

GROWER SUCCESS STORIES

REAL RESULTS
FROM THE
VEGETABLE R&D
LEVY

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Australia



Ongoing investment in research and development (R&D) is key to enhancing the productivity, efficiency and profitability of the Australian vegetable industry.

The 2016 edition of *Grower Success Stories: Real results from the vegetable R&D levy* shares the stories of Australian growers who have successfully incorporated vegetable levy-funded R&D onto their growing operations and experienced real-world business success as a result.

Each year, Hort Innovation invests a significant amount of National Vegetable Levy and matching Australian Commonwealth Government funds on behalf of vegetable growers. These R&D investments are aimed at enhancing the production of Australian vegetable growing operations, open new avenues for market development and provide growers with the tools and knowledge they need to meet consumer demands.

On-farm, the levy-funded Soil Wealth program has continued to educate growers about the important role that soil plays in crop productivity and efficiency. David East currently hosts a demonstration site in Manjimup, Western Australia, and he shares his success in this booklet.

Sustainability is a key concern for many businesses and the EnviroVeg program is an excellent resource for growers to make the most efficient use of their land. In this edition, South Australian grower Duy Ly explains how the program has helped his business to create a credible brand that is environmentally responsible in the minds of the consumer.

Vegetable levy funds are also invested in gathering market intelligence and data that help to build market access overseas for Australian growers. Ryan McLeod from Dicky Bill Australia has worked closely with the Vegetable Industry Market Access and Development Program throughout 2016 and has built key contacts to export produce to Asia.

The opportunity for levy-paying growers to visit leading vegetable farms overseas has inspired hundreds of grower attendees over the years. Claire Russell was one of eight female growers to visit a range of European growing operations in 2015 and has since applied the knowledge gained from this experience to her current role in Tasmania.

The annual Global Innovations in Horticulture Seminar is another platform for growers to learn about technological advances that are transforming farms across the world. Mike Badcock, a Tasmanian industry stalwart, attended the 2016 seminar which inspired growers to think about how global technologies can work on Australian farms.

While the growers profiled in this booklet are leaders in their own right, the vegetable industry is fortunate to have the Growing Leaders program to develop personal, business and industry skills in emerging leaders. Kane Busch from Victoria is a graduate of the 2016 program and he has already found it to be of immense benefit to his business.

These case studies and many more testify that the Australian vegetable industry is seeing the benefit of its levy investment in R&D and I look forward to seeing many more growers benefit from this investment in years to come.

Yours sincerely,
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DAVID EAST

Building soil wealth



Western Australian lettuce grower David East knows a thing or two about how to make his plants happy and the answer, he says, lies in the soil.

It is why he turned to using caliente mustard as a biofumigant green manure in his rotation five years ago.

And he has never looked back, claiming the practice has been beneficial for the health and productivity of his crops.

Benefits of biofumigation

Biofumigation is the use of specialised green manure crops which are grown, mulched and incorporated into the soil before the planting of the next crop in order to suppress soil borne pests, diseases and weeds.

"I am extremely satisfied with the results," David says. Together with his wife, Lee and more recently his three sons, he has been growing baby leaf and contract lettuce in Manjimup over the warmer months for more than 16 years.

“ The whole chemistry of the soil has benefited. ”

"My lettuce looks healthier, the soil holds moisture better and I've seen a reduction in soil borne diseases and weeds, which has resulted in fewer seedling losses and less fungicide use in subsequent crops. The whole chemistry of the soil has benefited."

The East's production season begins with the first plantings of lettuce and baby leaf in late September and the final harvest is in late May.

"We sow the mustard seed in April-May

after the crop residues of the summer leaf program have been incorporated," he says.

"Because the caliente crop is deep rooted, a lot of the nutrients are brought up from deep in the soil profile and recycled, which reduces the need for pre-plant fertilisers for the caliente. Herbicides are not needed as caliente has a large canopy which blankets any weeds."

Sharing knowledge

In September 2015, David and Lee East hosted a field day on their Manjimup property as part of the Soil Wealth program.

David spoke to visiting growers and industry specialists about the benefits he had observed using the caliente and offered tips on implementing the practice.

Jointly run by Applied Horticultural Research and RM Consultancy Group, the program provides Australian growers with practical information and valuable resources on soil management to help them get the most out of their land and achieve long-term returns.

