

Young Growers Tour to New Zealand 2011

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AUSVEG Ltd

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Young Grower Tour
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Abstract

The 2011 Young Growers' Tour to New Zealand saw nine Australian participants visit vegetable growing regions in the North Island of New Zealand.

In addition to the farm visits, the growers were given the opportunity to attend the Horticulture New Zealand Conference in Rotorua, New Zealand.

Ranging in ages from 19 to 35 and from VIC, QLD, TAS, and NSW, the growers travelled from their home states to Melbourne where they all left for New Zealand on 23 July 2011.

Led by AUSVEG Communications Manager, William Churchill, the participants arrived in Auckland before heading to Rotorua for the Horticulture New Zealand Conference. The Conference provided delegates with knowledge and tools that can be used to increase the profit within their own businesses.

One participant gave feedback stating: "It was a great learning opportunity. It was a great experience to look outside our farm and business, learn from others and develop networking."

The overall recommendation from this project is that investing in the youth of our Horticulture industry is as important in investing in pest and disease trials. These tours are an excellent way to expand their knowledge and understanding of farming practices and should continue into the future.



Members of the 2011 Young Growers Tour to New Zealand

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 project, providing individual capacity building and the creation of new learning outcomes. Australian growers have been attending grower tours for 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 2011 tour gave growers the chance to explore the similarities and differences between the New Zealand and Australian vegetable industries. This experience benefitted the participants by extending the opportunity to form relationships, identify alternative business management practices and develop personal skills. Another key element was that the growers were able to compare production systems, including costs and profit, with their New Zealand counterparts as well as with members of the global horticulture industry by attending the 2011 Horticulture New Zealand Conference.

In this tour, nine participants from across Australia were taken to the North Island of New Zealand, where they visited: vegetable growers, packers, merchants, and market wholesalers, as well as attending the Horticulture New Zealand Conference in Rotorua. The purpose of the tour was to provide opportunities for growers to undertake formal development programs while building their skillset and knowledge base so that they can be active in building a stronger future for the Australian vegetable industry.

AUSVEG Communications Manager William Churchill assisted participants throughout the tour. Members of the group evaluated the tour throughout the trip with evaluation forms submitted at the tour's conclusion.

Acknowledgments

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.

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Tour participants

Surname	First name	Company	State	Crops
Churchill	William	AUSVEG	VIC	N/A
Wilson	Daryl	Wilson's Farm Fresh Fruit and Veg	QLD	hydroponic lettuce, hydroponic herbs and processed salad products
Wilson	Natalia	Wilson's Farm Fresh Fruit and Veg	QLD	hydroponic lettuce, hydroponic herbs and processed salad products
Slater	Mark	I + M Slater P/L	VIC	Spinach and Broccoli
Rigby	Lydia	Harvest Moon	TAS	Bean, broccoli and lettuce
Boratto	Joe	Boratto Farms Pty Ltd	VIC	Rocket, baby leaf and spinach
Richardson	Kain	R&L Richardson (Newlyn) Pty Ltd	VIC	Potatoes, corn and Carrots
Bullock	Jordan	Kurrawong Organics	NSW	Brassicas
Bellenger	Lee	Champion Mountain Organics	NSW	Organic vegetables - salads and season produce

Itinerary

Saturday: 23 July

Location: Auckland

Outline: The first stop of the study tour is Auckland. You will arrive in Auckland at 5:30PM and will be taken to your accommodation at Rydges.

Accommodation: Rydges, Auckland

Sunday: 24 July

Location: Auckland

Outline: Visit the Pukekohe Region south of Auckland. Pukekohe's fertile volcanic soil and moist warm climate supports large Horticultural and Dairy industries. Firstly meet Kirin at RC Hari and Sons, a prominent grower in the area. After this, enjoy lunch in the area, before going to AS Wilcox and Sons, a commercial grower, packer and marketer of fresh vegetables for domestic and export markets. AS Wilcox and Sons has 150 permanent staff and their principal crops are potatoes, onions and carrots.

Accommodation: Rydges, Auckland

Monday: 25 July

Location: Mt Wellington, Hamilton, Cambridge, Rotorua

Outline: An early start today to visit Fresh Direct, a processor who supplies many New Zealand outlets, and are market leaders in Asparagus processing. Then visit Bidvest Fresh in Hamilton, a market leader in the wholesale produce industry. After lunch in Hamilton, visit Boyd's Asparagus Farm in Cambridge, a large Asparagus operation that washes, grades and packages produce within four hours. Then proceed to Rotorua for the evening.

