

Final Report

VegNET – Wide Bay Burnett

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Delivery partner:

Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers Cooperative Limited

Project code:

VG19009

Project:

VegNET – Wide Bay Burnett (VG19009)

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Summary

VG19009 VegNET- Wide Bay Burnett was delivered between April 2020 and September 2021 with the objective of developing and delivering specific activities for vegetable levy payers and Industry stakeholders that work in partnership with levy payers with a focus on measurable practice change. By building the capacity of Industry with tailored focus areas the project was able to assist in enhancing the profitability and productivity of Australian vegetable businesses within the Wide Bay Burnett region of Queensland. This phase of the VegNET program expanded on previous VegNET successes in the region with a dedicated Regional Development Officer. Utilising a systems approach shifted the focus of the program from being a conduit of information and insight during previous phases to an enabler of knowledge. In collaboration with a Regional Extension Advisory Group the Program developed a five-year vegetable extension strategic plan and exceeded its contracted extension output activities.

The project met all deliverables outlined in the project milestones. Extension activities included a grower and agronomist breakfast, an ICA-38 Training Course in collaboration with Biosecurity Queensland, a biosecurity and pest management workshop, an Agricultural Forum in collaboration with other stakeholders and a two-day information booth at AgroTrend an agricultural field day in the Bundaberg area. The program also contributed to quarterly columns in Vegetables Australia magazine in addition to quarterly in-house newsletters with the Delivery partner. Attendance at Hort Connections Conference provided an opportunity for the Regional Development Officer (RDO) to connect with other VegNET RDO's as well as growers, industry stakeholders and upskill in the latest R&D. The development of a five-year extension plan has positioned the program well to ensure a vision for vegetable extension in the Wide Bay area is coordinated, succinct and importantly relevant to the needs of regional producers.

The program reports a 35 percent increase in grower's awareness of vegetable R&D levy investments and the number of stakeholders engaged in extension events on previous years. Extension programs were delivered based on the stakeholder engagement plan and in collaboration with the Regional Extension Advisory Group.

Feedback from industry about the success of the project was positive with monitoring and evaluation data indicating events were well attended with good one on one engagement with growers. Forty percent of participants said the information presented was either very useful or extremely useful. When asked if the information assisted them in making changes to their business 40 percent reported 'mostly', 10 percent commented 'yes' it did, and 30 percent reported the information 'definitely' assisted them.

Public summary

In collaboration with a Regional Extension Advisory Group this Program developed a five-year vegetable extension strategic plan which has positioned the program well to ensure a vision for vegetable extension in the Wide Bay area is coordinated, succinct and importantly relevant to the needs of regional producers moving forward. A combination of extension activities was delivered for this program during uncertain COVID times and included agronomist and grower networking events, training courses in ICA-38, pest management workshops and information booths at local agricultural field days. The program resulted in a 35 percent increase in grower's awareness of vegetable R&D levy investments and the number of stakeholders engaged in extension events on previous years.

Keywords

VegNET; vegetables; extension; pest management; biosecurity

Introduction

VG19009 built on the success of VG15040 VegNET Wide Bay Burnett (2016-2020) which assisted with developing links between vegetable R&D and vegetable producers. VG19009 was developed after considering the findings of VG18003 Extension Strategy for the Australian Vegetable Industry, the VegNET mid-term review report, VegNET teams' feedback, the Vegetable Strategic Investment Advisory Panel and the Vegetable Strategic Investment Plan to develop and deliver user defined activities focused on measurable practice change.

The Vegetable Regional Development Officer (RDO) became the central contact point for vegetable producers, industry supporters, researchers and other stakeholders seeking industry information, R&D outcomes, and R&D requirements and this was achieved through the long-standing trusted relationships that the Delivery partner has with the horticulture industry in the Wide Bay Region of Queensland.

This program contributed to Outcome 5 of the Vegetable Strategic Investment Plan (2017-2021) - Improved industry capabilities for innovation and adoption, with focus on addressing Strategy 5.1 - Communications and extension.