"We've hosted a number of demonstrations for this project since 2015, which gives us the chance to share our experience with other growers in the region," David says.

He explained that while biofumigation was a safe and effective way for growers to increase their soil fertility and combat soil borne pathogens, its benefits depended on local soil conditions and the type of crop grown.

"Caliente is not a silver bullet, but simply one part of your management system.

"Growers should consider what crops they want to grow, what diseases they want to mitigate and how it fits into their rotation."



Photographs by Jessica Liebrechts.

Summary:

- The Soil Wealth program (Project VG13076), is a levy-funded project that aims to highlight to growers the importance of soil in the productivity and efficiency of crop growth.
- David East has observed a number of benefits since using a crop cover of caliente mustard for green manure and biofumigation purposes into his cropping mix in Manjimup, Western Australia.
- These benefits include the suppression of soil borne diseases and weeds, an improvement in the soil's moisture holding capacity and a healthier, more fertile soil.
- The Soil Wealth program has been funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia Limited using the National Vegetable Levy and funds from the Australian Government.

DUY LY

Ahead of the pack

Photographs by asbCreative.

For companies that rely on high quality, naturally grown produce, making the environment a top priority should be a “no brainer”, says Duy Ly, Chief Executive Officer of 4 Ways Fresh.

The South Australian-based business, which has recently expanded with sites in Geraldton, Western Australia and now Vietnam, has been proudly associated with the EnviroVeg program since 2015.

The program was a natural fit for the thriving vegetable growing operation according to Duy, who says the decision to adopt new sustainable farming practices reflected the direction in which the organisation was heading. This was one of the reasons he was awarded the AUSVEG SA Grower of the Year award in 2016.

“It’s an ongoing process that takes into account every aspect of the business, from the way we manage our waste and water to how our staff view the company,” he explains.

A sustainable mindset

4 Ways Fresh is one of the largest suppliers of fresh produce in most Australian states to major supermarket chains, including Coles, Woolworths, IGA and Costco Wholesale.

“Our customers are becoming increasingly concerned with the environment and how their food is sourced,” Duy says.

“EnviroVeg allows us to be seen as environmentally responsible and credible, which is the lasting impression we want our brand to create in the minds of our consumers.

“It highlights what we are doing well and what we can do better so we are positioned ahead of the pack.”

Today, Duy is enjoying the benefits of the program as a Platinum member, the highest level of EnviroVeg membership.

This involves external auditors examining his property to ensure environmental best practice procedures are undertaken.

The system allows him to easily audit the resources used in the production process to

achieve optimum productivity and efficient use of land.

For Duy, the audits were valuable in highlighting the benefits of improving environmental management at 4 Ways Fresh.

Streamlining processes

According to Duy, a number of strategies were developed to help mitigate the business’ impact on the environment. These included harvesting more water and appropriately managing and disposing of large quantities of waste and unwanted materials.

“Not only were we not separating a lot of our waste, but we were paying a lot of money to get rid of it,” he explains.

By taking some simple steps to reduce the level of waste that goes into landfill, Duy is reaping significant cost savings.

He says he is also profiting from the environmental improvements in his business.

“ (EnviroVeg) highlights what we are doing well and what we can do better so we are positioned ahead of the pack. ”

“We are getting a return on our unwanted plastic and cardboard, and our vegetable waste is sent to animal farms for consumption.

“We have also looked into our power consumption and have invested heavily in solar power at our SA facility in Virginia.

“This means we are less reliant on the grid and we can generate a lot of power ourselves, while also reducing our overall costs.”

Duy says becoming certified under the EnviroVeg program this year coincided with a visit from Vietnamese Government representatives.

“They were impressed with what we were

doing with EnviroVeg and asked if we could implement a similar system in Vietnam, which we are currently working to achieve,” he says.



Summary:

- The EnviroVeg program (Project VG12008) is the vegetable industry’s own environmental program developed specifically for vegetable growers.
- Duy Ly from South Australia has been associated with the program for a number of years and is an EnviroVeg Platinum member.
- He is also a champion of the Vietnamese translated version of the EnviroVeg manual, taking this resource to the Vietnamese Government to discuss the value of the program.
- The EnviroVeg Program has been funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia using the National Vegetable Levy and funds from the Australian Government.

Ryan McLeod

The resources to succeed



Photographs by Lisa Hayman.