Accommodation: Rydges, Rotorua

Tuesday: 26 July

Location: Rotorua

Outline: Hort NZ Conference and Hort NZ Gala Dinner

Accommodation: Rydges, Rotorua

Wednesday: 27 July

Location: Rotorua

Outline: Hort NZ Conference

Accommodation: Rydges, Rotorua

Thursday: 28 July

Location: Rotorua, Gisborne

Outline: In the morning visit Te Puia, a Māori Arts & Crafts Institute in the Te Whakarewarewa Thermal Valley, with steaming vents, boiling mud pools and spectacular geysers as well as Maori culture experiences. Then drive to Gisborne, via the picturesque coastal town Opotiki.

Accommodation: Bella Vista, Gisborne

Friday: 29 July

Location: Gisborne, Napier

Outline: Start the day with a visit Leader Brand in Gisborne a vertically integrated produce business who grow, harvest, pack, market and distribute produce nationally and internationally. Leader Brand specialises in Leafy Greens and has a large range of pre-packed salads. After this drive South to visit Hugh Ritchie in Central Hawke's Bay, who utilises minimum tillage practices as well as GPS farming.

Accommodation: At the Rocks Motor Lodge, Napier

Saturday: 30 July

Location: Hastings, Palmerston North

Outline: A busy day today, firstly visit Scott at Lawson's True Earth, an organic grower of potatoes, carrots, onions, sweet corn and pumpkins. After Lawson's, head to Fielding, where you will experience Halfords Exotic Produce. Halfords specialises in growing Yams, Earth Gems and Potatoes. After Halfords head to Levin, where you will visit Woodhaven Gardens, where they produce Spinach, Lettuce, Spring Onions and Radishes. Return to Palmerston North for your final night in New Zealand.

Accommodation: Braemar Motor Lodge, Palmerston North

Sunday: 31 July

Location: Palmerston North, Wellington, Melbourne

Outline: Depart Palmerston North for Wellington, the Capital of New Zealand, to return to Australia.

Tour Report

The following report is a collation of the information collected on the tour during farm and merchant visits, the Horticulture New Zealand Conference, and in participant evaluations of the tour.

Day one: Saturday 23 July

The tour departed Melbourne in the early afternoon and arrived without complication in Auckland in the evening.

Day two: Sunday 24 July

Auckland area farm visits:

RC Hari and Sons:

The tour visited the family run operation RC Hari and Sons operating in the Pukekohe region of the North Island of New Zealand. The family run farm is currently in its third generation of management and largely keeps the senior employment amongst family members. RC Hari and Sons produce Asian Vegetables, varieties of lettuces as well as a variety of Pumpkin mainly grown for export to Japan known as 'Squash'. The operation has become a major supplier to Pukekohe and its retail market which is dominated by 'Countdown', a company owned by Australian Parent Woolworths Limited.

Due to the close proximity of farms in Pukekohe to the town many growers are able to drastically cut their transport expenses and increase their overall profitability. RC Hari and Sons do not send any perishable produce to any other regions and solely supply the town due to savings made on transportation.



The farm has expanded several times as other growers in the area have sold out of horticulture or retired over the last 15 years. Similar to Australia the New Zealanders face a contraction on the amount of growers in the industry but farm sizes are getting bigger.

The proprietors of RC Hari and Sons also have similar issues around labour sources as well. Australian labour is often predominately made up of workers of Vietnamese or Cambodian decent; similarly in New Zealand many of the workers are from India or the Pacific Islands with few Caucasian or 2nd generation settlers choosing to take up the physically intensive workloads.

As an example of the farm setting best practices, produce grown was extremely clean and well presented. The farm was also innovative with its practices using shrink wrap to value add and have smaller serving sizes before it leaves the farm gate. By shrink wrapping produce and cutting it into smaller sizes a premium is able to be charged on the product per kilo as well as being able to recover saleable portions of damaged product. RC Hari and Sons also rotated their fields with other growers in the area to extend their cropping rotation periods, particularly rotating with potato growers. Instead of competition with their neighbours these community systems are set up on a handshake. There was a sense of community amongst the growers in Pukekohe that is rarely seen in Australia.

*Picture: Kiran and Ganpat (Patch) Hari show grower tour members their produce at their Pukekohe packing sheds.

AS Wilcox and Sons.

AS Wilcox and Sons or Wilcox's as they are more commonly known, were to many of the growers one of the highlights of the tour. An example of corporate farming at its most successful. Growers of carrots, onions and potatoes the size and scale of the operation demonstrated that domestic populations are not a limiting factor to the size a horticulture business can grow too. Managing a production base of 2,500 acres Wilcox's size easily dwarfs competitors in Australia and has a significant focus on export quality produce.

