

**Production of Australian  
Vegetable Industry  
*VEGEnotes Series***

Hugh Tobin  
AUSVEG Ltd

Project Number: VG06127

## **VG06127**

This report is published by Horticulture Australia Ltd to pass on information concerning horticultural research and development undertaken for the vegetable industry.

The research contained in this report was funded by Horticulture Australia Ltd with the financial support of the vegetable industry.

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ISBN 0734122403

Published and distributed by:

Horticulture Australia Ltd

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179 Elizabeth Street

Sydney NSW 2000

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Fax: (02) 8295 2399

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VG06127

**Production of Australian Vegetable Industry *Vegenotes* Series – VG06127**

Hugh Tobin  
AUSVEG Ltd

30 January 2010



VG06127

Production of Australian Vegetable Industry *Vegenotes* Series

The purpose of this final report is to communicate the successful delivery of project VG06127, *Production of Australian Vegetable Industry Vegenotes Series*.

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Funded by:

- National Vegetable Levy
- Horticulture Australia Limited

Report date: 30 January 2010

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## **Media Summary**

Project number VG06127 relates to the production of the *VEGEnote* series as part of a broader communications strategy.

The *VEGEnote* series is a four-page, full-colour, bi-monthly publication mailed directly to Australian vegetable growers, researchers, service providers, advertisers and other key members of the vegetable industry.

Launched in 2007, *VEGEnotes* was initiated as the key vehicle for the dissemination of Research and Development (R&D) outcomes through practical explanation that can be applied in on-farm practices. Research undertaken as part of the National Vegetable Industry Communications Strategy showed growers were low internet and email users and preferred to receive their information in printed format or face-to-face.

Each issue of *VEGEnotes* for this series, except for the first edition, has been mailed out bi-monthly with *Vegetables Australia* magazine to reduce costs. The first edition was sent out with a special *VEGEnote* folder with the expectation that farmers would retain their copies of each issue for use as an on-farm reference tool.

Production of the *VEGEnote* series was outsourced to various writers, designers, printers and mail houses over the life of the project, although graphic design has since moved in-house.

Distributed alongside *Vegetables Australia* magazine in January, March, May, July, September and November each year, the publication continues to be a functional resource for the Australian vegetable industry.

## **Introduction**

Research and Development (R&D) outcomes and general farm innovation relevant to industry is at times very technical in terms of the outcomes without any practical explanation of how the benefits to growers are applied at farm level.

As part of the broader Vegetable Communications Strategy, the purpose of the *VEGENote* series is to provide growers with timely, technical and digestible information that can be applied to their on-farm practices.

With print publications and face-to-face communications the preferred means to get information, *VEGENotes* has become an effective tool to translate outcomes from the levy investment to growers. Additionally, the project has increased growers' awareness of their levy investment in R&D projects and ensured R&D outcomes were communicated to industry, which will ultimately improve on-farm practices.

The current suite of communications tools in use within the vegetable industry at a state and national level provide mostly general information on R&D projects. *VEGENotes* is distinct from other publications as it provides the technical detail and practical steps to applying levy outcomes on farm.

Feedback from growers and the IDO network suggests there is a strong demand from within industry for technical publications such as *VEGENotes*.

Feedback has demonstrated the continued need for *VEGENotes*, with a strong recognition amongst growers for their usefulness and practicality.

AUSVEG has provided the skills and expertise which meet the requirements of the project.

## **Method and Activities**

### **Methodology**

**Audience:** The primary audience for *VEGEnotes* was Australian vegetable growers. Secondary audiences for the publication included researchers, industry bodies, supply chain partners, and government representatives.

**Style:** Upon completion of the last *VEGEnotes* project, feedback suggested growers preferred to receive information that is clear, concise and easily digestible. *VEGEnotes* makes it easy for growers to obtain timely technical information for possible on-farm application.

Over the three-year timeframe of this project *VEGEnotes* has remained a four page colour publication. The size of each individual *VEGEnote* was A4 and each publication was produced with a view that growers would keep each issue in a new binder folder that was sent in the first mail-out of this series. The folder created a new identity for *VEGEnotes* and created a distinction between the new and the old series.

**Content:** Topics covered were kept general enough to be relevant to a broad range of commodities but when necessary topics have addressed specific crops. Individual *VEGEnotes* focused in detail on a particular project or on relevant innovative technology.

*VEGEnote* topics were selected by AUSVEG in consultation with industry. The focus was to select relevant and timely topics that would benefit the industry most.