Baby leaf salad producer Dicky Bill Australia made its first foray into the global export market earlier this year, but getting there took a great deal of patience, research and planning.

“It wasn’t a decision we rushed into,” says Company Director Ryan McLeod.

“Exporting overseas is a whole different ball game. We knew it would be a steep learning curve, which is why we devoted a lot of time and energy into assessing the advantages and challenges and ensuring we got our objectives right.”

When he was satisfied that the fourth-generation farming business was ready to take on a global market, Ryan applied for a position to attend the Food and Hotel Asia trade show in Singapore in April 2016.

Global market insight

The event, which was delivered as part of the Vegetable Industry Market Access and Development Program, allowed Ryan to visit a range of importer and retail supermarkets where he received an invaluable insight into the Singaporean market and supply chain.

“Through my involvement in the program over the past two years, I have promoted our produce at the Reverse Trade Mission on the Gold Coast, which was held in June. I then went on to attend Asia Fruit Logistica in September this year,” he says.

The Vegetable Industry Market Access and Development Program aims to improve market access for vegetable growers looking to increase their trade through exports.

Ryan says the trade shows are a great way for growers to meet face-to-face with distributors under the one roof and to identify markets where their products would have the best opportunity for success.

“I wanted to understand how foreign markets operate and what happens logistically with our produce to maintain cold

chain integrity from when it lands in a foreign country,” he says.

A strong commitment

Today, Dicky Bill Australia sends multiple shipments per week of its product range, both retail-ready and wholesale, to Singapore.

While having a product that is in demand in an overseas market is vital for success, so too is the necessary commitment, resources, skills and information to support sustained exporting activities over the long-term.

“It is important that we demonstrate our ability and commitment to long-term supply relationships of this nature, and build buyer confidence in us as a supplier,” Ryan says.

“Showcasing our business on an international platform has also made us more conscious of the quality of our produce.”

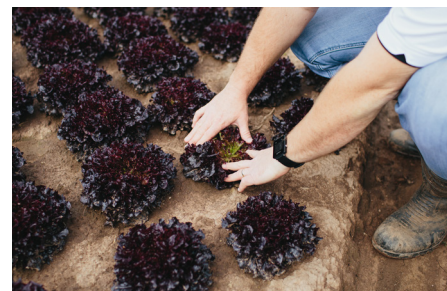
“Exhibiting at these trade shows and linking with international buyers allowed us to determine whether there was a willing customer base and that our pricing was in line with target market expectations.

“Showcasing our business on an international platform has also made us more conscious of the quality of our produce, especially when considering the costs of shipping and international marketing.”

He encouraged export-ready growers, as well as those interested in exporting, to contact the AUSVEG Export Development team for help or clarification around free trade agreements and market access.

“The AUSVEG Export Development team helps to navigate any language

barriers and cultural nuances, and filtered a lot of relevant information which we could leverage to expand our business opportunities abroad.”



Summary:

- Project VG13097 identifies opportunities for vegetable growers to investigate the export trade and helps them navigate the process to increase production through exports, with the ultimate aim of improving profitability.
- Vegetable grower Ryan McLeod’s involvement with the program has enabled him to access resources, attend export-themed industry seminars and events, meet with international buyers through the Reverse Trade Mission and attend international fresh produce trade shows.
- The Vegetable Industry Market Access and Development Program has been funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia using the National Vegetable Levy and funds from the Australian Government.

CLAIRE RUSSELL

Woman on a mission



Photographs by Loic Le Guilly.

Setting foot in the Tasmanian horticulture industry four years ago, Claire Russell made it her mission to absorb as much knowledge as possible.

A former senior agronomist, Claire was recently appointed Production Manager for salad ingredients at Houston's Farm in the state's Coal River Valley region, which produces fresh, ready-to-eat baby lettuce and herbs.

With innovation, know-how and good old-fashioned hard work underpinning the company, the Tasmanian is always looking for ways to make "more valuable contributions to Houston's production system".

"I am responsible for ensuring we have the best inputs and management techniques in place to maintain a healthy crop, so we have quality leaves available for harvest on a year-round basis," she says.

"I also spend a lot of time talking to seed reps and overseeing in-house variety trials, and I try to get to as many grower workshops and field days as I can, because building professional networks is something I am passionate about."

