

Growers Study Tour- PMA/USA 2009

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Growers' Tour
USA October 2009

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Abstract

The 2009 Growers Tour to the USA saw eight Australian growers visit prime California vegetable growing regions of the Salinas Valley, Visalia and Santa Maria, north of Los Angeles.

In addition to the farm visits, the growers were given the opportunity to attend the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) Fresh Summit Conference in Anaheim, California.

Ranging in age from 23 to 65 years and hailing from WA, SA, VIC, NSW, and QLD, the growers travelled from their home states to Los Angeles on October 1, 2009.

Led by AUSVEG Communications Manager, Hugh Tobin, the growers began their tour in Anaheim, the site of the PMA Fresh Summit International Convention & Exposition.

The 2009 PMA Fresh Summit focused on driving change and seizing opportunities in the current economy, and featured speakers such as Condoleezza Rice, the former U.S. Secretary of State, and the campaign manager for Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, David Plouffe.

Three days at the PMA Fresh Summit were followed by six days of grower and merchant visits throughout California, and featured highlights such as San Ysidro Farms in Guadalupe and the Pismo Oceano Vegetable Exchange (POVE) Facility in Oceano, not far from Santa Maria.

Travelling north, the growers eventually arrived in San Francisco where they spent two days before heading home to Australia on Sunday October 11.

One participant gave feedback stating: "It was definitely worthwhile, it was very productive. Because it was an organised tour we got to see a huge amount in a very short space of time. I'd highly recommend it to anyone, it was a great tour."

Introduction

The Australian vegetable industry's strategic plan, VegVision 2020, includes five pillars which outline the priority areas for R&D to build and strengthen the industry into the future. Pillar five, "Strengthen the enabling environment, industry capacity, motivation and commitment to meet the VegVision 2020" is concerned with leadership and change.

To support VegVision, the AVIDG commissioned a study in 2007 to investigate the training requirements of Australian vegetable growers. The report concluded that vegetable growers require more leadership and business management skills and that these skills should be firmly tied to the profitability of the business.

People development needs which were identified included improving business management skills based upon:

- business evaluation and planning
- understanding costs of production and financial reports
- better communication
- developing negotiation and conflict resolution skills
- improving decision making and managing change
- creating marketing opportunities.

The vegetable industry has therefore clearly identified "leadership and people development" as a priority area for investment in order to build capacity, ensure sustainable and profitable business practices are implemented, and to create future leaders. Numerous strategies have been employed in recent years to meet these people development needs through various "Industry Development" projects.

It has been widely recognised that study tours are an important and effective industry development tool, providing individual capacity building and the creation of new learning outcomes. Australian growers have been attending grower tours for a number of years with great success. With support from the National Vegetable Levy, grower tours have allowed Australian growers to expand their knowledge and build relationships

between Australian and international industries.

The purpose of the 2009 tour was to provide opportunities for growers to undertake formal development programs and build their skills and knowledge so that they may assist in the advancement of the Australian vegetable industry in the future. In order to achieve this goal, eight growers from across Australia were taken to California in the United States of America, visiting 13 operations across the horticulture industry including vegetable growers, merchants, packers, research facilities, farmers markets, and machinery dealerships, as well as touring fresh produce retailers and attending the PMA Fresh Summit International Convention and Expo in Anaheim, California.

The 2009 tour provided the opportunity for participants to form relationships, develop personal skills, identify alternative business management practices and compare production systems (including costs and profit) with their American counterparts. Growers saw the high importance food safety and traceability is given in the USA, while attending the conference allowed the participants to explore the differences between the NZ and Australian vegetable industries.

AUSVEG Communications Manager Hugh Tobin assisted participants throughout the tour. Notes were collected at each site visit and every night the group came together to discuss and record the learning outcomes from that day.

Acknowledgments

The 2009 USA tour, including farm visits, conference registration and accommodation, was arranged with the assistance of Agrotours Inc.

Thanks must go to the many growers and business managers that showed participants through their operations and enlightened them with their business skills and knowledge.