R&D projects selected for inclusion in *VEGEnotes* were often commissioned to freelance journalists and sometimes the researchers themselves wrote the copy in order to ensure technical accuracy of the information. Journalists commissioned to write copy were instructed to work closely with researchers in developing stories.

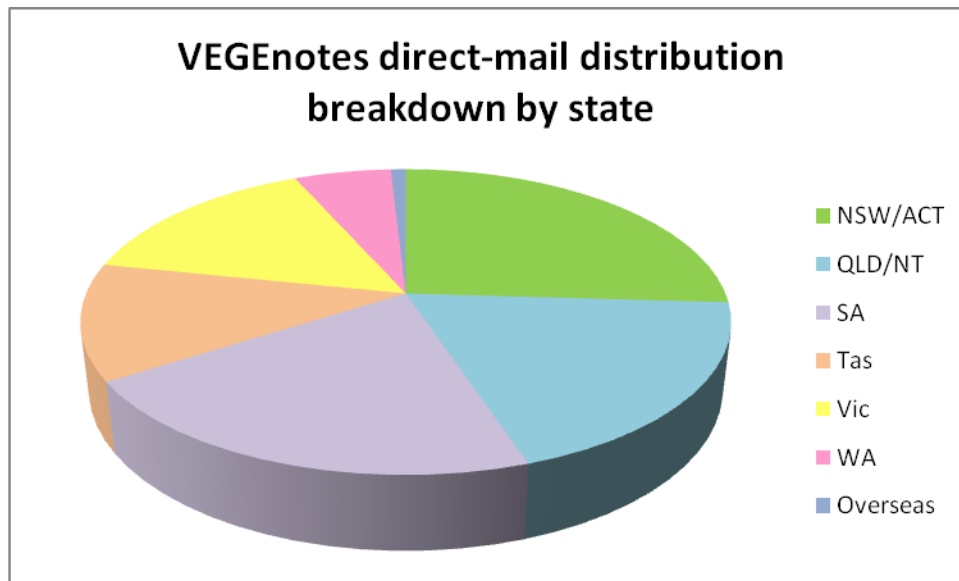
**Design:** The new series of *VEGEnotes* took on a professional updated look in terms of its design and layout, with the new design aligning with other existing industry publications such as *Vegetables Australia* magazine and prominently featuring the Vegetable Levy R&D brand.

**Distribution Mode (mail out):** The new folder and first *VEGEnote* were sent out in a separate mail-out to growers. Following the initial mail-out of the new folder and first *VEGEnote*,



proceeding *VEGENotes* were mailed out with *Vegetables Australia* magazine to economise on mailing costs. Distribution of *VEGENotes* was achieved through one main avenue. The primary distribution method for the magazine was via direct mail to readers. The direct mailing database consisted of 5705 recipients (as at July 2009), which is broken down state-by-state as follows:

	NSW/ACT	QLD/NT	SA	Tas	Vic	WA	Overseas	Total
<b>Total recipients</b>	1480	1081	1200	702	863	328	51	5705
<b>Percentage</b>	25.9%	18.9%	21.1%	12.3%	15.2%	5.7%	0.9%	100%



**Distribution Frequency:** The distribution frequency of this series of *VEGENotes* was bi-monthly with *Vegetable Australia* magazine (16 issues and one specially designed folder in total over the project's three year duration).

## Outputs

The outputs for the *VEGEnote* series were:

- One folder in which to store the *VEGEnote* series.
- 16 *VEGEnotes* produced over three years (bi-monthly output distributed with *Vegetables Australia* magazine, beginning in June 2007).

Across the three-year duration of the project (16 issues), *VEGEnotes* reported on 18 R&D related topics and projects funded through the National Vegetable Levy and matched Australian Government funds.

A full list of topics *VEGEnotes* covered is outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1. A list of articles published in *VEGEnotes* over the life of this project including, where relevant, the associated project numbers**

Project number (if relevant)	Article title	Issue published
N/A	Soil Moisture Monitoring	Issue 1 – June 2007
N/A	White Blister	Issue 2 – September 2007
VG99016	Composting On-Farm	Issue 3 – November 2007
N/A	Precision Agriculture	Issue 4 – January 2008
N/A	Native Vegetation and Pest Control	Issue 5 – March 2008
VG04019	Reducing Nitrate and Nitrate Concentrations in Vegetable Crops	Issue 6 – May 2008
VG06100 / VG06090	Healthy Soil Management	Issue 7 – July 2008
VG03200	Minor-use Pesticides	Issue 8 – September 2008
VG00055 / VG04004 / VG06044	Diamondback Moth (DBM)	Issue 9 – November 2008
VG06010 / VG05044	Controlling Spinosad Resistance with WFT	Issue 10 – January 2009
VG04032	Identifying Key Pests and Diseases of Asian	Issue 11 – March