Many of the operational implementations within Wilcox's also sets the standard for what should be included in a world class farm. Wilcox's employ an HR strategy that praises feedback from staff and drives innovation from the ground up. Throughout the pack house are problem identification boards where staff are encouraged to give new ideas on how to make the environment more enjoyable to work in. All suggestions are taken seriously and the business understands that if employees are happy and have a sense of membership to the business they are likely to be more loyal. Such an example of this was an employee noting that there was no natural light in the pack house. Wilcox management in response built a six by six metre window into the side of the building and also cut sky lights into the pack house and glassed them over. The result was a work place bathed in natural light and a happier team of employees.

Wilcox's have also implemented a significant Controlled Traffic Farming (CTF) set up within their operations. It's an excellent example that such practices can be implemented on large scale commercial farms and show positive results. Wilcox's are reporting a reduction in the levels of disease in their potatoes from these activities.



Additionally, the Wilcox automated pack house uses best practice to handle produce. Rather than conventionally dropping potatoes into storage bins a laser guided chute lowers itself to the bottom of a bin stopping the product from being dropped from height and being bruised. As the bin fills the chute retreats only ever dropping the potato from a few inches. While a small innovation in handling it's a simple example of how to manage the longevity of product and prevent bruising.

Wilcox's also make several investments into their Potato Marketing activities. Most notably that they have invested in specific varieties that are ideal for baking, frying, mashing and boiling. These "ideal" varieties are extended into the market and sold on the packaging as "Great for.....". These innovations into their product lines are under threat as their major customer Countdown are forcing Wilcox's to use their bags.



Wilcox's also elaborated on their dealings with the Tomato/Potato Psyllid. It was stated that their spraying programs were almost at breaking point to try and control the infestation with the company spending 17 times the amount on chemicals now than before the Psyllid arrived in New Zealand. The Psyllid is cited as being a substantially difficult pest to control and the levels of investment for chemical controls are a struggle for smaller potato operations to manage.

*Pictures:

-A shot of the Wilcox's packhouse and packaging lines

-Wilcox's Potato Crop Manager Fenton Hazelwood showing the growers their in store packaging bags.

-An example of some of the Wilcox's branded potato bags.



Day three: Monday 25 July

Auckland area farm and marketing visits:

Fresh Direct-

Fresh direct is a marketing and wholesale operation on the outskirts of Auckland. The Managing Director is Peter Turner who started this company after leaving Turners and Growers, a significant wholesaling operation in New Zealand. Fresh Direct maintain a high quality of produce and supply directly into major supermarkets down to green grocers. As part of the operations niche they supply quality produce and continue to emphasize that aspect of their business. Unlike many arrangements in Australia where major retailers have a direct relationship with the producer, Fresh Direct operate as an intermediary where they offer constant supply to customers while managing the logistical issues of receiving stock from large numbers of growers. Despite their large supply base they are able to manage consistent quality from a large geographic distribution of growers. It would be a reasonable assumption that Fresh Direct employ similar specifications to the supermarket, and like the market here, there would be losses for on and off specification product depending on the season. Where Fresh Direct can capitalize on this is by only ever providing on specification product to their customers leaving the customer to never question the continued quality of their supplier.



*Pictures – Fresh Direct show their quality produce to Tour members at their facility on the outskirts of Auckland

Bidvest:

Conversely the tour visited Bidvest. Approximately 45 minutes from Fresh Direct. This company supplies predominately large processors where volume/size of the product is critically important as well as institutions where quality is not a paramount consideration when making a purchase. Such examples of who they supply are Subway restaurants, prisons, mines and the defence forces.

Compared to the specifications required by Fresh Direct, Bidvest's specifications are very different. Subway restaurants request large, oversized product that is able to be processed into a large volume of produce useable on sandwiches while prisons do not place an emphasis on quality. As a result Bidvest source oversized product from growers or product that does not meet supermarket specifications. The results of which are evident in the manner by which the product is stored at the Bidvest warehouse.

Tour participants were able to learn from this visit that should their product not make the specifications of their wholesaler/buyer in Australia, there are always other avenues to pursue for sale of product to businesses that will accept oversized or out of specification goods.



Pictures: Examples of the level of quality at the Bidvest depot from the facility on the outskirts of Auckland.



Boyd's asparagus farm:

The tour then went to visit Boyd's asparagus farm. This farm operation has been running for over 10 years and is an excellent example of mechanisation processes for delicate vegetables. Asparagus stalks are still required to be harvested by hand as stalks do not grow evenly and mechanised harvesters are not yet developed to a level where they are able to be used. Boyd's asparagus pack house has its operations substantially mechanised and are able to handle individual stalks, separating by weight and collecting into bunches. Future system innovations will be to have an automatic buncher installed that will eliminate the labour component for a large portion of the automated system. Currently Boyd's are evaluating the fidelity of several options but are yet to settle on a preferred piece of machinery.