The tour was facilitated by HAL in partnership with AUSVEG and was funded by the National Vegetable Levy. The Australian Government provides matched funding for all HAL's R&D activities.

Tour Participants

State	Name
WA	Peter Pegg
VIC	Benjamin Walker
NSW	Andrew Smith
QLD	Terrence Beutel
QLD	Faye Beutel
QLD	Anthony Beutel
NSW	Nicholas Miall
SA	Monika Fiebig

Itinerary

Thursday 1 October	All arrive in Los Angeles. Take city sightseeing tour of LA and Hollywood. Travel from Los Angeles to Anaheim.
Friday 2 October	Attend day one of the PMA Fresh Summit International Convention and Expo.
Saturday 3 October	Attend day two of the PMA Fresh Summit International Convention and Expo.
Sunday 4 October	Attend day three of the PMA Fresh Summit International Convention and Expo during the morning. Tour Anaheim's local retail grocery stores. Australasian Reception at the Hilton Anaheim Hotel.
Monday 5 October	Travel to Santa Barbara, north of Los Angeles. Take a self-guided tour at the Center for Urban Agriculture at Fairview Gardens in Moneta. Travel into San Luis Obispo Country, an important agricultural region. Travel to Guadalupe and visit San Ysidro Farms.
Tuesday 6 October	Visit the California Polytechnic State University in the San Luis Obispo area. Tour the Gardens at Leaning Pine Arboretum. Tour the Organic Farm with Cindy Douglas, Farm Manager. Travel to the Pismo Oceano Vegetable Exchange (POVE) Facility and meet with General Manager, Dan Sutton.
Wednesday 7 October	Travel to the town of Shafter in Kern County. Meet with Joe Nunez, Farm Advisor for Vegetable Crops at the University of California cooperative Extension Service in Kern County.

	Travel north into Tulare County, then east to Sequoia National Park.
Thursday 8 October	Travel to Salinas Valley, known as "America's Salad Bowl". Tour the Seminis research station. Visit Pezzini Farms in Castroville, the proclaimed "Artichoke Capital of the World." Visit the Crown Packing Company.
Friday 9 October	Visit Coastal Tractors, a New Holland and Case-IH dealership. Travel to Earthbound Farm in Carmel for a tour with farmer Mark Marino. Visit Carmel-by-the-Sea and the Mission Carmel. Travel north to San Francisco.
Saturday 10 October	Visit the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market. Travel north to the Muir Woods National Monument, part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.
Sunday 11 October	Farewell lunch at Marketbar, at the Ferry Building Marketplace. Sightseeing tour of San Francisco. Travel home from Los Angeles to Australia.

Tour Report

The following report is a collation of the information collected on the tour during farm/merchant visits, the PMA Summit, and daily debriefing sessions and from the participants' evaluation of the tour.

Farm, merchant & related activity reports

After arriving in Los Angeles and travelling by coach to Anaheim on Thursday 1 October, the first of the farm visits kicked off on Day Five in Santa Barbara.

The tour spent the initial few days at the PMA Fresh Summit International Convention and Exposition in Anaheim, California, before moving north towards San Francisco through various farm, merchant, and research facilities.

The tour finished on Sunday 11 October in San Francisco

Center for Urban Agriculture at Fairview Gardens in Moneta

Based in Moneta, ten miles north of Santa Barbara, the Center for Urban Agriculture at Fairview Gardens is a California not-for-profit organisation that was established in 1997 to preserve and operate Fairview Gardens, the historic farm where their products are grown.

Founded in 1895, Fairview Gardens is considered by some to be the oldest organic farm in southern California, and is now preserved in perpetuity through an agricultural conservation easement. On 12.5 acres surrounded on all sides by a growing suburban community, the farm produces 100 different fruits and vegetables, feeds approximately 500 families, and employs over 20 people. The produce stand is open seven days a week, 51 weeks of the year.

The farm also offers a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), where shareholders support a portion of the crops through a season long commitment, prepaying all or part of the cost so Fairview's farmers can purchase seeds and prepare fields in anticipation of the coming harvest.