	Vegetables	2009
VG06100	Indicators of Soil Health	Issue 12 – May 2009
VG08004	Gross Margin Comparison Tool for Vegetable Growers	Issue 13 – July 2009
VG06045	Environmental effects on greenhouse cucumber production	Issue 14 – September 2009
VG02051	Minor-use permit registration / Agronomic program to encourage uniform crop maturity	Issue 15 – November 2009
VG05050 / HG03070	IPM Strategies for Silverleaf whitefly in Vegetables / Development and Implementation of Industry Biosecurity Plans	Issue 16 – January 2010

Each issue of VEGEnotes was made available online to levy payers via the AUSVEG Grower Portal: <http://ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm>.

The website, available to all registered levy payers, is password-protected. This mechanism for archiving allows ongoing access to the articles. Readers can also download supporting material from the website, as provided by research providers. This may include downloadable final reports, research papers and images.

In a readership report compiled in June 2008 from the results of a *VEGEnotes* Reader Survey, only 14 per cent of respondents read or download *VEGEnotes* from the AUSVEG website. The majority of respondents chose not to access this information from the website, or did not know it was available, preferring instead to access the hard copy version of the publication.

Vegetable industry sources were consulted on all aspects of production of the *VEGEnotes* series. This included sourcing topics for issues from Industry Development Officers (IDOs) where applicable, as well as researchers and growers. The Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee (IAC), advisory groups and working groups were also consulted in order to determine future *VEGEnotes* topics.

Sources, such as researchers from the state departments of primary industries, were consulted to ensure the relevance and accuracy of each *VEGEnotes* topic and its content. In addition, recently completed levy funded projects were also used as a source of information for *VEGEnotes*.

## **Outcomes**

Outcomes for the project were:

- Information on R&D projects in a digestible form for easier application on farm.
- A reference library on-farm of key R&D practices.
- Better uptake and adoption of R&D outcomes by growers from National Vegetable Levy funded R&D program.
- More efficient and effective on-farm practices within the vegetable industry.

## **Industry Adoption**

The target audience for the *VEGEnote* series was vegetable growers, with the purpose to encourage growers to adopt new on-farm practices as a result of specific R&D projects or outcomes.

The project was a continuation of the previous *VEGEnote* series, with awareness of the series growing. The new series was distributed with *Vegetables Australia* magazine and a folder was provided with the first mail out encouraging longevity and collection of the series.

The timeframe for distribution of the series coincided with the publication dates of *Vegetables Australia* magazine, which is distributed bi-monthly.

## **Commercialisation**

Copyright in *VEGEnotes* is jointly owned by HAL and AUSVEG.

## Evaluation and measurement of outcomes

The success of this project was dependent on the continued acceptance of the publication by growers. Feedback was solicited halfway through the project in 2008 from growers via a reply-paid readership survey. The survey was distributed in April 2008 with a return deadline of Friday 9 May 2008 (Refer to Appendix 1) and offered a prize of an in-car navigation system worth \$499, encouraging readers to return their survey and ensuring a larger range of responses.

