

Media release**10 November 2021**

Growers in Victoria's North, West and South East to benefit from new VegNET extension program

Vegetable growers in Victoria's Northern, Western and South-Eastern regions are set to benefit from the next generation of a national extension program aimed to boost productivity and deliver the latest research and development on-farm.

The new \$14.1M VegNET 3.0 program is being delivered through Hort Innovation using vegetable industry levies and funds from the Australian Government, and led by Australia's peak vegetable industry body AUSVEG.

The nominated regional development officer for the region is Danielle Park. Danielle's most recent role has been as coordinator of the EnviroVeg Program with AUSVEG. Danielle has a Bachelor of Agricultural Science from the University of Melbourne, and a Master of Business Administration from Charles Sturt University. She has over 20 years' experience across a wide array of agricultural industries and roles, including on-farm operations and state government agricultural extension.

"Working with growers to help them solve challenging issues in the field, in the shed or in the business is a key focus for VegNET," said Danielle Park.

"The close ties with our grower network and the experience we have developed in extension will support the continuation of delivering good value to growers. We welcome the opportunity to work on VegNET with Hort Innovation and the other regional development officers around the country to help vegetable businesses in our region to improve the productivity, profitability and competitiveness of their businesses."

As part of VegNET 3.0, the regional development officer role will transition from previous regional extension delivery partner RM Consulting Group (RMCG) to AUSVEG. RMCG has successfully delivered VegNET in the Northern, Western and South-Eastern regions of Victoria for the past six-years, helping growers improve their growing practices and profitability.

RMCG and AUSVEG will work collaboratively over the coming months to ensure a seamless transition of the project that continues to support Victoria's vegetable growers and connect them to levy-funded R&D that fosters innovation and best practice on-farm. From a grower's perspective, it will be very much 'business as usual' for VegNET in Victoria.

According to AUSVEG CEO Michael Coote, a nationally-coordinated model for the new VegNET program will work hand-in-glove with regional organisations to produce the right mix of consistency and regionality to ensure all growers in every region have the opportunity to benefit advice and support to help grow a sustainable crop and profitable business.

"VegNET is an important program for our industry. Victorian vegetable growers are world-leaders in the production of high-quality, healthy vegetables and are constantly looking for new ways to innovate and grow more sustainably and develop their businesses," said Mr Coote.

"AUSVEG is well-placed to deliver extension for growers in Victoria's Northern, Western and South-Eastern regions as a part of a high-performing, consistent and efficient VegNET program that will meet vegetable growers' needs."

Hort Innovation Chief Executive Officer Matt Brand said the VegNET initiative complements Hort Innovation's dedicated extension arm which was created in 2019. He said it also builds on the foundation and momentum generated through previous VegNET programs.

"This supercharged 5-year extension initiative takes a collaborative, local focus, with Victoria receiving tailored support that meets local challenges," he said.

"VegNET arms growers with the latest evidence-based tools and information in vital areas such as biosecurity, pest and disease management, soil and water management, the supply chain and protected cropping."

Danielle Park is one of ten regional development officers who will work as part of the VegNET network to deliver this program. Regional development officer partners include:

| Region | Regional Development Officer (organisation) |
|---|---|
| New South Wales | Local Land Services New South Wales |
| Northern Territory | NT Farmers |
| Queensland – Bowen-Gumlu | Bowen-Gumlu Growers Association |
| Queensland – Bundaberg | Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers |
| Queensland – Lockyer Valley | Lockyer Valley Growers |
| South Australia | AUSVEG SA |
| Tasmania | RM Consulting Group |
| Victoria – Gippsland | Food and Fibre Gippsland |
| Victoria – Northern, Southern and Western | AUSVEG |
| Western Australia | vegetablesWA |

"While growers are facing significant issues with labour shortages, rising input costs and an increasingly volatile climate, the industry is well-placed to overcome these challenges and take advantage of the research and services on offer in Australia to improve its productivity and increase its value to help the agriculture sector meet its goal of \$100 billion by 2030," said Mr Coote.

"A strong extension network that connects growers with local, regional and international experts will be an important element to the industry's future success."

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