San Ysidro Farms

San Ysidro Farms is a 1600 acre vegetable operation located in Guadalupe. The farm boasts large scale production of broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, lettuce, spinach, sugar peas and celery - much of it for the export market to Japan and Asia. The farm has a 6-ton transplanter with mounted radar gun and onboard computer that can plant one acre per hour.

Tour participants were advised of the importance of scheduling and time-management on a farm of this size. San Ysidro produces 2.7 crops per year in each field, which are on constant rotation. The farm boasted \$30 million USD in gross profit each year and employs 50 full-time workers at \$8 USD per hour plus healthcare as well as harvest crews of 200 people.

Tour participants commented on the “great insights” they received during this visit and remarked on the “refined” farming and business practices. One participant stated it was “the best run business on the tour.”

The Gardens at Leaning Pine Arboretum - Arboretum Manager, Chris Wassenburg

The five acre Gardens focus primarily on the world’s five Mediterranean climate regions: Australia, California, Chile, the Mediterranean basin, and South Africa. Additionally there is an Entry garden, a New Zealand garden, a Dwarf and Unusual Conifer Garden, a Formal garden, a Primitive garden, and a Palm and Aloe garden.

Featuring a varied assortment of trees, shrubs, and other landscape plants, each garden is unique while continuing the cohesive experience of the entire arboretum.

Tour participants learned the Agriculture College at the Arboretum offers a four-year course for 150 students to grow and sell produce for a profit.

Organic Farm - Farm Manager, Cindy Douglas

The 11 acre Organic Farm is used for vegetable and fruit production, all of which are CCOF Certified Organic. The group was given a tour of the farm by Farm Manager, Cindy Douglas.

Pismo Oceano Vegetable Exchange (POVE) Facility - General Manager, Dan Sutton

The POVE Facility specialises in growing and shipping Asian vegetables, and is located on the central coast of California in the town of Oceano, just north of Santa Maria, California. POVE utilises the mild coastal climate to grow high quality vegetables with an emphasis on Asian vegetables including nappa cabbage.

POVE ships year round from Oceano, California, with the majority of production between the months of May and December. During these warmer months, production includes such items as: leaf lettuces, head lettuce, spinach, broccoli, celery, green bell peppers, parsleys, cilantro, green and red cabbage, nappa cabbage, and bok choy.

The group was offered a tour of the facility by General Manager, Dan Sutton, visiting

several POVE growers in the surrounding areas.

Tour participants learned the facility was a vegetable cooperative dating back to the 1920s with five partners.

Kern County - Joe Nunez, Farm Advisor for Vegetable Crops at the University of California Cooperative Extension Service in Kern County

Kern County is a state leader in the production of carrots, potatoes, fresh market garlic and watermelons. Bell peppers, mixed melons, onions, lettuce, and tomatoes are other vegetables grown on a large acreage basis in Kern County.

Joe Nunez, the Farm Advisor for Vegetable Crops at the University of California Cooperative Extension Service in Kern County took the group on a tour inspecting fields of carrots and potatoes.

Tour participants learned 80,000 potatoes are produced each year across 18,000 acres of fields and California produces 80 per cent of the USA's carrots. Carrots can be grown in this region throughout the year with 80,000 acres dedicated to carrot production.

Seminis research station - Raquel Salati, Research Scientist in Plant Pathology

The Seminis research station in San Juan Bautista of the Salinas Valley is part of a host of facilities that together form the largest developer, grower and marketer of fruit and vegetable seeds in the world. Using recycled water, their hybrids improve nutrition, boost crop yields, limit spoilage and reduce the need of chemicals.

Agriculture dominates the economy of the Salinas Valley; in particular a large majority of salad greens consumed in the US are grown within the region. Strawberries, lettuce, tomatoes and artichokes are the dominant crops, with other crops including broccoli, cauliflower, wine grapes, celery and spinach. Due to the intensity of local agriculture the area has earned itself the nickname, "America's Salad Bowl."