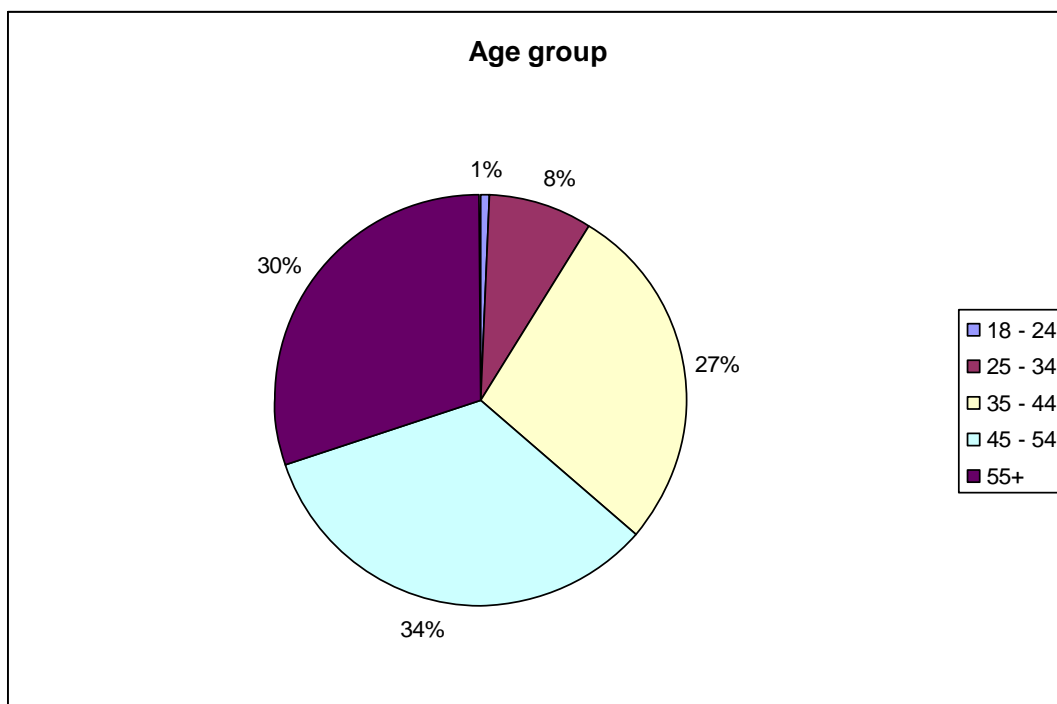
The purpose of the survey was to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from readers. The readership survey solicited feedback from both grower and non-grower readers, providing a rounded perspective on the role of the publication within the Australian vegetable industry.

### Key Survey Results

Response rate:

- 250 responses (the previous survey conducted by ARRIS received only 100 completed surveys)
- 69% growers
- 31% other (including researchers, advertisers and industry representatives)