Growing practices vary from field grown to protected cropping, traditional farming to organic and this provided the opportunity for the VegNET RDO to deliver information targeted at specific producers. Whilst this may require smaller more frequent sessions producers were able to walk away with increased knowledge which potentially leads to increased practice change.

Utilising a systems approach that recognises the complexity of the industry, the barriers to adoption and the uniqueness of each growing region was paramount to ensure Industry needs were met. The Wide Bay Burnett VegNET RDO facilitated stakeholder collaboration and delivered extension activities in collaboration with other providers that play an active role in relevant projects for producers in the Wide Bay Region. Taking a collaborative approach reduced duplication and maximized the opportunities for producers to learn and upskill.

This program built on the success of VegNET 15040 which had a positive impact on vegetable producers regarding expanding their knowledge and business capacity. As the program progressed increased engagement was witnessed across the platforms of engagement which highlights the effectiveness of the program to disseminate information that was of relevance and importance to the businesses in the target area.

Methodology

The target audience was predominately vegetable producers but also included agronomists and consultants on the understanding that these professional skilled people are in constant contact with producers and offer a broad understanding of current issues and opportunities for the sector. Through regular column contributions to Vegetables Australia magazine the program was able to extend its reach beyond the Wide Bay Burnett which supports greater industry and community support for the area.

Given the program was to build on the successes of previous VegNET programs (VG15040) the program-maintained relationships with industry partners that participated previously. These include researchers, other organisations and extension officers, universities, schools, and media connections in addition to peak industry bodies and other program Regional Development Officers to collaborate on shared learnings and opportunities.

The implementation of a regional extension advisory group (REAG) was undertaken to support the RDO and to provide advice and guidance in the development of and implementation of project activities. The group purpose of the REAG was to oversee the development and implementation of a regional extension strategy to ensure it meets the needs of the vegetable industry regionally, including growers, advisors, extension providers and other key stakeholders, to provide regional input into the industry level extension plan, to be a conduit between growers, research, extension, and the private sector both within and across regions, to ensure VG19009 stayed focused on required outcomes and importantly to act as a 'sounding board' to the RDO.

Information transfer strategies and activities that supported project development and planning included the delivery of work plans, communication plans, risk management plans, project management reports and regular project updates to the Delivery partners Board Directors. Delivery of Industry specific information and activities was achieved through workshops, small group session, forums, displays, booths at field days, social media posts, regular program updates through in-house newsletters and general attendance by the RDO at extension activities not organised by the program to continue building networks and relationships with industry and growers specifically. The RDO attended upskilling events including Hort Connections Conference in addition to an accidental counsellor training session and first aid course to ensure the RDO had a greater understanding and awareness of how to support growers in times of distress.

Using the extensive database of the Delivery partner information regarding the VegNET program was disseminated, including news of upcoming events. This database was continually updated to ensure as many contacts in the Wide Bay were informed and as involved as possible. The RDO utilised numerous platforms of communication including traditional and non-traditional extension activities including one-on-one, phone, SMS, email, newsletter, hard copy and social media.





VG19009 Project Leader Bree Grima on farm at Austchilli, Australia's largest chilli producer which is based in the Wide Bay Burnett Region.

