

**AustSafe Super Growcom  
Queensland Young Leaders  
Study Tour to Perth May  
2008**

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GROWCOM

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**GROWCOM QUEENSLAND YOUNG  
LEADERS STUDY TOUR  
TO PERTH MAY 2008**

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**Growcom Queensland Young Leaders Study Tour to Perth May 2008**

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**Purpose:** This report summarises a project involving young vegetable growers from Queensland who were assisted to undertake a study tour visiting innovative businesses in Western Australia and attendance at the annual AUSVEG dinner.

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David Ellement (Vegetables WA) & Dianne Fullelove (Ausveg)



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## **Summary**

In May/June 2008, five vegetable growers participated in a study tour to Western Australia, facilitated by Growcom with funding from Horticulture Australia Ltd.

The tour's primary objective was to expose the growers to a series of innovative businesses across the whole of the horticultural supply chain. A secondary objective was for the growers to interact with, share experiences with and form informal networks between each other.

Highlights of the tour included visits to Trandos Hydroponic Growers, Suncity Carrots, The Loose Leaf Lettuce Company, Perth produce markets, Woolworths distribution centre, and Challenger TAFE aquaculture facility.

# **WESTERN AUSTRALIA GROWERS TOUR**

## **May 28<sup>th</sup> – June 1<sup>st</sup> 2008**

### **Introduction**

The genesis of the project was as a follow on from the successful growers' tour to Brisbane and a similar tour organised without HAL funding, supported by Growcom and the participant growers. In that instance, the growers came from the Stanthorpe area. The feed back from these tours was so positive that it was agreed that a more ambitious tour would be beneficial, this time to WA to coincide with the Vegetables WA 60<sup>th</sup> year Anniversary Dinner held in conjunction with the 2008 Vegetable Industry Awards. As a consequence, project proposal was submitted to HAL based on 10 growers, incorporating funding support from AustSafe Super. The application was successful.

Regretably, by the time the tour moved into the final planning stages which required growers to give a financial commitment, only five growers were available. As a consequence of the reduced numbers, AustSafe Super were given the option of withdrawing their funding support (paying for the tickets to the dinner). AustSafe accepted this option.

As a consequence, what started as a Young Growers' Study Tour concluded as a Women in Horticulture Study Tour. This trip created the opportunity for the participants to communicate the different strategies of finding the balance between running a business, a home, and a family without either one suffering.

Five women who are all involved in their various types of farm operations took part in the Study Tour. They were Lisa Crooks (tour leader), Desley Jackwitz, Wendy Voight, Melinda Brimblecombe & Jill Stone.

### **28<sup>th</sup> May 2008 First introductions over dinner.**

The group met in the foyer for pre dinner drinks meeting up with Dianne Fullelove our host for the tour, also the opportunity to have Jim Thompson, Editor for *Vegetables Australia* magazine join the group for dinner. This has led to an article being written by Dianne for the magazine regarding our tour.

## **29<sup>th</sup> May 2008 TRANDOS HYDROPONIC GROWERS**

Harry and Danny Trandos hosted this visit. This is a family owned hydroponics and greenhouse operated enterprise which mainly grows trellis gourmet tomatoes. This farm's impressive history of innovation has resulted in Danny receiving the young grower's award with Ausveg.

One of the most interesting initiatives was to a computerized operation system.

They recycle their water utilizing reverse osmosis; the plants are not grown in the ground, therefore also saving water. The plants are direct fed via the irrigation system.

Chemical usage is very low. This is due to the implementation of integrated pest management (IPM) systems.

The tomatoes are grown all year round, thanks to the controlled atmosphere of the greenhouses. Using fans in summer and coal burning steam through the pipes in winter this helps to maintain their production throughout the year.

The Trandos's draft their own plants to get a good strong rootstock matched with a quality fruit bearing plant. The plants last for 1 year continually producing tomatoes. The greenhouse runs on equipment purchased from various parts of the world.

The vines are tended to daily, they measure daily the growth of the plant and through their computer program the importance of monitoring and data collation was evident as with each plant we could be told the expected life cycle of the plant and the yield of the plant. This enables them to know the exact harvest dates. The plants are trimmed back to five tomatoes to a bunch for optimum product.

## **SUNCITY CARROTS**

This is a large scale, family owned enterprise.

The carrots are grown in a very sandy soil type. The property is approximately 3 kilometres from the beach. The tour group was amazed at the growing conditions and the farming differences compared to what we are used to. Being a sandy soil, this enables the carrots to grow perfectly straight. Harvesting is able to be carried out in most weather conditions. If they have had recent rain, they are still able to get onto the crop, whereas on the black soil conditions of the touring party, they would be waiting for several days before being able to get onto the ground.