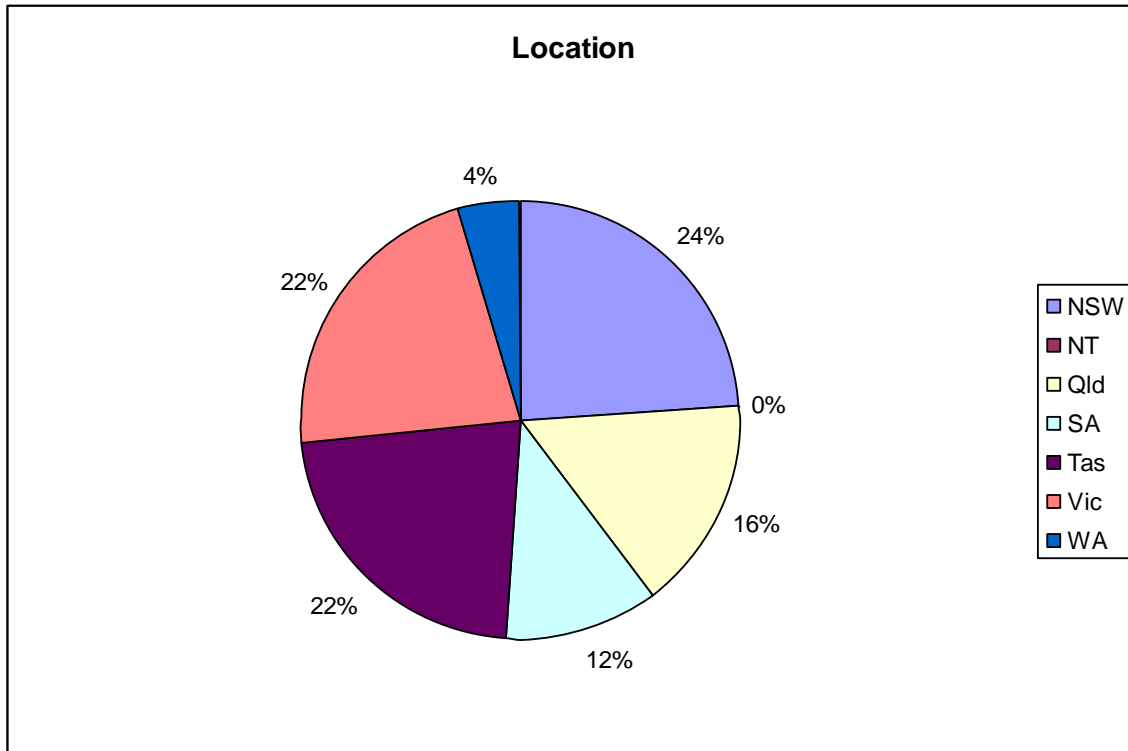
### Age of readers



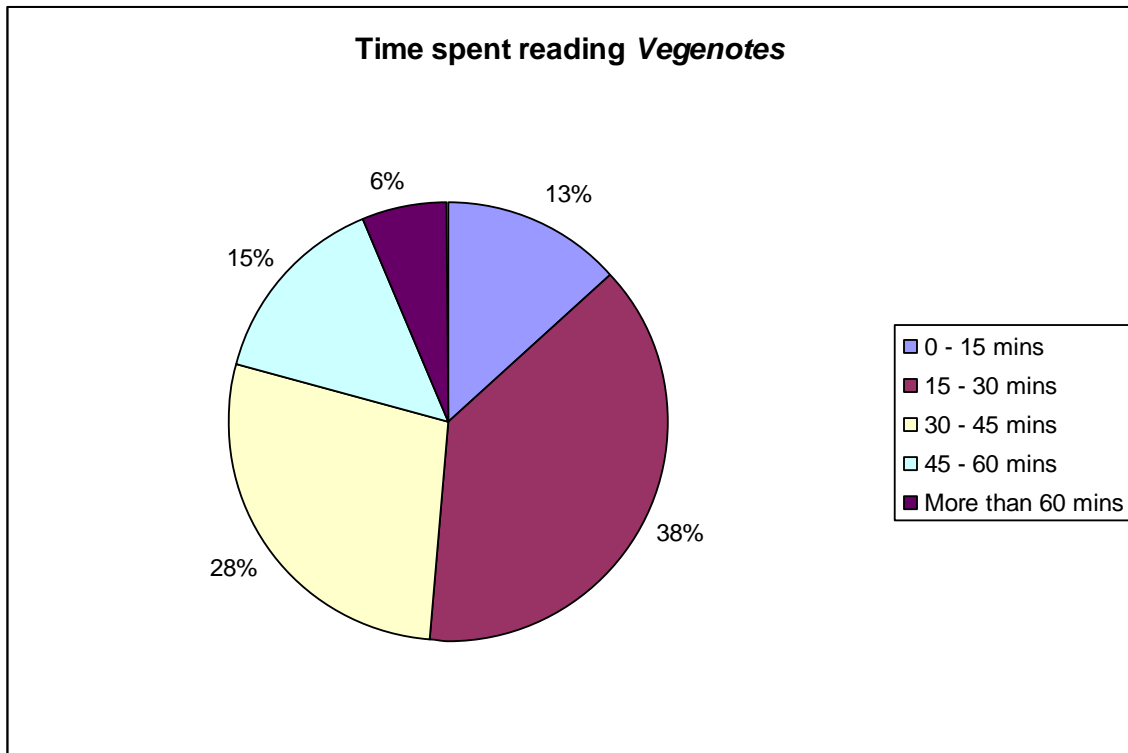
## Crops grown by growers who read *VEGEnotes*

An extensive range of vegetable crops were identified by growers. These include cabbage, cauliflower, lettuce, sweet corn, bean, pea and cucumber.

## Location of readers



### Time spent reading *Vegenotes*



### Number of people who read readers' copy of *Vegenotes*

The responses to this question varied, however the majority of readers said that between 1 and 4 other people read their copy of *VEGENotes*. There were a few higher numbers of readers (such as 6, 10 and 20 people), indicating that copies of the series are shared amongst larger groups of people.

### Relevance and clarity of *Vegenotes*

Almost every response said that they found the information in *VEGENotes* clear and relevant to on-farm practices (99 per cent). This shows the improvement in topic choices and presentation of information, because in the previous survey only 80 per cent of responses found the series easy to understand. The two respondents that disagreed said that they would like more information about a particular crop, tomatoes, which is currently not a part of National Vegetable Levy system, and hence, not applicable to *VEGENotes*.

## **VEGENotes information for on-farm practices**

From the responses, 60 per cent of readers have used *VEGENotes* information for help with on-farm practices such as water conservation, managing pests and diseases and for chemical use.

## **Future topics**

The survey gave readers the opportunity to nominate topics they wanted more information about. The majority of respondents wanted more information about managing pests and diseases (28 per cent), although the other categories such as water and irrigation (20 per cent) as well as improving profitability and efficiency (19 per cent) and equipment and technology (18 per cent) still rated highly. 'Other' topic suggestions included organics, food safety and good employment and training practices. Since obtaining the results of these questions, *VEGENotes* has covered seven topics on managing pests and diseases, three stories on improving profitability and efficiency and two stories on soil health and management.