Outputs

Whole of project deliverables (Outputs)	Summary Report on achievement
Participation in Extension Training	<p>Achieved</p> <p>The RDO participated in all Extension Training Modules supplied by Sean Kenny at Rural Consulting Group. These Modules / sessions included</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training Module 1 – The How and Why of Extension • Training Module 2 – Developing Regional Extension Strategies • One on one support – Regional Discussion Paper Review • IDO Discussion Paper Reviews – shared progress with VegNET teams • Project Development and Design Training Zoom session • Training Module 3 – From Strategy to Action Part 1 • Training Module 4 – From Strategy to Action Part 2 <p>In addition to the formal extension training modules and sessions the RDO participated in VegNET team extension videos where support and resources were shared and discussed with other VegNET RDO’s.</p>
Development of Regional Extension Plan 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2025	<p>Achieved</p> <p>The Regional Extension Plan was drafted by the VegNET RDO with support from the professional development team provided through the program. A process was accessed to define priority areas for future action will guide future investment in Vegetable extension and identify cross regional and national priorities for extension activities. Key components of the Regional Extension Plan included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context, challenges, and opportunities <p>This recognised key characteristics of the region and the challenges and opportunities facing growers. The physical, social, and economic elements of vegetation production were explored, and challenges and opportunities were summarized into 4 key focus areas with reference to their alignment in key strategic documents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional scan <p>A Regional scan was applied to each of the key focus areas and documented current RD&E activities in the Region. Key themes of what has or is being done in the focus area, what and where is the work targeted, what changes are sought and who will this benefit the target audience were addressed in the regional scan for each focus area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gap Identification <p>This component addressed what and where the gaps and services were that could be delivered.</p> <p>From the regional extension plan, four specific topics were further explored and developed into project briefs. Including</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Plastic Waste 2. Organic Waste 3. Ag Tech

	4. Biosecurity
Coordination of a Regional Extension Advisory Group (REAG)	<p>Achieved</p> <p>The Regional Extension Advisory Group (REAG) is a vital component of the VegNET transition from a conduit of information to an enabler of change. The REAG consists of key stakeholders established as per the terms of reference with the Regional Strategy as a key output.</p>
Develop and Implement Work Plan 1 July 2020 – 30 Sep 2021	<p>Achieved</p> <p>The Workplan guided the RDO in their delivery of the program. The RDO committed to delivering minimum three extension activities during this period in addition to supplying quarterly <i>Vegetables Australia</i> column and contributing to the in-house newsletter that shares R&D activities and outputs. All outputs were met.</p>
Stakeholder engagement plan	<p>Achieved</p> <p>A stakeholder engagement plan was developed to explore the links between stakeholder organisations, and the engagement being sought from each. The plan addressed stakeholders in various categories including Industry, Funding Bodies, community groups, local organisations, and growers.</p> <p>The role of and communication and engagement strategies for each stakeholder was explored noting each stakeholder responds differently to communication methods.</p>
Program Logic M&E Pan	<p>Achieved</p> <p>Four Program Logics and M&E plans were developed for the four regional strategies identified by the Regional Extension Advisory Group for the five-year extension plan. The four strategy topics included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting increased uptake of Ag Technologies on vegetable farms in the Wide Bay Burnett • Coordinated Pest Management for the Wide Bay Region • What to do with waste – organic waste in the Wide Bay Burnett • Reducing on farm plastic waste in the Wide Bay Burnett <p>The M&E plans explored activities and outputs of the program, the measurement tools within each activity, the method used for data collection and those responsible for activity. The plans also explored the desired change by service providers, KASA change by growers, the practice change sought from farmers and the desired outcomes.</p> <p>In addition to this the plans explored the reporting requirements for each activity, which included progress reports, articles, papers, presentations, annual reports and final milestone reports.</p>
KPI Data	<p>Achieved</p> <p>KPI data was captured as part of the M&E Plans and project workplans and is captured below.</p>
Risk Register	<p>Achieved</p> <p>A risk register was developed to address risks, potential causes, potential impacts, and controls to manage risks. This included loss of key project personal, grower push back, low attendance rates or interest levels, damaging weather events and COVID pandemic restrictions among others.</p>