Speaking with the Operations Manager at Boyd's similar supplier/grower relationship issues came to light and reflected many of the issues that growers find in Australia. Boyd's cited QA issues with major supermarkets as a level of interference with their operations, even dictating how many toilets should be available within the pack house.

*Picture- Shot of the asparagus bunching lines installed at the facility.

Day four: Tuesday 26 July

Rotorua – Horticulture New Zealand Conference (Day 1)

The fourth day of the tour was spent at the Horticulture New Zealand conference. The conference is the annual gathering of all horticulture producers in New Zealand but features a smaller component of Trade Show and events when compared to the AUSVEG National Convention.

The first day of events contained several speaker presentations by Horticulture New Zealand Chairman, Andrew Fenton amongst promotional pieces by Sponsors.

The Horticulture New Zealand Chairman drew many parallels with the Australian industry, in particular asking the growers; "Is your business a lifestyle choice or a business venture"? A similar sentiment

echoed in Australia with the large number of “hobby farmers” in Australia criticised for over producing and oversupplying the market. While offering no immediate solution to the issue of over saturation of the market the Horticulture New Zealand Chairman went on to promote the 10/2020 plan laid out by Horticulture New Zealand. This is the ambitious plan to increase the value of the New Zealand Horticulture Industry to ten billion dollars by the year 2020. It was reported that the industry is on track to achieving this goal and with it create enough demand that oversupplies of product within the market would become a rare occurrence, not a frequent disruption.

The second presentation of note was the International Speaker from Clemenger BBDO, an international advertising agency with an office in Melbourne, Mr Peter Biggs. Speaking on the complications of modern advertising, Biggs told the audience that today humans will see 7,000 messages but will retain only 10 of those and that being in those top ten messages is increasingly difficult and complicated.



Biggs told the crowd that the key to being in those 10 messages is to be interesting, and to be interesting you need to be weird and normal. Without offering attendees a solution to solve the industries issues on marketing themselves, Biggs did draw attention to many of the successful campaigns run in Australia that made the product interesting in weird ways. The first was the National Australia Bank “Break Up” campaign (<http://breakup.nab.com.au/>). Involving nationwide plans to publicise the changes to the National Australia Bank’s image. These changes made it an interesting product and as a result new account openings increased substantially.

Amongst other items such as “The hidden pizza restaurant” for Yellow pages (<http://hiddenpizza.com.au>) and the Old Spice ads (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owGykVbfgUE>) BBDO challenged the vegetable industry to come up with a weird idea that would make the industry interesting.

As an example of product innovation and marketing the third speaker was the CEO of ROCKIT (Rock – It) apples. ROCKIT’s product is a small intensely flavoured apple smaller than a stress ball, based on the flavour and its unique packaging offering this was how the product was focusing on being “weird”. Of particular interest was its retail strategy where the product, unlike any other apples is in a plastic tennis ball container and is sold in the beverage section of the supermarket.



Its positioning as a juicy alternative to drinks or other fruits is the product's point of difference but the expectation is that this will be enough for customer's to justify its \$5 a tube price (\$1 per apple).

The first day of the conference concluded with the Horticulture New Zealand Gala Dinner.

*Pictures - A shot from the Old Spice advertisement. An example of the ROCKIT apples packaging.

Day five: Wednesday 27 July

Rotorua – Horticulture New Zealand Conference (Day 2)

The second day of the conference split into specific product groups and had presentations from different sectors. See Appendix 1 for the second day's program.

Day six: Thursday 28 July

Rotorua travelling to Gisborne

The tour departed Rotorua and headed toward Gisborne for the following day's farm visit. Along the way the tour visited the TePuia Hot Springs. The Hot Springs are a local heritage site and centre for Maori culture.

Picture: Maori Tiki Totem at the Te Puia hot springs in Rotorua



Day seven: Friday 29 July

Gisborne farm visit to the Leader Brand

Leader brand in New Zealand is one of the biggest growing operations in the country. Similar to AS Wilcox, Leader Brand is market leader for quality and has a substantial export market into Japan for "squash", a variety of pumpkin.

The tour met with Stuart Davis, the technical director of Leader Brand and were shown around the Gisborne operations facility. This was a central operations hub for many of Leader Brand's activities. It was pointed out that the brand also houses all of its mechanical operations and maintenance in house at the facility employing 4 local apprentices as well as full time maintenance staff.

The tour was then taken through the facilities high care processing site. This part of the facility was responsible for processing and bagging all of the Leader Brands mixed salads and coleslaw lines. The secure rooms were all colour coded to ensure no staff cross contaminate any of the product. The most sensitive part of the facility was the “blue” room. Kept slightly pressurised so that if a door is opened air will only flow out this was the most important room in the process. Bagging in this area is almost fully automated as hyper sensitive scales measure how much product is in a bag. The only staff contact with product in this section is feeding it into the processing machines.

