevant lessons efficiently. It also gives a point of reference to make a judgment on the sophistication and success of current communication activities in the vegetable industry.

The three industries chosen to benchmark against are Meat, Cotton and Nursery. Meat and Cotton were selected because growers nominated these industries as excellent communicators for both information to growers and marketing to consumers. The nursery industry was chosen because they have a similar industry structure and face similar communication challenges to the vegetable industry.

Meat & Livestock Australia

The meat industry peak body for farmers is Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA). Strength of the meat industry is its large size, quoted at about 100,000 producers, who pay a levy on animals sold (not slaughtered).

The members of MLA are the farmers themselves and membership is voluntary. To be a member of MLA is free to every levy payer but to receive services they must formally register with the organization. Under this structure about 30% of Levy payers are members. MLA believed that its members were the largest and most influential farmers in the industry.

MLA does not have state associations as members. Although not direct members specialist lobby groups such as the Cattle Council and Meat Livestock Council, who represent farmers participate in the decision making process of MLA. Farmers pay a membership to these organisations to represent them. MLA noted that it was sometimes challenging as these groups did not represent all levy payers but were responsible for all agripolitical activities. MLA does not undertake any agripolitical activity and levy payers that were not members of the lobby groups often felt they did not have a sufficient voice.

Of the \$3.08 levy paid on each animal sold, 92 cents goes to R&D and \$2.16 goes to marketing. MLA manages the marketing and R&D communication activities through the following separate departments:

- International Consumer marketing (4 staff)
- Domestic consumer marketing (5 staff)
- R&D communication (4 staff)
- Industry Affairs (15 staff)

The largest department, industry affairs, manages all publications for the other departments (including marketing in MLA). To do this they have in house graphic designers and a full time editor and writers. This area also manages media and events.

Communication in the meat industry is centralized and managed by MLA. There are no regionally based industry development, marketing or communication officers. Instead there is the EDGE network. The EDGE network is managed by consultants on behalf of the MLA. The EDGE network aims to give farmers tools to enhance their business and improve profits through the face to face presentation of cutting edge research and development results.

In regards to communicating research and development outcomes to farmers the following tools are used:

1. A central database of all MLA members. All mail outs are centralized from the MLA head Office to save money and time.
2. A magazine, 'Feedback' is mailed to members 10 times a year. This magazine is minimally designed and contains about 20% R&D information and 80% general issues.
3. A quarterly publication called MLA Prograzier – Delivering R&D results to producers, is also minimally designed and is dedicated solely to communication R&D outcomes. It is fairly dry and technical in nature. This publication is also directly mailed to farmers.
4. A weekly publication – Meat & Livestock Weekly is a publication sent or emailed to members and contains updated market and product statistics to grower.
5. A bimonthly publication – Quantum which was dedicated to quality issues was mailed direct to all members.
6. Product Catalogue- This annual publication is sent to every farmer and outlines all the available publications and fact sheets related to the R&D program. Every project under the R&D program has a range of publications, especially fact sheets which are used to communicate outcomes in an easy to understand format.
7. MLA website- MLA mirrors all information in print on the website under a member's only section on the website. However, MLA found that members had only started to use the website in the last 2 years but although use was growing it was felt that it should be kept simple as it took more effort or interest from farmers to find information on the website and was more targeted at active members. It was felt that a huge investment in the website was unnecessary and that it was better to build on it as usage grew. The MLA found however it was best for archiving and did not replace the need of printed publications.
8. The Edge network- consultants that ran this were usually state based Departments of agriculture or farmers associations. These were separate projects in themselves and supported usually by Farmbiz government funding.
9. Events- R&D showcase events. Groups of farmers can nominate a requirement for an event in there area which provides face to face showcase of R&D outcomes and all other activities of the MLA. While these groups must manage this day event, and demonstrate necessity, the MLA will seek sponsorship and support these events. MLA found that there were usually 4 of these held each year.

An interesting point was that although all levy payers have a right to access MLA information, unless they formally registered as members they were not given access. MLA does many membership drives to encourage as many farmers to be members as possible. All registered members received a formal member card. Registration was used to confirm that the farmer was actually a levy payer. MLA stated clearly that no complete list of livestock farmers existed.

The funds for the above communication activities came solely from the R&D Levy.

Marketing to consumers is a very extensive program backed by about a \$5.5 million dollar budget. Part of this program includes extensive advertising campaigns, brochures, in store promotions and public relations activities. MLA supports about 7 international offices which are predominantly focused on marketing product to consumers.

Cotton Australia

Cotton Australia is the peak industry body representing cotton growers across Australia. Currently cotton is grown predominantly in NSW and Queensland and there are approximately 100 growers. All growers are members of Cotton Australia and the organization is funded by a voluntary levy of \$2 a bale. Nearly all growers choose to pay the levy.

Cotton Australia provides direct funding to the grower associations in all of the key growing areas to support the operation of these organisations.

Cotton Australia has seven field staff that assists growers in their regions. These roles help growers in areas of Best Management practice, farm management, issues management and community liaison. Field staff are also responsible for face to face communication and representing the industry to the community at events.

Communication in the cotton industry occurs from the organisations, Cotton Australia and Cotton Research and Development Centre (government, similar role to HAL) and the Cotton Cooperative Research Centre (CRC). Cotton Australia outsources communication activity to a public relations agency. CRDC and the CRC have in house communication staff.

CRDC is responsible for communicating R&D outcomes and Cotton Australia for general information on the industry, specific programs such as their environment program, issues management, media management and marketing cotton to consumers. There is little marketing now to consumers but previously development materials are used successfully to maintain education of cotton in Australia. Cotton Australia historically ran

a shop front in Sydney for education programs with children, however this no longer operates.