<p>Milestone Reports</p>	<p>Achieved</p> <p>Milestone 102 - October 2020</p> <p>Milestone 103 – December 2020</p> <p>Milestone 104 – May 2021</p> <p>Milestone 190 – Final Report Oct 2021</p>	
<p>Minimum 3 Extension activities with minimum 10 attendees at each</p>	<p>Achieved</p> <p>Seven events held with total 223 participants, detailed below.</p> <p>This program saw a 35 percent increase on previous years in grower awareness of vegetable R&D levy investments and number of stakeholders engaged in extension events.</p> <p>Feedback from industry about the success of the project was positive with monitoring and evaluation data indicating events were well attended with good one on one engagement with growers. Forty percent of participants said the information presented was either very useful or extremely useful. When asked if the information assisted them in making changes to their business 40 percent reported 'mostly', 10 percent commented 'yes' it did, and 30 percent reported the information 'definitely' assisted them.</p>	
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Extension Events</p>	<p>Grower and Agronomist Breakfast</p>	<p>Achieved – held 25th February 2021</p> <p>The Grower/Agronomist Breakfast was held on 25th February at Rowers on the River with 15 in attendance. Speakers included Dr Siva Subramaniam, senior entomologist at Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, John Duff, ASQ Plant Protectionist, Tim Fischer, Biosecurity Qld and Jessy Logan, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Topics covered include fall armyworm, serpentine leaf miner, market access update for cucumber green mottle mosaic virus and regional updates. Whilst RSVP numbers were higher a last-minute clashing event resulted in fewer attending the actual event.</p> 
	<p>ICA-38 Training Course</p>	<p>Achieved – held 12th February 2021</p> <p>In collaboration with Biosecurity Queensland the RDO held a pest management training course for local growers on 12th February in Bundaberg. With total twelve attendees plus presenters this 6-hour intensive course introduced participants to and provided an understanding of domestic quarantine and market access systems in Australia, the role of interstate certification systems, the role of an authorised inspection person operating within the ICA scheme, melon thrips biology and identification and sampling and inspection techniques for fruits, vegetables, live plants, cut</p>

		flowers and foliage of suspect melon thrips. Participants were provided with a course completion certificate identifying them as an ICA-38 Approved Inspection Person which will allow them to issue ICA-38 certificates on their farm prior to product being sent interstate. Melon thrips are particularly damaging to eggplant, capsicum, chili, rockmelon and cucumber. Participants received a pest monitoring kit, biosecurity signage for their farm and resources including the Ausveg Vegetable Biosecurity Guide.
	Biosecurity and Pest Management Workshop	Achieved –held 17 th March 2021 in Gympie The RDO collaborated with Growcom to deliver a biosecurity and pest management workshop in the Gympie region on 17 th March. This workshop covered beneficial insects as part of a wider pest management program, developments in technology to improve accuracy of infield detections, biosecurity plans and best management practice in pesticide use. Speakers included Callum Fletcher from Ausveg, Dr Nancy Schellhorn from RapidAIM, Paul Jones from Bugs for Bugs and the Growcom BMP Facilitator. This was a well-attended event with 30 guests, predominately growers and some industry.
	Understanding systemic and non systemics workshop	Achieved – 26 th May 2021 A workshop was held for a small group of growers to provide practical information on the best times to apply systemic and non-systemic products and how they affect the plant at various growth phases which was well received by those present. 
Additional Extension Activities not in workplan	Bundaberg AgForum	Achieved – held 30 th April 2021 The RDO collaborated with other key stakeholders to coordinate and deliver AgForum 2021 held Friday 30 th April at CQUniversity. This event included a keynote address from Trade Commissioners in Singapore, Indonesia, and Hong Kong in addition to presentations on best management practice in horticulture, current water innovations and the AgTech Initiative and trials in the region. The RDO facilitated an employment panel session involving two vegetable growers and two industry stakeholders to discuss how growers have managed through COVID restrictions and strategies utilised to maximise their on-farm efficiencies. The four-hour event was well attended with over 50 people attending in-person at the University and another 20-participating online.