It was explained it can take up to 15 years for commercialisation of new seed types and

tour participants learned seeds are screened for resistance to pests and diseases with samples sent for diagnosis. Seminis produced \$30 USD million worth of spinach seeds in the last financial year but also grow tomato, lettuce and capsicum seeds.

Pezzini Farms

The group visited the roadside farm stand of Pezzini Farms in Castroville, the proclaimed "Artichoke Capital of the World." Pezzini Farms has produced Green Globe artichokes in Castroville for over 50 years. The artichokes are carefully selected for optimum tenderness and flavour, with all artichokes harvested and packed by hand. In addition to providing customers with the finest tasting artichokes, Pezzini Farms also sells gourmet sauces and dips in their Artichoke Store in Castroville.

The group met the Pezzini Farms manager who answered their questions about artichoke production.

Crown Packing Company - Chris Bunn, owner

The Crown Packing Company, known to locals simply as "The Farm," is an agricultural education center and a farming business, offering organic produce and farm tours to the public, and using flowers to attract good pests. Owner Chris Bunn took the group through fields of lettuce, cauliflower, artichokes and carrots.

The Farm has been a family business since the 1920s and has since been downsized to 50 acres from 1200 due to risk. The main focus is now on the produce stand and local sales as it is hard to compete with the bigger farms that can produce multiple lines throughout the year.

Access to water is also being reduced with environmental concerns on the rise. It was explained the Salinas valley is 100 miles long with 200,000 irrigated acres and rainfall has no impact on day-to-day growing. The Salinas Valley is widely regarded as the centre of the salad industry with the majority of people living in the Valley working in agriculture and in 2008 the agriculture industry boasted a turnover of \$3.5 billion USD.

Coastal Tractors, Salinas - Mike Rianda

Coastal Tractors is a New Holland and Case-IH tractor dealership. A guide explained the operation of the operation, which is the largest in the area, to tour participants and the tour participants discussed the machinery they use in Australia and were interested in the possible application of machines they had not seen before.

Earthbound Farm, Carmel - Mark Marino

Earthbound Farm in Carmel is a large organic farming operation producing a vast array of commodities including beetroots, bell peppers, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, celery, cucumber, zucchini, garlic and onions, herbs, lettuces, potatoes, tomatoes, apples, avocados, berries, citrus, grapes, kiwi fruit, melons, pears and stone fruit. In addition, the farm produces all-organic dried fruits, cookies, snacks and juice.

Earthbound Farm has 35,000 acres of organic produce and uses beneficial insects from flowers as part of their IPM program. Legumes are planted to put nitrogen in the soil and Earthbound was the first company to produce pre-washed salads in a bag with products grown at the farm sold in 97 per cent of supermarkets in the USA.

Tour of Anaheim Retail Grocery Stores

This tour incorporated visits to several retail grocery stores in Anaheim, California. Stores included Vons Grocery, Stater Brothers, 99 Ranch Market, Gelson's Market, Whole Foods Market, and Trader Joe's. Tour participants made comparisons between the different retailers in presentation of produce, scale, service and variety. Whole Foods Market was considered the highlight of the tour for its high quality shopping experience.

General observations from farm visits

- "It was good to see the large scale and the way they do things." - A tour participant's comments on the impressive size of San Ysidro Farms.
- "The owners opened their books [to us]." - A tour participant was impressed by the openness of the people they met, who freely offered advice and information

to the participants.