## **New topic suggestions**

There were a number of new *VEGENotes* topics suggested including:

- Grower snapshots in each publication over one year covering various production areas
- Residue management in exported produce
- Planning and production cost calculations
- Alternative farming practices
- Value added products and new market developments
- Types of pesticides to control grubs in Chinese vegetables
- Increased emphasis on importance of IPM and bio-control
- Pesticide application technology
- Business management
- Comparative profitability of different vegetables
- Government rules and regulations pertaining to spraying and general trading
- Climate change and carbon trading



These suggestions were useful in determining *VEGEnotes* topics post-survey and will continue to be utilised moving forward into the next *VEGEnotes* project.

### ***VEGEnotes* specially designed folder**

76 per cent of respondents stored their issues of *VEGEnotes* in the specially designed folder.

This high figure is a good indication that the folder is useful and practical for storing *VEGEnotes*.

### ***VEGEnotes* funded through the National Vegetable Levy**

83 per cent of respondents knew that *VEGEnotes* was funded through the National Vegetable

Levy, which is a great indication that the link between the series and R&D funding is well recognised.

### **Other comments**

The majority of other comments from respondents were very positive and said that the *VEGEnotes* series was a valuable asset, highly useful and a great information source.

## **Recommendations**

Although the overwhelming majority of feedback for *VEGEnotes* was positive, there were still some areas for improvement.




One area for improvement related to the age demographic of readers being predominately from 35-55+ years. Whilst the average age of a vegetable grower falls within this category it is important *VEGEnotes* also connects with a younger audience, considering they are the future of the vegetable industry. It was recommended AUSVEG appeal to a younger audience by including more topics that are relevant and interesting to this age group, such as areas related to business skills and marketing.

It is also recommended that in future issues of *VEGEnotes* or *Vegetables Australia*, there should be a short article on how to access publications on the AUSVEG website. This would potentially increase readership and boost the number of people registered for the Grower Portal.

## **Conclusion**


The positive feedback from the written survey showed the *VEGEnotes* concept, with its simple yet informative style, has been well received by growers, as well as the broader vegetable industry. Respondents were satisfied the series has been providing them with relevant, up-to-date information in an easy to read format. The high number of topic suggestions demonstrates *VEGEnotes* has been connecting well with readers and they were eager to provide input to further improve their industry publication. Compared to the previous survey, respondents seemed more willing to suggest new topics and provide feedback about *VEGEnotes* so it continues in a direction that will most benefit vegetable growing businesses.

# Appendix 1 – Reader Survey

## vegenotes

**Vegenotes Reader Survey April 2008**



**WIN**  
a navigator  
valued at  
**\$499!**

Please return this survey to AUSVEG before Friday 9 May 2008 to go in the draw to win a TomTom ONE XL car navigation system. To be eligible, you must fill in your details below and return your survey by the due date.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Suburb: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact phone number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick here if you DO NOT wish to be added to our database.

---

1. Are you a:

Grower                       Advertiser

Researcher                 Industry representative

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Age group:

18 – 24    25 – 34    35 – 44    45 – 54    55+

3. Crop (please identify your main crops):

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Which state do you live in?

New South Wales     Tasmania

Northern Territory    Victoria

Queensland            Western Australia

South Australia

5. How much time do you spend reading *Vegenotes*?

0 – 15 minutes         45 – 60 minutes

15 – 30 minutes       More than 60 minutes

30 – 45 minutes

6. On average, how many people read your copy of *Vegenotes*?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you find the information in *Vegenotes* clear and relevant for on-farm practices?

Yes     No

If no, please provide details.

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Have you used the information in *Vegenotes* for on-farm practices? Please provide details.

\_\_\_\_\_

9. What topics would you like to receive more information about?

Ways to improve profitability and efficiency

Water & irrigation             Managing pests & diseases

Equipment & technology    Long-term business strategies

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you have any suggestions for new topics in *Vegenotes*?

\_\_\_\_\_

11. Have you been involved in improved farm practices that other growers would be interested in learning about? Please provide details.

\_\_\_\_\_

12. Do you store *Vegenotes* in the specially designed folder?

Yes     No

If no, please provide details.

\_\_\_\_\_

13. Do you read or download *Vegenotes* from the AUSVEG website?

Yes     No

14. Are you aware that *Vegenotes* is funded through the National Vegetable Levy?

Yes     No

15. Do you have any other comments?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your time.