	 <p>The top photograph shows five people seated on a stage for a panel discussion. A large screen behind them displays 'AgFuture Employment Issues in the Agriculture Sector Panel Session'. To the right, a blue banner reads 'Visa options for working in Australia' with the AusIndustry logo. The bottom photograph shows a large audience seated at tables in a conference room, facing a stage area with a screen and banners.</p>
<p>Information booth at two-day Agricultural Field Day Agrotrend</p>	<p>Achieved – held 30th April to 1st May 2021</p> <p>Agrotrend is a two-day agricultural field day in the Bundaberg Region coordinated by Rotary. VegNET Wide Bay Burnett shared a booth with other Delivery partner projects and during the busy two days there were lots of growers and community members stopping by to discuss all things horticulture. Agrotrend was attended by over 5000 patrons and the resources provided were popular particularly the cucumber greenhouse management toolkit, green beans / sweet potato and sweet corn toolbox booklets on insect pests, beneficials and diseases, and other biosecurity themed brochures and signs. Of the 80 VegNET resources taken to the Event only 30 were brought back and each item represents genuine discussions and enquiries from producers.</p>
<p>Pineapple Field Day</p>	<p>Achieved – 9th July 2021</p> <p>A VegNET trade booth was held at the 2021 Pineapple Field Day, even though pineapples are not a vegetable levy crop there are many producers that grow pineapples in addition to vegetable crops. The Event was well attended by over 40 growers and industry, and the booth was popular handing out lots of biosecurity signs, pest management booklets for vegetable crops and other VegNET resources.</p>

		 
<p>Quarterly column in Vegetables Australia magazine</p>	<p>Achieved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 2020 • July 2020 • October 2020 • January 2021 • April 2021 • July 2021 • October 2021 	
<p>Quarterly in-house newsletter update sharing R&D links and extension outputs</p>	<p>Achieved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 2020 #Issue 20 • July 2020 #Issue 21 • September 2020 #Issue 22 • January 2021 #Issue 1 • May 2021 #Issue 2 • July 2021 # Issue 3 • August 2021 #Issue 4 • October 2021 #Issue 5 	

Outcomes

Priority Focus Area	What changes are sought from the M&E plans	Who	VegNET 2.0 outcomes
Supporting increased uptake of Ag Tech on vegetable farms	50% of attendees in the program increase their awareness of product opportunities.	Growers	20.42% (n=67) of total growers reached through in-house newsletters increased awareness of AgTech products and opportunities. 40% (n=20) of participants attending Forums were engaged directly in one-on-one discussions
	25% of attendees in program commit to accessing and implementing commercial AgTech products	growers	30% of current trials in the region (n=6) are on vegetable farms with growers committed to implementing commercial products including smart traps, heat management, drone technology, packaging robotics and farm management systems.
	25% of growers involved report increased on farm efficiencies	growers	This will be a priority focus area for VegNET 3.0
Reducing on farm plastic waste in the Wide Bay Burnett	50% of attendees in the program increase their awareness of product opportunities	Suppliers	This will be a priority focus area for VegNET 3.0
	20% of attendees in program initiate new plastic waste management reduction practices.	Growers	This will be a priority focus area for VegNET 3.0
What to do with organic waste?	50% of attendees in the program increase their awareness of product opportunities	Suppliers	33.69% (n=111) of total growers reached increased their awareness through in-house newsletters
	20% of attendees in program initiate new waste management reduction practices.	Growers	This will be a priority focus area for VegNET 3.0
Coordinated Pest Management for the Wide Bay Region	80% of attendees in the program increase their awareness of pest activity and management in the area	Growers	45.88% (n-151) of total growers reached increased their awareness through in-house newsletters 100% (n=57) of participants attending workshops and forums increased their awareness 50 one on one discussions held with participants at a two-day field day,
	50% of attendees in program implement best management practices for prevention and management of pests	Growers	100% (n=12) participants attended accredited training course, certificate of completion indicates intent to implement best management practice to ensure ICA-38 regulations are met

Outcomes continued

VG19009 continued to connect vegetable growers in the Wide Bay Burnett with R&D programs and Industry stakeholders through the developed networks and strengthened relationships obtained through previous VegNET programs. The Program enhanced the reach of R&D programs through increasing grower awareness and potential adoption of existing R&D project outputs and promoted industry needs and capability building opportunities.