- On the best aspect of the tour, one participant said, “the visits to the large conventional farms such as POVE and especially San Ysidro.”
- On the retail produce tour, one participant said it gave “a valuable insight into how vegetables are sold in the USA in regards to packaging and promotion.”
- One participant stated the San Ysidro Farms visit was “fantastic” and that they “enjoyed every aspect of this visit. They were very knowledgeable and were happy to share everything with us, even their financials.”
- “The POVE farm co-operative was a good visit as Australian farmers will likely adopt a similar mentality to help market their produce.”
- “It was good to see a large scale organic producer,” said one tour participant on the visit to Earth Bound Farms in Carmel.
- Regarding the retail produce tour, one participant stated “there was a marked difference between the retail markets. Some were like our IGA stores to the up market (and welcoming you to buy) Whole Foods Market. The layout and presentation of this store has shown us how important it is for the grower and wholesaler to market their produce with a uniformed approach.”
- On San Ysidro Farms, one grower said “from Roy Senior’s welcome to the complete talks on markets, machinery and crops, all were excellent. [I] found the purple cauliflower interesting, as well as the poly pipe rewinding.”
- On the visit to POVE, one participant said it was “very informative. It was good to see the packing shed for hot peppers and I found the machine that cools down the trailer load of produce interesting.”
- Following the visit to the Pride of Farm Market a participant stated they “were a little surprised to find no windbreak trees between the farm and their neighbours and around the main road.”
- “It blew me away, even down to the fact if they find animal tracks through their crops, they can’t use any of the produce. If they see a dog walking through the field, anything that comes within a certain radius of the dog has to be destroyed. That will be a big issue with us [if it becomes legislated here], especially with the amount of wildlife we have like kangaroos, rabbits and foxes.” - A tour participant on the emphasis placed on food safety in the US.

Produce Marketing Association Fresh Summit 2009 - International Convention and Exposition, October 2-5 2009

The Produce Marketing Association (PMA) is a global trade association serving the produce and floral supply chains, including vegetables, by enhancing the market of related products and services worldwide. The annual PMA Fresh Summit International Convention and Exposition is one of the largest international events dedicated to fresh produce, with more than 17,000 attendees each year.

Vegetable industry workshops - day one:

“How the ‘New Washington’ can impact your business”

- This workshop explored the new legislative and regulatory initiatives to determine the effects they’ll have on the produce industry and, ultimately, on your business. Participants heard the most up-to-date information from government experts on new produce-related programs and learned how those programs presented a new opportunity for them to increase sales and improve profitability. The workshop offered the Australian growers a unique insight into the US produce industry.

“Produce Traceability Initiative: Implementation of Best Practices”

- Participants learned about the latest developments, best practices, and operational tips to implement milestones outlined in the Produce Traceability Initiative Action Plan. Participants were able to ask questions and gain a clear picture of the Initiative’s long and short-term impact on their businesses.

“Win-Win: The Power of Positive Negotiation with Ron Shapiro”

- This workshop outlined a systematic approach to negotiation that would increase business and strengthen supply chain relationships. Participants also learned how to maintain positive business relationships.

“Global Economy Part 1: What in the world is going on out there?”

- Participants were given an understanding of impacts on the global economy and how the economic climate had been affecting the produce supply chain. Future

outlooks were also explained by a renowned expert on global economics and business strategy, Dr Jeffrey Rosensweig.

“Food Safety: New approaches for a new economy”

- Tour participants learned the importance placed on food safety in the US throughout their farm and merchant visits. In this workshop, food safety was raised as a crucial issue once again. Participants learned about the new produce business model and the integral role food safety has in the American industry. The panel of corporate and food safety experts stressed the importance in building a food safety culture into fresh produce businesses.

Vegetable industry workshops - day two:

“Food Safety Innovations: What’s new and what does it really mean?”

- Food safety was once again a paramount issue on the second day of the PMA Fresh Produce Summit. This workshop examined several breakthroughs being made in the area of food safety, including the latest research and how it could be incorporated into daily business operations.

“National Fruit and Vegetable Research and Promotion Board Town Hall”

- This workshop looked at the Produce for Better Health Foundation’s proposal to create a National Fruit and Vegetable Promotion Board to increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. People behind the initiative explained how such a board could benefit the produce industry. The workshop took on the format of a debate with those questioning the cost efficiency of the plan also speaking.

“Locally Grown Produce and Profits: How they go hand in hand”

- This session explored the way the movement toward locally grown produce has created profitable new opportunities not only for local growers but for retailers, food service operators and others throughout the supply chain. Growers learned about the various aspects behind the growing movement and how to capitalize on the field to fork phenomenon.