Cotton Australia maintains a central database of all growers which is 99% accurate probably due to the small number of growers in the industry.

The types of communication materials produced by CRC, CRDC and Cotton Australia for the industry include:

- CRC- Research threads. A newsletter on current research outcomes.
- CRC- Cotton Tales- A newsletter with updates on the cotton industry.
- CRC individual reports on research outcomes
- CRC website- comprehensive database of all information materials associated with cotton research.
- CRDC reports on specific cotton research projects.
- CRDC statistical information on the cotton industry.
- CRDC website- contains a basic search of all research projects and top line summaries. Not password protected.
- Cotton Australia- Cotton Reel- a quarterly magazine which is mailed to growers. Each edition is dedicated to a particular issue in the industry.
- Cotton Australia Annual report also mailed to every grower to provide a broad base of information on the industry.
- Cotton Australia fact Sheets- general information on the cotton industry such as history, marketing, how it is grown etc. targeted more at general public.
- Cotton Australia Education kits and marketing information- aimed at school children to promote the industry.
- Cotton Conference- supported by all organisations in the industry.

Nursery Industry Australia

The nursery industry is structured in a very similar way to the vegetable industry, with a peak industry body NGIA representing all levy payers and state based associations. Levy payers cannot become members of NGIA and participating in state based associations is voluntary. There is a compulsory levy paid on each pot sold.

Communication in the nursery industry is managed by state associations and NGIA through a national communications manager and state based Industry Development Officers.

The industry does not have a consolidated national database of members but is currently trying to build one to streamline communication activities. Grower details are currently held by state associations. To receive any national communication materials a levy payer must register their details with NGIA. NGIA are constantly marketing communication materials to improve this percentage.

Each state association also sends out a regular newsletter to its members. National communication materials are not sent through state based associations as not all levy payers were members of the state association and nation communication materials were commissioned by the industry to communicate R&D outcomes to all Levy payers.

The communication materials produced by the nursery industry to communicate R&D outcomes are:

- NGIA Clippings- a monthly newsletter that has stories and case studies about R&D funded projects. Direct mailed to levy payers that have registered.
- Nursery Papers- Colour coded easy to read reference information with actionable conclusions for a particular R&D project. Papers issued every two months.
- Nursery papers collection CD- a CD containing all issued nursery papers. Basically pdfs available for download. CD will not be provided soon as all information will become web based.
- Issues Alert- Issued on an as needs basis as the need arises. Information that is need immediately.
- Communication Information flyer- this flyer encourages nursery industry members to register to NGIA for information.
- NGIA website- contains various information and is being built as the central reference point.

The nursery industry also has two magazines that service it produced by media bodies not managed by the industry. The industry regularly submits information to these publications and pays for advertising.

Gap Analysis (SWOT)

Strengths

- Willingness to improve communications in the vegetable industry- commissioned this project.
- Some existing funding is allocated by the industry to improve communications.
- High level of focus on communication in the industry- seen as a valuable and high priority area.
- Industry Development Officer Network established and some information reaching a number of levy payers.

Weakness

- Very low awareness of the AUSVEG Levy funded Research and Development Program.
- High level of grower dissatisfaction with the AUSVEG Levy funded R&D program
- High level of grower dissatisfaction with information they receive on the AUSVEG Levy funded R&D program.
- Inconsistent use of logos and brands in the industry creating confusion what is and isn't levy funded.
- High level of apathy among vegetable growers reducing the amount of information actively sought out
- Poor audience definition makes targeting communication difficult.
- Communication activity not consistent across Australia for all growers. All growers pay the levy and should receive similar communication services.
- Limited communication networks and reliance on one dominant network.
- Limited identification of the breadth of information other organisations and interest groups communicate to growers.
- No national event/workshop calendar available to growers.
- Low cross- pollination of ideas and communication between states.
- Lack of coordinated and consistent message release on R&D outcomes.
- Low readability in the majority of existing vegetable industry publications.
- Lack of coordinated, regular and consistent communication mediums to deliver key messages.
- Low industry profile.

Opportunities

- The survey work funded by this audit is an excellent benchmark to judge improvements made to communication in the vegetable industry.
- Initiation of already funded communication materials such as the AUSVEG website R&D Database, R&D Annual publication and bimonthly magazine will provide mediums to send out key messages. Opportunity to make the most of these publications.
- Development of a National grower database will increase efficiency of communication.
- Small changes to current publications could improve readability dramatically.

Threats

- Politically motivated issues inhibiting communication activities to the detriment of growers
- State based motivated issues inhibiting overall national improvement to communications.
- Inability of states to work together will reduce the effectiveness of a national communication program.
- Reluctance by some industry members to embrace change to current communication activities.

Conclusions

The vegetable industry needs to address the gaps identified in this audit to improve communication to growers and ultimately the uptake of R&D outcomes funded by the AUSVEG levy.

Both the written and telephone survey results, as well as other analysis activities undertaken, demonstrated that the level and quality of communication to growers is low and not meeting the needs of the industry.

A comprehensive communication strategy is required to give a coordinated and clear direction to the industry.



Vegetable Industry Communication Strategy

Funded by National Vegetable levy project
'Improving Communication Networks in the Australian Vegetable Industry'
(VG03094).