The project outcomes sought included:

Key Performance Indicators	Outcome achieved
Increase in grower's awareness of vegetable R&D levy investment	Grower interaction and awareness of vegetable R&D levy investment has increased by 35 percent on previous years. 329 participants actively engaged with vegetable R&D levy investment information and projects.
Increase in stakeholders accessing levy funded research findings and outcomes	Minimal. The program shared findings of levy funded programs however it was not regularly requested by growers
Increase in stakeholders engaged in extension events	Stakeholder engagement in extension events has increased by 35 percent on previous years.
Extension programs delivered, based on stakeholder engagement plans	During the project period there was a 46 percent interest rate recorded for biosecurity and pest management topics therefore there was a heavy focus on these topics for extension activities.
Increase in grower knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspirations in identified best management practices and innovations relevant to the region	This program saw a 35 percent increase on previous years in grower awareness of vegetable R&D levy investments and number of stakeholders engaged in extension events.
Increase in growers changing their practices due in part to vegetable R&D levy investments	30 percent of participants reported they were assisted in making changes to their business.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation plans were developed for the four key priority areas to be addressed in future funding models and for VegNET 3.0. These plans explored activities and outputs of the programs, the measurement tools within each activity, the method used for data collection and those responsible for activity. The plans also explored the desired change by service providers, KASA change by growers, the practice change sought from farmers and the desired outcomes.

In addition to this the plans explored the reporting requirements for each activity, which included progress reports, articles, papers, presentations, annual reports and final milestone reports.

The expected impact of VG19009 was that due to this funding seven percent (7%) of regional stakeholders adopt one or more targeted management improvements of innovation practices and that seven percent of regional growers would make one or more change that improve their productivity and or profitability. An example may be, changes in practices relating to agronomic advice, irrigation and water efficiency, reef management sediment control, improved record keeping assisting with compliance with quality assurance programs, fostering of biosecurity and pest management control measures on and off farm. Given 223 growers were engaged directly with extension activities plus another 6500 recipients were in receipt of the Vegetables Australia Magazine and Delivery partner newsletters the impact of VG19009 is considered significant.

Based on direct engagement activities seven percent of regional stakeholders relates to 15 regional producers having adopted one or more targeted management improvements due to this program. Based off anecdotal evidence and in speaking with producers this conservative estimate has been achieved. Six regional producers have committed to accessing Ag Technologies to improve on farm efficiencies, these cover the topics of fruit fly, protected cropping, fall armyworm, drone technology, farm management software and packing shed robotics. These trials have been implemented across a range of vegetable crops including chilli, corn, eggplant, and cucumber. In addition to this, two regional producers attending the systemics and non-systemics workshop have

committed to developing and implementing tailored spray programs and nine producers have committed to installing DTN Weather Stations and allowing public access to this data providing localised weather data for all producers.

R, D & E Events

Exceeded contractual commitments by 57 percent holding seven events held with total 223 participants

Feedback from industry about the success of the project was positive with monitoring and evaluation data indicating events were well attended with good one on one engagement with growers. Forty percent of participants said the information presented was either very useful or extremely useful. When asked if the information assisted them in making changes to their business 40 percent reported 'mostly', 10 percent commented 'yes' it did, and 30 percent reported the information 'definitely' assisted them.

Newsletters

The Delivery partners newsletter contains information and resources from several different funded programs. Engagement with VegNET resources has been actively increasing as the program progressed. 1244 participants received newsletters during the project period with 611 participants opening and actively engaging with the content resulting in an open rate of 49 percent, well above the 21.33 percent expected open rate set by MailChimp. Of the 611 engaged participants 329 clicked on VegNET specific resources. Of this 20 percent was related to AgTech information, 34 percent to organic waste information and 46 percent in response to biosecurity extension information.