While in the viewing room the tour was joined by Leader Brand’s resident Food Scientists who are responsible for tractability of the product. Similar to Australia’s processes, product from every batch is kept for a period of 10 days in the unlikely event of a recall or need to test after the product has been sent to retail stores. Growers asked about the use of water at the facility and it was said that the Leader Brand changes it water every day and has never had to investigate recycling systems as there has never been a shortage of water in New Zealand.

The tour then left the production facility to visit the Leader Brand’s nursery on the outskirts of Gisborne. While smaller than other nursery facilities in Australia, having its own nursery is a testament to Leader Brand’s scale of operations. Leader Brand established its own nursery operation to improve traceability in their product as well as ensuring continuity of supply. Growers asked about GMO seed used on site and the Leader Brand nursery manager said they choose not to use GMO products because of public pressure, despite them feeling that that will be the way of the future.

Nursery operations paid close attention to hygiene and keeping the site contamination free. Upon arrival at the site all shoes had to stand on a decontamination pad with a cleaning scrub. Growers were also shown how to use verbicite in the soil mix to reflect sunlight and stop the plants from overheating.

The tour was then shuttled to some of the area’s growing operations. The area visited was a broccoli plantation that was running a harvester through a paddock. Some of the tour participants noted large amounts of ring spotting affecting the broccoli but it was said that the local demand for broccoli was far exceeding the levels of supply allowing all product to make it to market. Growers were also able to see firsthand the benefit of streamlining packing systems. The Leader Brand set up was to grade and pack all in the field which was is a much more efficient system than some growers were using in Australia where they were bulk harvesting in the field then grading and packing back on the property. Leader Brand also gave good examples to the growers of Controlled Traffic Farming (CTF) and the use it can be on farm. By using CTF growers could manage a high level of soil health under an intensive growing environment.



Pictures:

Leader Brand self propelled broccoli packing arrangement

Leader Brand machinery warehouse

Leader Brand CASEiH 9,000 series earth leveller.



Finally the tour visited the Leader Brand equipment warehouse. Present here was a CASEiH 9'000 series leveller. Similar to the leveller used on roads this piece of equipment was used to level the vegetable beds at an angle that would allow proper water drainage of the property. Growers were amazed by the plethora of specialised machinery with one grower noting that this many machines not being utilised would be losing the business money. It was noted by Leader Brand crop managers that during peak seasons all the machines are operating at one time and all are needed and despite them being inactive for periods of time it would be more expensive to hire in equipment during peak periods.

Day eight: Saturday 30 July

Napier to Palmerston North & farm visits:

On day 8 the tour continued around the Hawkes Bay area toward Wellington. The next stop on the Tour was at an arable land farmer's operation. Hugh Ritchie was our contact there and was preparing his property to grow peas for the McCain processing plant in Hawkes Bay. Hugh was a pragmatic farmer who only grew crops to make him money and has begun transferring his business away from cropping into vegetables so he can supply McCain. Hugh was a Nuffield farming scholar and a strong advocate of CTF farming and taught the growers about the techniques used on his farm. The tour had morning tea there and Hugh spoke about fragmentation within the Australian industry and his belief that there would be many macro level issues of relevance to all Peak Industry Bodies and that many should merge.

The afternoon of farm visits were to Lawson's True Earth at Hastings and Halford's exotic produce at Fielding.

The tour first visited Lawson's True Earth. An organic farm for the past 15 years the property has had to develop alternative ways to manage pests, disease and weeds on property without the use of pesticides or herbicides. Also without being able to use conventional soil additives like many fertilizers Lawson's

True Earth relies quite heavily on best practice guides to manage soil quality.

Lawson's solution to many of the farms weed problems were very unique. Being unable to use herbicides on the property the farm instead used the less conventional method of fire. By covering the plants in a protective shield as the device moves along, all exposed ground between beds of crop are incinerated from the heat. Lawson did not say if this had an adverse effect on the plants he was trying to keep but mentioned that it was an economical alternative and cheaper than it would be if he were using herbicide.

Lastly the tour visited Halford's exotic produce. Run by Clint Smythe, Halford's exotic produce markets a unique variety of brightly coloured yams native to South America. A staple food of the Inca's Mr Smythe has carved out a niche market for this unique produce in New Zealand to supplement his potato and yam business. While small in demand the produce is able to be grown in the cold conditions of the North Island and is a popular side dish in meals. Growers were also impressed that Mr Smythe was the sole supplier of earth gems in New Zealand and had legal exclusivity. The tour ended with a visit to his fields 20 minutes away to view the speciality harvester (a modified potato harvester) to harvest yams and earth gems.