March 2005- March 2008

Prepared by Elisa Maguire, Communications Manager AUSVEG

Index

Executive Summary	40
Introduction	41
Structure of the strategy	8
Situation Analysis	42
Research	42
Problems	43
Goals/Objectives	44
Goals/Objectives	44
Key Messages	45
Target Audiences	46
Geographic and Crop Breakdown	46
Strategy	47
Summary	47
Visual identity for R&D in the vegetable industry	48
R&D Project Communication Plan Template	48
Communication template content	49
Increasing face to face communication opportunities	49
National Conference	50
Campaigns	50
Growers Resource Centre	50
Enhancing the Profile of the Industry.	50
Media Strategy	51
Recognition Program	51
Other communication strategies that need consideration outside this plan	51
Tools	52
Overview	52
Print	52
IDO Newsletters	52
Expansion of Vegernote Program	53
Grower Resource Catalogue	53
Guide to R&D Levy Payers Only site	53
Priority Setting Flier	53
Electronic	53
Face to Face	53
Other communication mediums	54
Media	54
Advertising	54
Timing	55
Evaluation	56
Conclusions	56
Recommendations	56

Executive Summary

The vegetable industry communication audit revealed that the industry faces many communication challenges with existing communication levels very low.

The overarching aim of this communication strategy is to increase the uptake of R&D outcomes by improving communication to vegetable growers. This improvement will be a gradual change over a 2-3 year period.

However, before the uptake of R&D outcomes can be improved there are a few preliminary steps that must be undertaken. First the level of awareness that growers actually pay a levy needs to rise. Growers cannot be expected to use levy funded R&D outcomes if they don't know they pay a levy. Second is a greater awareness of the link between the levy and the research program (ie the levy funds the research and development program). Growers again cannot be expected to use levy funded R&D outcomes if they don't understand what the levy is used for. Third growers must be able to see that R&D outcomes can be used to improve their business. Fourth is vegetable growers must feel they have ownership and control of how their levy funds are spent and understand how and what they need to do to make a suggestion on where the levy is spent.

Once these basic elements of understanding are made the specific communication of R&D outcomes can be more easily made. Growers will then be able to make a connection between a research project outcome that has saved them money on the farm such as a minor use permit for a chemical, to the AUSVEG levy that they paid. And there is already many examples of where research project outcomes have a real value at the farm gate.

To achieve this increased awareness and more effectively communicate outcomes of the research program, a communication framework needs to be established in the vegetable industry. The communication framework includes a basic visual identity, key messages, communication tools (such as publications and meetings), defining the target audiences and finally a strategy to coordinate activity.

Part of this framework includes the industry taking a more proactive approach to seeking information from research providers and distilling it into easy to understand and practical format for growers. It will also encourage service providers to place a higher priority on actively communicating project outcomes with growers.

The quality of existing communication materials also needs to be improved to increase readability and to enhance the overall professional image of the industry.

Once this framework is established key information campaigns can be implemented. Information campaigns are, in essence, the dedicated delivery of a set of key messages using an established communication framework that will inform growers of particular R&D outcomes. For example a minor use permit campaign would regularly communicate to growers using a set of consistent key messages and a range of communication mediums about the available permits, what to do and how to use them to make a difference to the bottom line of their business.

This campaign driven communication gives the vegetable industry a powerful way of delivering important messages to growers at minimal costs because the communication mediums remain mostly the same and the only change is the messages. The industry can even run multiple campaigns at once to select audiences.

To implement the communication strategy some additional resources from industry will be required such as a communications officer and additional funding for some activities. However, it is important to note that cost savings can be made by rationalising existing and new communication tools into a more streamlined framework. The familiar 'Economies of scale' approach.

The communication strategy should be evaluated at the end of three years using a similar random telephone survey to make sure it is delivering the desired communication requirements for the significant investment made by vegetable growers.

Introduction

'Improving Communication Networks in the Australian Vegetable Industry' (VG03094) was a project identified as a priority by the vegetable industry in 2003. The Vegetable IAC identified that one of the key impediments to industry growth was the lack of adequate communication and collaboration in the industry.

A comprehensive scoping study (referred to as a communication audit), was conducted to identify weaknesses in existing vegetable industry communication structures and recommend positive changes. The findings from the audit are the basis of this vegetable industry communication strategy.

This communication strategy highlights communication gaps in the industry and suggests a plan of implementation over two years. Although the communication audit identified a need for the vegetable industry to communicate to external audiences (those not within the industry), only some aspects of external communication, relevant to communicating R&D programs are included.

Marketing to consumers is outside the requirements set for National Vegetable Levy funded project and therefore not included in this strategy. However, some recommendations will be made to assist the vegetable industry to go forward in these areas.

Structure of the strategy

The communication strategy is based on modern communication planning techniques set out by the Australian Institute of Public Relations and the various universities that have industry recognised public relations and communication qualification courses.

These sections are:

12. Situation Analysis- a brief overview of issues the communication strategy can assist to solve.
13. Research- a summary of research undertaken prior to forming this strategy.
14. Problems- a list of issues the communication strategy addresses.
15. Goals/Objectives- the top line goals of this strategy. These are high level and often difficult to measure on evaluation. Objectives are measurable and specific to address each of the problems identified.
16. Key messages- the foundation of the strategy. These outline what we are trying to communicate.
17. Target Audiences- the groups of people the vegetable industry is communicating with.
18. Strategy- the broad outline of the entire communications strategy.
19. Tools- this is a list of communication tools (mediums) that will be used to carry the key messages.
20. Timing- this is a time table of activity for the two year program.
21. Budget – approximate costs to run the program.
22. Evaluation- outlines how the communication strategy will be evaluated.