“Produce Marketing Part 1: Marketing to the new Cost-Conscious Consumer”

- This workshop looked at the shift in consumer buying behaviour worldwide in response to the Global Economic Crisis. The challenges and opportunities this shift presents to the fresh produce industry were explored with the aim of providing participants with the knowledge to adapt to, and leverage, the new trends.

Vegetable industry workshops: day three:

“Food Safety and the Environment: A Delicate Balancing Act”

- The pressures to be ‘green’ while being diligent about food safety were looked at in this session, which explored solutions to finding the balance between food safety and the environment.

“Finding the ROI of Sustainability”

- This panel discussion explained how being environmentally responsible can be very good for business and was presented by the PMA Vice President of Government Relations and Public Affairs, Kathy Means.

For more information about the PMA and its events and trade shows, please visit:

<http://show.pma.com/freshsummit/2009/index.cfm>

General Observations from the PMA Fresh Summit 2009 International Convention and Exposition:

- “As a cauliflower grower we’d never considered packaging every cauliflower with a barcode. All their vegetables were bagged and bar-coded but the bigger vegetables here in Australia aren’t really done like that.” - A tour participant on the marketing techniques used in the US, as demonstrated at the PMA Fresh Summit.
- “Overall a good look into the American produce industry and the issues it is

facing, many of which are likely to affect Australia as well.”

- “The PMA convention was very informative.”
- “From the Convention of Produce stalls and information to the breakfasts and dinners, all were excellent. [I] especially enjoyed listening to Condoleezza Rice and David Plouffe. The presenters of the workshops were interesting but found some of the panel members were very basic with their information.”
- “The PMA is a great experience.”
- “The speakers were very insightful and the workshops showed the similar problems faced in horticulture globally.”

Summary

The farm visits and related activities provided the opportunity for the Australian growers to explore new production methods, compare production systems, and build relationships with other growers.

Growers had the opportunity to develop international networks and examine current and future issues common to vegetable producers in Australia and the USA.

Highlights of the tour included the visit to San Ysidro Farms and the POVE facility.

One issue the group identified with regards to planning future tours was the need for a rest opportunity immediately following arrival in the USA.

The PMA Fresh Summit 2009 provided an opportunity for the participants to better understand the extent of marketing practices and the emphasis placed on food safety in the American fresh produce industry.

Participants' comments on the value of the tour:

- "I think it was definitely worthwhile, it was very productive. Because it was an organised tour we got to see a huge amount in a very short space of time. I'd highly recommend it to anyone, it was a great tour.
- "Seeing the different farms and farming regions. The magnitude of the amounts and area of produce was enlightening. The different and innovative approach to growing and packing of the produce by individual growers was educational.
- "It really broadened our outlook on farming and the amount of produce that is grown and marketed in the USA. The comparison between the large farms to the small ones was good. Also noticed that every available piece of land is farmed right up to the city boundaries. The PMA convention was huge and totally enlightening."
- "The well organised, easy going and flexible approach by our tour leader was most appreciated."
- "A great insight into the gigantic American horticulture industry in California. You learn so much which can help your business to improve."
- "American autumn was a perfect time to hold the tour as crops were in harvest and the weather is still good before the winter."
- "It was a great tour. A great eye-opener on the diverse population and culture running through California. The immense agriculture industry and its implications on the American economy. Every visit had methods and practices that would benefit my business."
- "Overall it was an excellent trip that was jam packed with PMA, visits and experiencing the American way of life.

Recommendations for future tours

1. Coastal Tractors was “purely a tractor shop. A farm plant and equipment dealer would have been more beneficial.”
2. “I would do the farm tour before the PMA Convention so [participants] can get an idea about the production and marketing side of things before hearing about the state of the industry and its issues.”
3. “A local map on the areas where we were travelling would have given more perspective, more so for Los Angeles and San Francisco.”
4. “The need to shower and rest for a few hours after the plane trip is important as most of us were too tired to enjoy the sightseeing tour on arrival. The tour in the afternoon would have been better. The afternoon before returning to Australia could be time to pack up, rest, shop, or for local sightseeing.”
5. There is a need for more “jet lag recovery time and maybe a half day break for leisure and shopping.”