*Pictures – Growers inspecting the Halford's Exotic Produce "Earth Gems". Growers also inspect the specialty yam harvester that uses a barrel to separate the yams from soil when harvested.

Day nine: Sunday 31 July

The tour departed Wellington in the early afternoon for a flight back to Melbourne.

Tour participants' observations

RC Hari and Sons:

- “RC Hari and Sons gave an insight into family business run by two generations of farmers and the way family involved in the business deals with succession using land values.”
- “Great to see labour intensive operation versus the latest technology and marketing operation.”
- “It was excellent to see how they produce on such a large scale and the way they are marketing and value adding their products.”

AS Wilcox & Sons:

- “From the production side they were investing in pivot irrigation, and moving towards sustainable management systems such as controlled traffic farming (CTF) and IPM.”
- “Very modern and well equipped family business with corporate structure. They use modern equipment and innovative ideas to promote, process and sell their products.”
- “There was very good management in the place and the manager was very aware of all aspects of their business. They were innovative when branding to supermarkets with new microwave potatoes.”

Fresh Direct:

- “Fresh Direct has a long tradition of family wholesaling. They are commission based and provided an interesting insight into how wholesalers operate.”
- “I have always wondered how the merchants operated and this provided a great insight as I have never had anything to do with it.”
- “Visiting Fresh Direct was good as it is important to understand the full supply chain. Fresh Direct are major middle men in fresh produce purchases and sales and they do value add to the product as they have a very large contact base of suppliers and retailers.”

Bidvest:

- “One thing I was very excited to see at Bidvest was the use of lower-grade produce. So much fresh produce is wasted due to small imperfections especially in appearance.”
- “Bidvest was really good; their operation was not too dissimilar to what we do with our local farm’s produce.”

- “Bidvest was the first wholesaler we saw and their operation was similar to that of Australian wholesalers. They operate with up to 18.5 per cent sales commissions and generally receive produce and then try to sell it.”

Boyd’s Asparagus Farm:

- “It was good to see how a labour intensive harvest of asparagus can reduce cost by use of contract workers and technologically advanced grading systems.”
- “Boyd’s Asparagus Farm was good and informative in that you are able to know what an end product looks like and also seeing the processing steps to how the product got there.”
- “Boyd’s Asparagus Farm had large market share and sells all grades of product with good profitability and scope for expansion.”

Leader Brand:

- “I was blown away with the amount of effort required to get salad into a bag. The investment into their own nursery was impressive. By doing this they have taken more control over their production and are better able to ensure that transplants and hygiene procedures meet necessary levels.”
- “Leader Brand was a fantastic snapshot of a 30 year-old business established by one man. It was very worthwhile visiting.”
- “The business is certainly making a great attempt in being self-sufficient by growing, packing and processing their products.”

Hugh Ritchie in Central Hawke’s Bay:

- “Fantastic operations that are not scared to implement new techniques.”
- “Hugh Ritchie and his farming systems were an excellent example of where sustainable agriculture practices need to head.”
- “Hugh’s involvement in the political side of horticultural industry was very interesting.”

Lawson’s True Earth and Halfords Exotic Produce:

- “Lawson’s True Earth Organics was an interesting stop. He stressed the value of full utilising GPS navigation on tractors in order to implement CTF and optimize efficiencies.”
- “It was great to gain an insight into ‘niche’ market operations and what hurdles they face to increase market share.”
- “It was an interesting insight into benefits and challenges faced by an organic grower. Interesting information was provided on the way organic growers battle pests.”
- “Halfords was a good opportunity to view a farm not focused on the ‘Get Big’ and do it well approach.”

Te Puia:

- “Amazing experience and natural wonders that we cannot see in Australia.”
- “Scary to think what is going on under your feet! Good to see!!”
- “It was great to get the opportunity to see some of the tourist attractions and learn about the local history and Maori culture.”

2011 Horticulture New Zealand Conference

Tour participants found the 2011 Horticulture New Zealand Conference to be a beneficial aspect of the tour. Participants had the opportunity to meet speakers and industry experts and had the opportunity to hear a range of diverse topics discussed.



* Pictures – Peter Silcock, Horticulture New Zealand CEO speaking during the conference and a picture of the Horticulture New Zealand conference Trade Show.

Tour participants' observations from the 2011 Horticulture New Zealand:

- “The opening speakers at the conference provided an interesting overview of the horticulture industry in New Zealand.”
- “There was a fantastic range of topics being discussed.”
- “The Gala Dinner was a good night. Great to see such a young farmer competition get so much attention.”
- “It was really good to learn about the Psyllid and scary to hear about its impact on the industry.”
- “The conference had speakers who spoke on a range of topics [including] the real cost of water for growing. This speech covered the importance of good water management and efficiency of use.”