Situation Analysis

The vegetable industry is highly diverse in both produce grown, areas it is grown in and the people who grow them. The Australian Bureau of statistics estimated that in 2003, 4390 vegetable growers produced more than \$1.7 billion worth of product. However, the industry is aware of more than 6000 growers across Australia. It is not possible to collect the details of vegetable levy payers at time of collection and therefore it is difficult to know the exact number of growers in the industry.

Currently most product is sold on the domestic market and consumer demands are rising and changing the way growers do business. Other challenges growers face include rising costs, increasing legislative burden and cheap imports.

Vegetable growers pay a compulsory levy of 0.5% of the gross sale value at first point of sale. This is matched dollar for dollar by The Australian government through HAL. This levy funds the extensive research and development (R&D) program for the industry. Limited communication on what the outcomes and how and why certain projects are chosen over others have led to a very high level of dissatisfaction in the perceived value of the R&D program and this in turn is limiting the uptake of R&D outcomes.

The vegetable industry does not work cohesively across Australia and tends to be state focussed with limited collaboration between growers in different states. Communication between growers within a state is also limited and dependent on geographical location and if the grower is a member of their state vegetable growing association. Various state departments of agriculture and other service providers to the vegetable industry also communicate at varying levels directly with growers.

To meet the demands of the future the vegetable industry recognised that a lack of good communication on research and development outcomes was a significant impediment to growth.

Research

A comprehensive scoping study (referred to as a communication audit), was conducted between September 2004 and February 2005, to identify the strengths and weaknesses in communication within the vegetable industry.

Part of this audit included extensive consultation with vegetable growers. Initially, this was completed using a written survey to a small number of industry members (64) drawn from product and key investment group, state associations and the AUSVEG Board. However, following further consultation it was agreed by the Industry Advisory Committee that a broad, more representative survey, be conducted. A random telephone survey followed using the National Farmers Database.

Problems

1. Low utilisation of R&D outcomes in day to day vegetable production.
2. Very low awareness of the AUSVEG Levy funded Research and Development Program.
3. High level of grower dissatisfaction with communication on the AUSVEG Levy funded R&D program
4. Inconsistent use of logos and brands in the industry creating confusion what is and isn't levy funded.
5. High level of apathy among vegetable growers reducing the amount of information actively sought out.
6. Poor audience definition makes targeting communication difficult.
7. Communication activity not consistent across Australia for all growers. All growers pay the levy and should receive similar communication services.
8. Limited communication networks and reliance on one dominant network.
9. Low cross- pollination of ideas and communication between states.
10. Lack of coordinated and consistent message release on R&D outcomes
11. No national event/workshop calendar available to growers.
12. Low readability in the majority of existing vegetable industry publications.
13. Lack of coordinated, regular and consistent communication mediums to deliver key messages.
14. Low industry profile.

Goal

The primary goal of the communication strategy is to increase the uptake and adoption of AUSVEG levy funded R&D project outcomes by communicating better with vegetable growers.

Objectives

5. Improve grower satisfaction levels with the information received on AUSVEG levy funded projects.
 - a. Improve grower awareness by 20% on sources of information on the AUSVEG levy funded program.
 - b. Create a national vegetable levy payer database with at least 30% of growers listed.
 - c. Broaden available communication networks.
 - d. Increase the level of information sharing between states.
 - e. Increase the amount of available information to growers by at least 30%.
 - f. Increase AUSVEG website usage by 20%.
 - g. Create feedback mechanisms for growers to choose the way they want to receive information.
 - h. Ensure 90% of information released to growers is in an easy to understand format.
 - i. Increase readability levels of communication materials by 40%
6. Reduce the level of apathy among the majority of vegetable growers which leads to a low activity level to seek out information.
 - a. Better define vegetable industry communication audiences.
 - b. Ensure communication mediums and messages are appropriate for the audience.
 - c. Create a mechanism to be able to identify opinion leaders in the industry.
 - d. Move at least 5% of growers to more active communication participation.
7. Improve grower satisfaction with the AUSVEG Levy funded R&D program
 - a. Improve grower awareness by 10% that they pay a levy on vegetable sales that supports the National R&D program.
 - b. Improve grower awareness by 30% that the National vegetable levy is spent on a research and development program.
 - c. Improve grower recall of a vegetable R&D project by 20%
 - d. Improve grower awareness by 30% of how and by whom decides where the National levy money is spent.
 - e. Improve awareness on the many positive outcomes derived from the AUSVEG Levy funded R&D program.
 - f. Encourage growers to become members of their state association.
 - g. Create a consistent communication medium for the majority of growers to provide suggestion on priorities for the AUSVEG Levy funded program.
8. Improve the profile of the Australian vegetable industry in relation to the world class research and modern industry practices used.
 - a. Create awareness in vegetable consumers that the vegetable industry is a highly professional industry using world class R&D technology (ie environment, chemicals etc).
 - b. Improve the information sharing between growers in different states.
 - c. Create awareness of the importance the industry plays in the overall Australian economy.
 - d. Encourage growers to recognise that they and their industry use world class technology that makes an important contribution to Australia.