Water is managed very well and crops are given small amounts of water, often. This helps prevent erosion and fertilizer leaching.

In recent years, every part of the carrot gets used. The whole carrot is exported and sold to domestic wholesale markets. The carrots are also used for juicing and food powder/colouring. The factory is in the process of a refurbishment, bringing in more efficient automated equipment, therefore cutting down on staff numbers.

## **THE LOOSE LEAF LETTUCE COMPANY.**

Maureen Dobra, who was a very worthwhile recipient of the RIRDC Rural Woman of the year Award for Western Australia, hosted the visit.

The Loose Leaf Lettuce Company employs 40 staff. Maureen is very passionate about looking after the staff and creating an enjoyable workplace. There is a weekly Fun day, where the company puts on a BBQ for the staff at lunch time. Each staff member is important and recognized at weekly team time by having awards for the “staff member of the week.” Management can gauge the staff moral by speaking to them all during these meetings. Maureen stresses that the key to success is communication. Each year the company also puts on a family day in the form of an Olympics.

The company started by growing whole lettuce. A market was then identified for a prepacked loose lettuce leaf. The company now does a variety of loose leaf salad mixes. They are just about to install a \$300 000 hydro-cooler, which has been subsidized by a \$100 000 grant.

The farm has their own weather station, allowing up to the minute data to be collected and then being able to carry out irrigation accordingly. This farm irrigates small amounts frequently, making best use of water management for the soil type. This weather station was also purchased through a government grant.

**30<sup>th</sup> May 2008**

## **PERTH PRODUCE MARKETS**

The layout of the Perth Produce Markets is similar to that of the Brisbane Produce Markets. It was explained the directions the markets were heading for example they have recognise the opportunity and benefits of creating a catering and learning kitchen which is currently being set up. They plan to bring in businesses, schools and leading chiefs at times to either promote new products or bring to life old produce. The tour was after the day's trade had taken place there wasn't a great deal of action happening. Craig Mercer, from Mercer Produce, took the time to talk about what has been happening with the outcomes from the AVIDG group,

## **WOOLWORTHS DISTRIBUTION CENTRE**

It was extremely interesting to visit this centre so we could follow the food chain through from farm – distribution centre – store. Woolworths work closely with their farmers so they can forecast supply. If the farmers have an oversupply, they can put on a special. If the farmers can't supply, they will source the product elsewhere.



Following the food chain, the tour group then inspected Woolworths at Southland Shopping Centre. This is a store outfitted with the latest concepts and décor. The fruit and vegetable section has lower display cabinets so the customer can see the various sections. The display cases are self loading to keep everything full and to the front. The banana end displays are purpose built to properly display the bananas in a way that the shopper can very easily pick up a hand. This method also minimizes damage to the banana. As a grower, it was impressive that there was so little stock stored out the back of the store. This is due to Woolworth's daily product delivery ordering system. We were surprised to see they weren't following the country of origin labelling laws being implemented.

**30<sup>th</sup> May 2008**

### **CHALLENGER TAFE AQUACULTURE FACILITY**

This is the future of the commercial fishing industry – this will allow the waterways to restock and be left for recreational fishing. The waste can be utilized in different areas of agriculture. Being in tanks enables the environment to be controlled and therefore reducing the mortality rate.

Disease issues and predators – Diseases can be monitored and rectified through learning and management. The opportunity to implement a similar type of system incorporating aquaponics the usage of hydroponic and aquaculture was discussed with the benefits for the horticulture industry.

## WA Vegetables Growers Dinner



As ladies on the land, the group was very quick to kick off the farm boots and put on the heels. The chance to have a night out meeting and hearing the growth success stories of some impressive industry leaders encourages many to grow their own business. The ability to network outside the farm and learn what is happening in other states is a rare opportunity never to be missed.

We would like to thank and congratulate David Ellement, the vegetable Industry Development Officer (IDO) from WA, and Dianne Fullelove for making this trip an enjoyable experience. Both guided and directed us to many amazing people and places. Their passion for the industry came across, enlightening our experience there.

### *A personal note from Lisa Crooks*

I was quick to respond for a grower's tour over to Western Australia. I believe the more growers working together enhancing communication the stronger the industry will grow as a whole. While I have had the pleasure of meeting some growers from the west, it was a wonderful chance to meet more, observe, and learn.

With great and enthusiastic travel companions, I feel even more motivated to think outside the square.

Thanks to HAL and Growcom for supporting this very worthwhile experience.