Summary

The farm visits and related activities provided an opportunity for the tour participants to explore new production methods, compare production systems, in countries with similar, or even more severe, climates to Australia.

Through their attendance at 2011 Horticulture New Zealand Conference, tour participants were able to develop international networks and were able to gain a wealth of knowledge through the speakers at the Conference.

Participants' comments on the value of the tour

- “It was great to have the opportunity to meet with other likeminded young growers from Australia, New Zealand and other associated industries.”
- “It was good being able to see and hear ways of improving our farming back home and also how farmers operate on a larger scale.”
- “The whole trip was great. The people on the tour, the places we visited and the way it was structured.”
- “The chance to see New Zealand with a great group of farmers and sample their beer!!!”
- “The farm visits to major production farms such as Leader Brand and Wilcox were the highlight.”

Recommendations for future tours

1. Grower Tours are extremely beneficial to Australian growers and should continue on an annual schedule. The New Zealand Young Growers tour is proving itself as a critical educational experience to young Australian horticultural producers and is a great way to learn better practices from leading growers in our closest neighbour.
2. The ideal length for these tours seems to be consistent at 10 days.
3. It was felt that although seeing the large scale operation was a fantastic and eye opening opportunity, it is still useful to visit farms that operate on different scales to get a true feeling of how farming operations compare to Australia. This was something achieved this year and should continue on future tours.
4. Some thought should be given to including at least one Asian destination potentially Vietnam or China if there is to be a three year series of Young Growers tours to take advantage of the different climate in our winter.

Media promoting the outcomes of the tour

The following pages contain stories from trade and general media to promote the tour in accordance with AUSVEG's commitment to promoting the outcomes of R&D activities within the vegetable industry.



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Participants on the New Zealand Young Growers' Study Tour: L-R: Mark Sitter, Lisa Bellenger, Julian Bullock, Nicholas Koch, William Churchill, Joe Boratto, Kain Richards, Lydia Busby, Daryl Wilson and Natalia Wilson.

Nine days in New Zealand

In August, a tour group of 10 young Australian vegetable growers ventured to the Land of the Long White Cloud - New Zealand - to learn and experience a foreign country and its best growing practices. The Young Growers' Study Tour ran for nine days and covered the major growing centres of the North Island. Here, tour leader and AUSVEG Communications and Public Affairs Manager William Churchill relives the journey.

Our Kiwi colleagues and their motivations are often questioned in Australia. With a substantially smaller domestic market and a large focus on exporting to support the enormous size of some of their businesses, it's no wonder Australian growers keep looking over their shoulders for a stampede of New Zealanders.

But as the recent Young Growers' Study Tour to New Zealand discovered, many of the challenges faced by growers in Australia were also significant concerns across the Tasman Sea.



Days 1 and 2

The tour started in Auckland, with trips out into the Pukekohe region, which is approximately one hour from Auckland. Many of New Zealand's largest producers are based in this area.

The first farm we visited in the area was RC Hari and Sons, a local family-run operation exclusively servicing the city of Pukekohe. Geographic isolation from their competitors and having a close proximity to town minimises transport costs and are key drivers for RC Hari and Sons' to keep their overhead costs down.

Similar to Australia, the New Zealanders have difficulty in sourcing labour to work on-farm during picking seasons, and we learned that this farm suffered from a lack of locals who were willing to work the hard labour during the summer periods.

Secondly, we visited AS Wilcox and Sons, also known as Wilcox's. This farming operation sets a world standard for potato growing in New Zealand and boasts a quality that any Australian grower would aspire to. The enterprise is wholeheartedly recommended to anyone to see. Wilcox's places a high emphasis on its staff and making the work environment as comfortable for them as possible. For example,

one employee asked for some natural light in the packhouse and the response was a 4m x 6m glass window built into the side of the building.

Throughout the same packhouse "problem identification boards" are visible everywhere. All staff are encouraged to give as much feedback as possible on how to make their workplace better. This is a great concept for management at the strategic level to drive feedback from the operational level, so that workplace protocols set by upper management are practical and easily implemented.

Day 3

The third day was spent visiting marketing operations in Auckland and along the way to Rotorua. The tour visited Fresh Direct and Bidvest.

Fresh Direct was run by Peter Turner, a member of the family that ran the Turners and Growers group. Both of these companies gave growers an impression of the crate system that is used in New Zealand, which is similar to the major supermarkets' system in Australia with black crates.

The coloured crates are managed by third party companies and are leased to hire. Unlike Australia, the system in New Zealand is significantly more affordable, with an \$11 bond per crate repayable on return and a daily hire rate, which in many cases is non-existent.



Days 4 and 5

The next two days were spent at the Horticulture New Zealand Conference in Rotorua. It was an opportunity to meet growers from other regions of New Zealand and listen to the current political climate growers are working through.