Key Messages

The broad key messages for the communication strategy are:

1. The R&D program generates outcomes that can be used by growers to make their business more financially viable and sustainable.
2. The R&D program is critical to growers to ensure the latest technology, information and problem solving is used to maximise returns to the grower and the industry as a whole.
3. The R&D program ensures the vegetable industry can remain competitive in a global economy.
4. The R&D program can only be of sufficient critical mass by pooling resources among growers. Research can be time consuming and expensive beyond the scope of an individual grower.
5. To fully participate in the vegetable industry it is a good idea to become a member of your state association.
6. The R&D program is very successful and has produced many positive outcomes for Australian vegetable growers.
7. There are many ways to find out about the outcomes of the R&D program. (Name where possible).
8. The AUSVEG website www.ausveg.com.au is a rich source of information on the R&D program and is increasing the library of knowledge to growers every day.
9. The industry always welcomes your feedback, tell us what you think. (name where to give feedback where possible).
10. Vegetable growers pay a National levy on all vegetable sales which supports the National R&D program.
11. Vegetable levy project priorities are chosen by growers through representatives. You must make your requirements known to these representatives to be heard.

Target Audiences

The communication audit found that the target audiences for communication were not well defined. Good audience definition is needed to make sure the right messages and mediums are used in the most efficient and cost effective way.

As stated in the communication audit it is not sufficient to say 'vegetable grower' as our target audience because there is a mosaic of different behavioural, ethnic, geographic and special interest groupings that make up the 'vegetable grower' audience. Also there are different levels of involvement by growers in the industry such as those highly active and those that are completely apathetic. Good communications requires reaching these audiences using different techniques.

The following audience categories are recommended to target vegetable growers.

1. Behavioural
 - a. Passive- a group that face a similar problem but are not aware of it.
 - b. Aware- a group that is aware of a problem but are not active.
 - c. Active- a group that is aware of a problem and want to do something about it.
 - d. Opinion leaders- the most active group.
2. Geographic (state/region/growing area).
3. Crops grown
4. Ethnicity or language

In the vegetable industry most of the growers fall into the passive and aware groups. Therefore, part of the communication strategy is to encourage growers to become aware of the information they need and then actively seek it out. While not obvious to the audience communication mediums and messages will be predominantly crafted to suit the passive audience.

However, to be able to effectively target audiences in behavioural categories a National database of growers will need to be established.

Other target audiences for the industry are:

- Industry Advisory Committee (Active)
- AUSVEG Board (Active)
- State Association Executive officers (Active)
- State Association Executive committee (Active)
- State Association members (Aware- maybe passive)
- Opinion leaders- *work is need to identify these people* (Active)
- Levy payers not on State IDO databases (passive)
- Non-English speaking background grower (NESB) Leaders (active and aware)
- NESB growers (passive)
- Industry Development Officers (IDO) (active)
- IDO management committees (active)
- HAL (active)
- Federal government (aware)
- Agronomists (active)
- State agriculture government agencies (active - aware)
- Service Providers to vegetable growers (active- aware)
- Allied Trades (passive and active)

Geographic and Crop Breakdown

Due to the vast distances between locations it is recommended that growers be identified more than by what state they are in. For communication purposes such as more effective face to face information exchange growers should be grouped into growing areas. Also for efficiency of communication growers should also be identified by what crop they grow.

To manage this, a national database of growers is recommended.

Strategy

Summary

The communication strategy will build a framework to coordinate the communication activities of AUSVEG levy funded R&D projects and develop new communication mediums and enhance existing ones.

Target audiences will be clearly defined and a National database of growers created to make sure appropriate messages and communication mediums reach them.

Communication mediums (such as brochures, newsletters and posters) will carry R&D information that is in an easy to understand format. Mediums will also use a similar visual identity (such as specific graphic design elements) to give the R&D program a physical link that can easily be recognised by growers as an output of their levy funds. Thus creating a greater appreciation of the tangible value of the levy.

A mix of communication mediums (print and electronic), at varying frequencies to account for urgent, semi urgent and non urgent information, will be used. The emphasis will be placed on print material due to the low use of electronic technology such as the internet, however the use of these mediums will be continuously encouraged to reduce communication costs and improve efficiencies. Growers will be encouraged to actively seek out information at all times.

Print publications will also be well coordinated to ensure clashes of publication release are minimised to maximise the frequency growers receive information. This includes state IDO publications. It is recommended that all IDO publications are released quarterly at a similar time.

An increase in and formal tracking of the number of face to face communication opportunities will be encouraged. For greater access it is recommended that newly established growing regions not constrained by state boundaries be considered.

Once the communication mediums are established key information campaigns such as increasing the awareness of the priority setting process for R&D projects and encouraging the use of the internet will be carried out.

The majority of R&D projects will be required to have a communication plan with communication milestones built into their agreements with HAL. Communication plans will follow a template set by the vegetable industry and any material produced by the project will need to meet a common visual identity and be available for download on the internet. Projects need to be categorised into high, medium and low communication priority. Highest priority outcomes will require a full information campaign to growers using existing and some tailor made communication mediums.

Due to the abundance of R&D information available, as well as archiving material on the AUSVEG website it is recommended that a system be put in place to refer growers to the correct place to purchase publications and documents of value to them. This would be an electronic reference library and printed catalogue- known as the growers resource centre.

Communication efforts of State departments of agriculture and other service providers will also be harnessed to improve the coordinated dissemination of information to growers. This will tie in well with the information available through the growers resource centre.

Significant project outcomes that have a whole of industry or significant state level implications will be used to communicate to vegetable consumer the relevance and professionalism of the vegetable industry. Media and events will be the predominant mediums for these messages.

Please note, to deliver all the requirements of this plan the industry would need to employ further human resources. A Communications Officer level position would be satisfactory for this purpose.

Visual identity for R&D in the vegetable industry

A visual identity for the R&D program is required to create easy recognition of outcomes and value of the program to growers. A style guide needs to be developed to create this identity and ensure it is implemented correctly through the industry.