Social Media

The Delivery partner social media reach during the project period was 46,587 for Facebook and 1,071 for Instagram. The age and gender of participants engaging with the pages for Facebook are predominately women (60.7 percent) and then men (39.3 percent) with a more even split for women (56.4 percent) and men (43.6 percent) for Instagram. Most of those interacting are within the age brackets of 35-44 and 45-54 for both platforms.

Website

Over the last twelve months the Delivery partner website was accessed by 7,602 users resulting in 24,462 page views. Peak activity was recorded across the months of April / May / June which correlates with many extension events held during this time.

Key evaluation topics of the program

Effectiveness

Given the program has reported a 35 percent increase in participation rate of extension activities this program has been effective in continuing the link between producers and the RDO established by the VegNET program. This program has achieved its intended investment outcome and benefit to growers with room to expand on future outputs. Hort Innovation provided ongoing support services to the RDO's through the R&D Manager and connectivity between programs was maintained.

Program relevance

This program was developed to assist vegetable producers access research and development information relevant to the industry and individual commodities. Through improved extension and communication of the Vegetable R&D Program this program was delivered flexibly at the regional level which assisted with meeting the geographically diverse vegetable grower needs of the area. Flexibility within programs such as this are paramount to ensure topics delivered are of relevance to producers at the time. Forty percent of participants said the information presented was either very useful or extremely useful.

Program Appropriateness

Allowing flexible delivery ensured the program was relevant and appropriate for producers. As each region is vastly different and affected by different challenges and opportunities this program as per other VegNET programs was delivered within its own framework all working towards Outcome 5 of the Vegetable Strategic Investment Plan –

Improved industry capabilities for innovation and adoption and Strategy 5.1 Communication and extension. This program contributed to strengthening the VegNET brand, provided an appropriately skilled Regional Development Officer, improved communication of the Vegetable R&D Levy and identified industry needs and priority focus areas for future funded extension programs.

Program Efficiency

The timing of events and other outputs ensured efficient use of resources and contributed to a steady flow of information to producers. Whilst COVID played a role in the coordination of extension activities and reduced the availability of some researchers to visit the region workshops were able to be developed and delivered mostly on an as-needs basis and planned in conjunction with other extension officers to ensure regional events did not clash.

Recommendations

Given the outcomes of VegNET 2.0 Wide Bay Burnett it is recommended funding continue to support further delivery of this program and that the regional industry representative continue to deliver this program ensuring the information and opportunities presented are of relevance to the industry and individual commodities.

Refereed scientific publications

The below item was published during the reporting period. Whilst not a VegNET activity nor did funding support the development of this activity the publication has relevance to the program moving forward as it discusses grower awareness and adoption of improved irrigation management practices and names the VegNET Regional Development Officer as co-author.

Journal article

Keoch, R., Haase, M., Grima, B., Taylor, B., 2021. Barriers and measures to improve adoption of irrigation technologies: A case study from the Bundaberg region in Queensland, Australia. *Irrig. And Drain.* 2021;1-15

References

NIL

Intellectual property, commercialisation and confidentiality

No project IP, project outputs, commercialisation or confidentiality issues to report

Acknowledgements

The Delivery partner thanks the many participating growers and advisors for their contribution to this program. As delivery partner of the VegNET Wide Bay Burnett Program since its inception in 2016 the organisation has been fortunate enough to have worked with hundreds of producers over that time, many of whom have made changes to their farming practices because of the information delivered.

We also like to thank the other VegNET programs specifically the Queensland VegNET RDO's in Bowen and Lockyer Valley for their ongoing support. Regular teleconferences with these two Delivery partners provided not only an opportunity to discuss upcoming events but challenges and opportunities to collaborate.

We acknowledge the value and support of the Regional Extension Advisory Group and thank them for their contribution to and guidance of the program. The mix of grower and researcher input ensured the five-year extension plan will target topics of relevance and commercial applicability to regional producers.

Finally, we thank Hort Innovation for the funding support to implement this project and for sharing our vision and belief in the importance of regionally delivered extension programs.

Appendices

NIL