New Zealand is currently debating Government Industry Agreements (GIAs). GIAs will fill a similar role to the proposed Plant Biosecurity Levy in Australia. Similar to our domestic arrangements where the response mechanism is through a separate biosecurity levy, GIAs will be another levy for the New Zealand industry.

Subsequently, there is significant debate taking place in New Zealand about how these should be managed, as growers do not wish to be levied twice.

Days 6 and 7

The tour left Rotorua after visiting the local geysers, mud and sulphur pools and a Maori culture centre. While the memories of our visit remain, the smell could not sooner be forgotten!

We proceeded east and south towards Gisborne and then Napier, our destination in Gisborne being Leader Brand.

If AS Wilcox and Sons is considered the king of their potato operation, then Leader Brand must be considered the Napoleon. With biblical operations in the North and South Islands and a substantial export operation into Japan and other countries, Leader Brand truly raises the bar.

The tour visited Leader Brand's processing plant, where they bag salads in pressurised clean rooms to ensure product integrity. So substantial is its size that the company has a team of mechanics (including three full-time apprentices) just to maintain the equipment.

We got to fully comprehend

just how much equipment the operation needed to operate when we visited Leader Brand's personal seedling nursery and its local planting fields.

The machinery storage facility on-site at the fields contained no less than 30 tractors and sprayers, including a CASE IH 9380 that was used for GPS levelling of the ground and managing water run-off.

Growers on the tour asked how Leader Brand could justify so much hardware and capital sat around and not working. We were assured that when the operation hit its peak of the season, all of the vehicles were used for the entire day. The scale of a farm that required that much hardware was impressively frightening.

Days 8 and 9

The final two days of the tour saw the group visit Lawson's True Earth, near Hastings, and Halford's Exotic Produce.

Lawson's True Earth, an organic farm, focuses on using best practice guides to manage its soil structures and combat

pests and diseases without having to resort to chemicals.

Unlike conventional farming, where herbicides are applied to knock out weeds, Lawson's True Earth uses a burner machine to spit flames in between rows of crops and literally incinerate weeds.

In summary

Overall, the tour was an exciting way for young growers to experience the international growing scene and come to better understand our counterparts across the Tasman Sea.

For the full tour report examining every farm visit

and stop along the way, please refer to the AUSVEG website (www.ausveg.com.au) through the Knowledge Management System. The final report will be uploaded in the near future and registrations for the AUSVEG website are available to any grower wishing to access the 10 years of vegetable industry R&D now available online.

This project has been funded by Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) using the National Vegetable Levy, voluntary contributions and matched funds from the Australian Government.

Project code VG11704.





Daryl and Natalia Wilson (far right) at Te Puia Hot Springs in Rotorua as part of the Young Grower's Tour of New Zealand.

Growers tour NZ

ROCKHAMPTON vegetable growers, **Daryl and Natalia Wilson** recently returned from the AUSVEG Grower's Study tour of New Zealand and say the experiences and knowledge they gained was invaluable.

The couple, who produce hydroponic lettuce and vegetables under the name Wilson's Farm Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, saw operations ranging in size from very small to very large.

"It was a great experience, the farm visits were a highlight for me," Daryl said. "Being able to discuss common issues and learn from their experiences, challenges and opportunities and how to relate them back to our operation."

Ausveg spokesman **William Churchill** described the tour as 'phenomenal'. "We have a lot to learn from our trans-Tasman brethren," he said. Nine growers were involved in the week-long tour, which

We have a lot to learn from our trans-Tasman brethren.

included farm visits on the North Island. In the Pukekohe region growers visited AS Wilcox & Son, producers of onions, potatoes and carrots. In the Gisborne region the tour visited one of LeaderBrand's farms, the largest grower, packer and shipper of buttercup squash in the world and the largest grower, packer, and shipper of broccoli, lettuce and fresh sweetcorn in New Zealand. LeaderBrand grows 3000ha of fresh produce each year for processing, domestic and international customers. Mr Wilson was struck by the different labour market characteristics of New Zealand. "Their minimum wage

appears to be between NZ\$13-\$14, which is drastically cheaper than an Australian operation, and there are no mandated maximum working hours," he said. "A lot of the workforce relies on rural employment and they have a highly trained rural workforce." He said farms were able to provide work year round, and in doing so could maintain their workforce. The growers also attended the HortNZ Conference in Auckland, which is the commercial fruit and vegetable industry showcase event of the year and attracts more than 500 growers, suppliers and industry supporters. "I would very much recommend the tour," Mr Wilson said. "I valued the networking with like-minded producers from across Australia and the opportunity to meet and interact with industry representatives." Plans are now under way for the 2012 young growers study tour, again to New Zealand.

● www.ausveg.com.au