Visual identity is more than using the same logo. The following items need to be included:

1. **Levy name:** Consistent name when referring to the Levy. Currently there are multiple terms used to describe the Levy. It is called the vegetable levy, national levy, AUSVEG Levy to name a few. One name must be chosen and used consistently in all communication material.
2. **Logos:** It is not recommended that a new logo or brand be created for the R&D program due to the clutter of logos already in the industry. Instead it should be clearly stipulated exactly which logos are used where and in what context. Logo use will need regular policing.
3. **Common tag line:** Because a new logo would be cumbersome a simple tag line is recommended for inclusion, in relation to all communication materials relating to the R&D program. A tag already exists that is used randomly 'Your levy at work' could be easily integrated into all communications materials. Once the name of the Levy is chosen then this should be integrated into the tag.
4. **Common language:** A style of written word needs to be chosen by the industry. This common language should be used throughout communication materials.
5. **Graphic design elements:** A consistent feel and quality needs to be chosen and applied to all communication mediums. This includes choosing a colour palette for the industry, such as earthy tones and a commitment to good graphic design principles (use of white space and consistent use of heading styles, good quality photos etc). These elements must be integrated into all publications. However, design elements must not be too ridged and increase the difficulty for research institutes to comply.

R&D Project Communication Plan Template

R&D projects need to be categorised into high, medium or low communication projects and meet with the requirements outlined below. It is likely that the guidelines will be met with some resistance at first because it will create extra work for the research providers.

1. High priority- these projects should have National implications. Outcomes from these projects should be communicated using a significant campaign to growers that goes beyond the template set by the industry. Funding should be set aside in these projects for communication activities, either organised by the provider or through an agency under approval by the vegetable industry.
2. Medium Priority- these projects should have a significant effect on one state or smaller effect on at least two states. Outcomes of these programs should be communicated following the template and at project completion a medium level communication campaign conducted using existing communication mediums and some specifically targeted mediums.
3. Low priority- these projects should be communicated using the template set by the vegetable industry.

Communication template content

A communication template is basically a top line guide to research providers on the communication requirements of the vegetable industry for their specified project.

Each project will be asked to meet key communication milestones, set out in the template prior to the project starting. Budget should be allocated in each R&D project for some communication to growers. This is often the case now but the materials produced do not refer to the levy correctly or use a consistent logos or visual identity. Communication materials produced by a project should be easily recognised as been funded by the AUSVEG levy.

1. Communication plan from the template must be submitted by the research institute for acceptance by AUSVEG.
2. All communication materials under the project must meet standard visual identity set by the vegetable IAC.
3. Standard communication for every project includes:
 - a. At least two stories per year written by a qualified journalist on the project. These stories will be written in three versions- one for website, one for publications and one for general media. If a project is not considered newsworthy the last story type will not be necessary. Estimated cost is \$1000 per project per year.
 - b. A series of quality photographs that clearly depict the project. Must be high resolution (300dpi, equivalent to 1mg file size) or not acceptable.
 - c. A clearly identified set of key messages.
 - d. FAQ sheet for the project.
 - e. Clearly Identified target audience for communication materials.
 - f. Copy of all milestone reports, final reports in printed and electronic format for download.
 - g. All communication materials to meet visual identity guidelines and be made available electronically and hard copy (to selected audiences).
 - h. VegeNotes (For high and medium priority communication projects only)
 - i. For high priority projects a complete communication plan and implementation program set out prior to the final milestone being set.

This individual attention to communication of specific R&D projects will also improve the relationship between the research provider and the industry by a stronger engagement between the two parties. This in turn will flow directly to growers as the relationships improve and dialogue becomes more frequent and more open. Research providers will feel their work is more valued and growers will appreciate the value of the research as the benefits become more widely known.

This also includes the individual IDO projects. A communication plan needs to be developed for each state through their IDO, that works with the National communication plan, emphasising key areas that need improvement. The role of the IDO in communications needs to be more clearly defined.

Increasing face to face communication opportunities

With out a doubt the most popular and effective way to receive information is face to face. The Communication Audit demonstrated that there was low attendance of face to face communication opportunities in the vegetable industry. The Industry Development Officer network is the current driving force behind face to face communication opportunities. It is recommended that these opportunities be expanded to growers for more in depth transfer of information from R&D projects. Consideration should also be given to a National Conference.

To enhance this network it is recommended that growers be categorised into growing areas not designated by state boundaries. An analysis of growing regions needs to be made to determine the best breakdown but about three areas per state is probably most workable. Groups would meet/workshop to discuss specific outcomes of relevant projects. These divisions would be for the purpose of organising meetings and workshops for the purpose of communication only. They would not be considered formal boundaries or territories, or have formal committees. Instead each area would have a recognised champion of information which would feedback to the appropriate IDO.

These gatherings need to be supported with communication materials, such as general industry information, and communication material specific to a project etc.

Meeting dates would need to be set prior to the year of commencement to allow adequate time for promotion of these events. Topics for the meetings would tie back into the R&D communication program, with projects chosen on relevance to the audience. The current Industry Development manager could be responsible for overseeing the program.

Prior to the development of such a program, it is recommended that the role of IDOs in communication is more clearly defined.

National Conference

Consideration to a National Conference should be made. Careful analysis of value per cost of participant is required to compare to other communication mediums. Sponsorship opportunities needed to run a conference of this scale could be augmented through other communication materials such as the bi-monthly magazine. Further scoping is required to determine the benefit to the industry of the investment. Perhaps a joint conference with New Zealand may be an opportunity here.