Expanding knowledge and networks

When the opportunity presented itself for Claire to attend a levy-funded mission geared specifically towards women in the vegetable industry, she leapt at it.

The 2015 Women in Horticulture Industry Leadership and Development Mission took eight participants on a two-week tour throughout leading vegetable growing operations and other innovative agribusinesses in the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland and Germany.

"Apart from a couple of trips to New Zealand, I had never been exposed to any production systems outside of Australia, so I was eager to learn about new ways of doing things," Claire says.

"The mission was a great opportunity to

broaden my existing skillset and, of course, travel as part of a group of strong, successful, like-minded women."

During the mission, participants were introduced to new farming methods, equipment, technologies and strategies currently being used in European horticulture.

European innovation

Claire says many of the countries visited were widely recognised for setting impressive benchmarks in their operations.

She says the horticulture sector in the Netherlands had a particularly strong focus on innovation.

“ The mission was a great opportunity to broaden my existing skillset and, of course, travel as part of a group of strong, successful, like-minded women. ”

"Bird Control Group has developed a laser system that ensure birds are kept at a safe distance from commercial and agriculture activity," she explains.

"Birds are a major problem for farmers – they can transmit diseases and significantly damage crops.

"The system is animal-friendly but extremely effective in repelling the birds."

Claire says she was inspired by the creativity and "aromatic architecture" on show at Koppert Cress, a Netherlands-based company that collaborated with chefs and mixologists to create uniquely flavoured micro-greens, micro-vegetables and other specialties.

"We also went to Crop's NV vegetable processor in Geer, Belgium, which specialises in different value-adding products and uses

a bio-gas production system to manage its waste," she says.

The mission recognised the pivotal role that women play in the Australian vegetable industry and allowed participants to develop networks and discuss mutual areas of interest.

Claire started her career 15 years ago at a time when the industry was "very male-dominated", but she says the industry had become "much more supportive and accepting of women" and the diverse skills they brought to the table.

"There are more opportunities to step up in leadership roles," Claire says.

Summary:

- Project VG13706 provided an opportunity for eight leading female vegetable levy payers to visit innovative vegetable growing operations, processors, research facilities, the world-famous Agritechnica trade show and other industry representatives in the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland and Germany.
- Claire Russell, from Houston's Farm in Tasmania, attended the mission and enjoyed the opportunity to visit leading growing operations overseas and network with her peers.
- The 2015 Women in Horticulture Industry Leadership and Development Mission was funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia using the National Vegetable Levy and funds from the Australian Government.

MIKE BADCOCK

Future is bright for farming



Photographs by Belle Young.

The Australian horticultural sector is evolving at a rapid pace, with advances in technology and innovation challenging growers to keep one step ahead of the curve.

Sixth-generation farmer Mike Badcock is no stranger to the transformative power of emerging technologies on the competitive dynamics of the industry.

Mike, of Enchanted Isle Farms at Forth on Tasmania's north-west coast, is confident the future is promising for Australian vegetable growers but says farmers must be willing to adapt their practices if they are to survive in a global food market.

"Australian farmers are at the forefront of these innovations – they should be looking at ways to meet future demands while cutting costs and driving productivity and growth in their operations," he says.

Global thinking

Mike, whose industry involvement has included roles at AUSVEG and the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, was one of the attendees at the Global Innovations in Horticulture Seminar held at the Gold Coast on Thursday 23 June 2016.

With a focus on new innovations from world-renowned experts, the seminar showcased a variety of ideas and technologies that will allow growers to become more efficient, more productive and ultimately, more profitable.

Participants also had the opportunity to field questions to speakers while discussing the importance and challenges of incorporating scientific and technical innovation into modern Australian farming practices.

"The speakers covered a wide range of topics including everything from precision agriculture and robotic technology to processing machinery, genetic modification, agricultural economics, pollination and plant breeding," Mike explains.

He says the seminar highlighted a number of key areas where technology could be

utilised by the companies he supplied to enhance productivity.

"Precision irrigation is a case in point of how water resource and irrigation innovations can result in significant savings for agricultural communities.

“Robotics are a very attractive option for farmers who are looking to improve efficiency and reduce costs.”

"It's really a game-changer for growers who can precision irrigate their fields and boost their yield, which will mean more efficient use of time, labour, water, costs and machinery.