Campaigns

Campaigns are communication strategies dedicated to the dissemination of a particular message theme. Some recommended communication campaigns to be implemented through this strategy include:

1. Campaigns that will assist in improving communication throughout the industry such as:
 - Promoting the use of the Internet - To reduce the overall costs of communication it is recommended that an internet use campaign be implemented – that is registering and accessing the R&D information.
 - Communicating with NESB growers - Non-English speaking background growers require dedicated communications from the industry to ensure the uptake of R&D project outcomes and appreciation of the value of the Levy. A communication project should be commissioned with an appropriate service provider. Investigation into available government grants is required to support this campaign.
2. Specific information campaigns such as
 - Minor Use Permit information campaign- raise awareness of these project outcomes.
 - Awareness of the Levy- A dedicated message campaign to highlight how R&D priorities are set and what to do if you have a suggestion. Also link to R&D project outcomes
 - Adoption of new technology is good for business information campaign.

Growers Resource Centre

The Growers Resource Centre is a one stop electronic shop of information that growers need. This would enhance and link to the current R&D project information already being integrated into the R&D section of the AUSVEG website but go one step further.

All publications and reference material needed as background to fully integrate R&D outcomes on farm would be included with details of where to go to purchase the material. A discount on purchase of materials (if not free) should be negotiated for all Levy payers. Types of information included are chemical use guides, pest guides etc.

A printed catalogue of the latest and current information would be produced yearly and mailed to levy payers. Such a catalogue has been very successful used in the meat industry. A project to fund this centre would be required.

Enhancing the Profile of the Industry.

Significant national outcomes from the R&D program, as well as being communicated to growers, will be communicated to the general vegetable consumer, research institutes and other industries to raise the professional image of the vegetable industry. A high profile means the industry will receive greater attention to its needs and also create a sense of pride by growers to be involved in the industry.

The two recommended methods to achieve this are a media strategy and a recognition program for growers who are successfully integrating new outcomes from research and development. The recognition program would feed directly into the media strategy.

Media Strategy

- Media training for appropriate spokespeople (identification of spokespeople)
- Identification and development of an appropriate media contact list. (See Appendix 2)
- All stories on R&D programs written as part of the projects' communication template to be considered for appropriate newsworthiness.
- Story written in news style if necessary.
- Release of story to media (at least two per month)
- Appropriate media monitoring and collation of positive stories.

Recognition Program

- Develop a simple awards based system of recognition- 'R&D' grower of the Year. A good model for this is the Victorian Weekly Times' Farmer of the Year Award.
- Criteria of what designates a good integration of research to be formulated. Growers and researchers to be involved.
- Growers could self nominate or be nominated by peers.
- A 'winner' announced every two months in the bi-monthly magazine.
- These 'winners' promoted in the media- good news angle.
- Prizes could involve a sponsor.
- Overall winner presented low key at yearly AUSVEG or HAL AGM.
- Program requires some funding for promotion.

Other communication strategies that need consideration outside this plan

Issues Management

- a. Each major issue to the industry should have an associated communication plan.
- b. Communication mediums outlined above will carry key messages of issue campaign.
- c. Other campaign materials set out in communication plan.
- d. Should have industry budget to cover these. Plan for 3 issues per year.
- e. Both Internal and External Campaigns.
- f. Could include things like OH&S, chemical safety, etc.

Policy Communication

- g. Each major policy to the industry needs an associated communication plan.
- h. Communication mediums to carry key messages of policy campaign.
- i. Other campaign materials set out in communication plan.
- j. Should have industry budget to cover these. Plan for 3 policies per year.
- k. Both Internal and External Campaigns.

Communication of nutritional benefits of vegetables to consumers.

- l. Link to 2 and 5 campaign

Tools

Overview

A basic set of communication tools need to be established in the vegetable industry to communicate the key messages and achieve the goals of the communication strategies.

In essence these tools should be a mix of mediums (print, electronic, face to face) for the maximum reach to the diversity of audience. They also need to be timed differently to cover immediate and long term R&D information needs. They must be regular enough to allow repeat message and encourage active participation in the industry. Opportunities for feedback must be available in all communication mediums.

Other communication tools should be developed to enhance a particular message. This might be a dedicated brochure or poster to understand the outcomes of a specific project. But whatever it is, as outlined above it should meet the criteria set out by the vegetable industry R&D visual identity.

Another underpinning tool of this strategy is a national database of levy payers. This allows targeted mail outs and other communication activities to occur efficiently at the right frequency.

Print

Print communication will remain the dominant medium and will always have a role to play in the vegetable industry. While the use of the internet must be encouraged for cost reduction and archiving of information the convenience of print information cannot be overlooked. There is no dialling up required and a print publication can be read anywhere, anytime. Picked up and put down at a growers convenience

To cover immediate, middle and archive information the following suite of print publications is recommended:

Issue Alert- growers register for this service provided by email or fax. For immediate information needs only

Bi-monthly magazine- R&D focus (see commissioned project proposal appendix X)

Quarterly- current IDO publications.

Year book- R&D focus (R&D compendium)

Special Publications:

- a. Vegenote Series
- b. Grower Resource Catalogue
- c. Brochure- guide to R&D Levy payers site.
- d. Priority Setting flier

IDO Newsletters

It is recommended that the IDO continue to send out their state based newsletters, however it is recommended that they be enhanced to increase readability and be of a similar quality across all states. To facilitate this, a short IDO workshop to highlight good design and writing elements be conducted.

It is also recommended that the newsletters be sent out at the same time- quarterly to coincide with the seasons.

Expansion of Vegenote Program

The Vegenote Series is a well received concept for communicating top line outcomes for research and development programs. It is recommended that Vegenotes be produced for first and second priority projects as defined above.