"We also can't discount the benefits of Integrated Pest Management (IPM), which is probably one of the most effective ways that R&D funding has been spent.

"There are major gains being driven by IPM in methods of agricultural production – Australia is nearly back to chemical-free production processes in many cases, which is an incredible outcome."

An automated future

Mike predicts sustainable farming to be the next revolution in agriculture.

He says robotic technology, in particular, would provide new opportunities for farmers to grow crops using smaller, lightweight machinery.

"Robotics are a very attractive option for farmers who are looking to improve efficiency and reduce costs, especially those who may be struggling to keep up with the demands of labour.

"Digital sorting is another real boon for the industry that will assist towards producing the 'perfect' product without any manual labour needed, while keeping efficiencies in check."

While the future is exciting for the Australian vegetable industry, Mike says these

developments would be gradual.

"It is very important that growers need to collaborate with each other and the industry to take the next step forward," he says.



Summary:

- The Global Innovations in Horticulture Seminar (Project VG15032) exposed Australian vegetable growers to the latest technical innovations in global agriculture.
- Tasmanian Mike Badcock attended the seminar and listened to nine thought-provoking speakers from around the world who discussed the very latest technologies that can be implemented on-farm to improve the productivity and profitability of vegetable growing operations.
- For the full list of speakers and their presentations please visit youtube.com/ausveg.
- The Global Innovations in Horticulture Seminar was funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia Limited using the National Vegetable Levy and funds from the Australian Government.

KANE BUSCH

Cultivating leadership skills



Photographs by Lisa Hayman.

An opportunity to grow his leadership skills has opened up a world of possibilities for East Gippsland farmer Kane Busch.

Kane is the Production and Marketing Manager of Busch Organics, a family-run operation that grows organic vegetables and lucerne on 81 hectares of certified organic land at Hillside on the Mitchell River Flats, west of Bairnsdale, Victoria.

As the fourth generation at the helm, he has witnessed a number of changes to the business since coming onto the scene seven years ago.

Kane, who oversees and manages the business' daily operations, says he had never been one to shirk hard work.

"There's a lot of responsibility that comes with this position and knowing the buck stops with me," he says.

"But I think that sense of wanting to continually improve and do better is part of the century-long legacy handed down by my family."

A growing leader

The chance to develop the skills needed to identify and pursue valuable network opportunities was what initially drew Kane to the 2016 Growing Leaders program.

He explained the program, which was recommended to him by a past graduate, had led him to a deeper understanding of how to lead with confidence and leverage his existing skills to improve his business.

The Growing Leaders National Vegetable

Industry Leadership Program focuses on developing personal, business and industry skills in emerging leaders in the Australian vegetable industry.

Run by Rural Training Initiatives, the program is conducted over six months, with participants involved in presentations by guest speakers, industry tours and skill development sessions on teamwork, conflict management, negotiation training, networking and managing people and projects.

Life-long skills

Since starting the program in April, Kane has noted a significant improvement in his ability to exercise effective leadership and problem-solving skills across all areas of his business.

"I already believed that I was a good leader, but now it's about refining this skillset as the business continues to grow and evolve," he says.

“What’s pleasing is that these skills are immediately transferrable to the industry.”

"The program has also challenged me on an interpersonal level. It has helped me to discover my strengths and weaknesses, allowing me to better understand what makes me tick and how to use this to my advantage.

"What's pleasing is that these skills are

immediately transferrable to the industry. I'm finding myself constantly referring back to the handbook in a range of situations, which can't be a bad thing."

A leading component of the program is the opportunity for participants to work on a nationally strategic project that sees groups participate in three residential.

The final residential was held in Canberra in October 2016, where groups pitched their strategies to an industry panel.

"We developed a farm-tour kit designed to bridge the gap between the producer and consumer, while also addressing some of the misconceptions that exist in the industry," Kane says.

Summary:

- Victorian vegetable grower Kane Busch participated in the 2016 Growing Leaders program (Project VG15030) and is looking to develop his leadership skills not only to improve his business but also to improve the standing of the wider Australian vegetable industry.
- The national vegetable industry leadership program develops the skills of new and emerging leaders with a mix of theory, practical industry-based visits and discussion panels with industry experts.
- Growing Leaders has been funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia Limited using the National Vegetable Levy and funds from the Australian Government.

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