The current Vegenote series needs to be improved to meet the visual identity guidelines of the vegetable industry and be better coordinated to make sure the right projects are included in the series and distributed to appropriate growers.

Because printing and producing Vegnotes can be costly it is recommended that the series be made available for download as pdfs, for additional copy requests. Mailing could coincide with the bi-monthly magazine to reduce costs and package up information to growers.

Vegenotes library also needs to be established on the AUSVEG website for download. It is recommended that the Vegenote project costs are evaluated and new estimates made.

Grower Resource Catalogue

See Grower Resource Centre discussion above.

Guide to R&D Levy Payers Only site

A DL size brochure explaining the R&D information part of the AUSVEG website which is only available under login. Also be used to promote Levy payers to register.

Priority Setting Flier

This DL sized brochure will contain a form for growers to submit priority ideas to IAC. It will also need to manage the expectations of growers by explaining the process and why some ideas might not get up. Could be part of the above brochure 'Guide to Levy Payers Web site' to reduce costs.

Nomination form to be part of R&D Advisory groups

A standard nomination form to be part of the R&D advisory groups needs to be developed and distributed to every grower.

Electronic

Electronic communication, particular the use of the internet, will grow in the vegetable industry. The established website for Levy payers is the AUSVEG website and this should continue to be grown. The project to provide R&D information online should continue (see project proposal Appendix 2 XX). Website effort and funding should be in line with grower usage. As this grows so should the communication dollars spent on this medium.

The use of email to receive information should also be encouraged. It is especially useful for providing immediate information. Email names will be collected from growers through the self registering for information program. Issue Alerts will be distributed through email.

Face to Face

Refer to discussion under strategy.

Other communication mediums

Media

It is not recommended to rely on independent media for distribution of R&D outcomes to growers due to varied and low circulation. Also, the R&D information requirements of the industry are not the driving force behind media publications and will therefore not receive the attention it needs. Instead the media strategy as outlined above should be implemented. Current columns in existing media such as Good Fruit and Vegetables should be discontinued in the current format and incorporated into the industries own magazine.

Instead Good Fruit and Vegetables as with other media should be offered newsy articles as outlined in above to build the profile of the industry and encourage media uptake. These articles should carry the standard industry brands, not the separate VegPlatter brand.

Advertising

Some advertising should be used in some media publications only when absolutely necessary for message penetration. For example, advertising in publications such as Good Fruit and Vegetables would be a valuable way of encouraging registration for R&D information on the internet.

Other

Some form of promotional collateral such as a mouse mat, sticker and/or poster is recommended to promote the AUSVEG website to access R&D information. It may also be important to seek sponsorship to run a competition to also encourage use of the internet. This will be covered in the website campaign.

Timing

Activity	2005												2006											
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Communication Audit	█																							
Communication Strategy draft	█	█	█																					
Communication strategy sign off			█	█	█																			
National Levy payers database	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█												
Opinion leader identification				█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█												
Visual Identity Style Guide		█	█	█	█																			
R&D Communication template		█	█	█	█	█	█	█																
Scope for grower regions for face to face communication				█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█												
Scope National conference	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█																
R&D Levy payers website- part A	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█												
R&D Levy payers website- part B									█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Bimonthly Magazine					█			█		█		█		█		█		█		█		█		█
R&D Compendium			█	█												█	█							
IDO Newsletters		█	█		█			█		█		█		█		█		█		█		█		█
IDO design workshop						█	█																	
Issues Alert					█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
AUSVEG website maintenance	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Project proposal for grower resource centre	█	█	█	█																				
Vegenote Series					█		█		█		█		█		█		█		█		█		█	
Vegenote library on website						█	█	█	█	█	█	█												
R&D priority flyer and form				█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█												
R&D Levy brochure (web)						█	█	█	█	█	█	█												
Website use campaign				█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Levy awareness campaign				█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
NESB campaign				█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
R&D media strategy				█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
R&D recognition program								█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Evaluation																							█	█

Evaluation

Evaluating the success of the communication strategy is very important to ensure the desired outcomes are being achieved for the resources spent.

Evaluation is recommended after the program has run for three years by:

- Repeating the telephone survey and comparing the results.
- Recording the number of Levy payers registered for information on the AUSVEG website
- Recording the number of 'hits' to the AUSVEG website.
- Recording any feedback from growers.
- Monitoring the number of growers registered for information on the National grower database.
- Media Monitoring.
- Recording numbers of communication materials distributed.

Conclusions

The Vegetable industry communication strategy will address the gaps identified in the communication audit.

The communication strategy will build a communication framework for the vegetable industry, including key messages, target audience identification and development of communication tools. Once established communication campaigns will be conducted.

The primary activities of the strategy are:

- Development of a vegetable industry visual identity style guide.
- Development of a National levy payers database.
- Employment of a Vegetable industry communication officer.
- Identification of opinion leaders.
- Development of an R&D project communication template and guidelines and communication to research providers.
- More clearly define the role of IDOs in communication
- Scope out viability of national conference.
- Development of a levy payers only R&D information section on the AUSVEG website.
- Development of a National bi-monthly magazine.
- Development of issue alert.
- Project proposal for grower resource centre.
- Expansion of the Vegenote series.
- Development of campaign to promote website use.
- Development of campaign plan for communicating R&D outcomes to NESB growers.
- Development of R&D media strategy.
- Development of R&D recognition program.

Recommendations

1. The communications strategy needs to be implemented in full to address the communication gaps identified in the communication audit.
2. Additional resources are allocated from the National Vegetable Levy.