

# vegetables australia

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volume  
**2.2**



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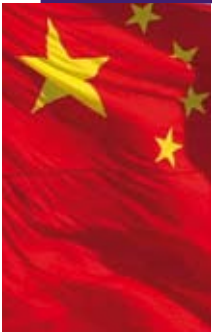
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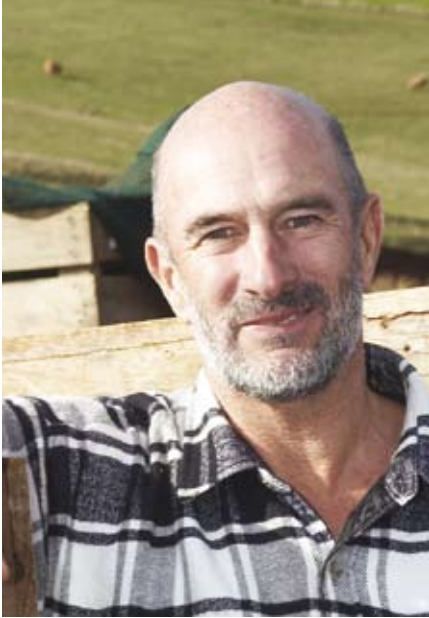
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## A word from the AUSVEG Ltd Chairman

**The vegetable industry continues to make rapid progress into securing its future.**

With the launch of VegVision 2020 by the Minister for Agriculture, Peter McGauran later this month, you will continue to see significant changes across the vegetable industry.

AUSVEG Ltd, your national peak industry body is also taking up the challenge, to ensure the organisation is well positioned to meet challenges and capture opportunities for the industry.

AUSVEG Ltd will continue to remain near to our grower base and over the coming months will work closely with our members through the state associations to review and reposition the organisation.

And stay tuned for more information on the next Vegetable Industry Conference in Sydney from the 29 May to 1 June 2007.

It is indeed an exciting time to be part of the vegetable industry.

Michael Badcock  
AUSVEG Ltd Chairman

### From the Editor



In the current competitive climate, many growers are concerned with the availability of suitable pathways to sell their vegetables. While some growers favour traditional market systems, and others work collaboratively with large retailers, there are many growers who are seeking new avenues for getting their produce to consumers. As such, the popularity of Farmers' Markets has started to grow. This issue, we explore the burgeoning trend of Farmers' Markets (p.12), and how growers are directly fostering the relationship with their consumers.

I'm also very pleased to introduce you to the first story in a series on women in the vegetable industry. This issue we profile Maureen Dobra of the Loose Leaf Lettuce Company. Named in 2005 as Western Australia's Rural Woman of the Year, Maureen's story is one of tremendous

success, which is sure to inspire male and female growers alike.

Those of you who are following the progress of free trade talks with China may wish to turn to page 16 for more information, courtesy of Virginia Greville of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Youna Angevin-Castro  
Editor, Vegetables Australia

Erratum: In the July 2006 issue of Vegetables Australia we published an article on the National Vegetable Levy (p22) which incorrectly stated that the levy provides funding for promotion. We apologise for any confusion this error may have caused.

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# Taking a scholarly

**Tasmanian greenhouse grower Anthony Brandsema talks to Tim Richards about how recent travel opportunities have contributed to the success of his business.**

When Anthony Brandsema became a grower, he had no idea it would help him see the world... or at least the agricultural parts of it. But that's what happened this year, as he travelled to diverse parts of the globe as a winner of the Nuffield Farming Scholarship.

The Nuffield Scholarship, awarded each year, allows a group of young farmers to travel internationally, learning about agricultural techniques and opportunities across a range of countries. Recipients take part in an intense Global Focus program that allows them to see growers' issues in a worldwide context. When they come home, they pass on their acquired knowledge to the Australian industry at large.

Anthony was one of six Australians in this year's Nuffield dozen, undergoing a dizzying tour including New Zealand, the Netherlands, Britain, France, Spain, Mexico, the USA and Canada over four months.

So, what is Anthony's farming background? From Tasmania, Anthony and his family's business,

J&A Brandsema Pty Ltd, has come to focus on greenhouse tomato growing.

"It was a bit evolutionary," said Anthony, explaining the move to the greenhouse. "Dad started on the property in the 1950s and grew a number of vegetable lines, but we're in black sand here. Black sand isn't necessarily mineral rich – imagine beach sand, but black. It wasn't the ideal soil to be growing vegetables in."

Moving to greenhouse production allowed a certain measure of control over climatic variations, and less reliance on seasonal factors. "We had a very good market window after Christmas, when there wasn't anyone picking tomatoes outside yet. The trick was to extend our season, and to do that we moved to the high tech greenhouses."

*The Nuffield Scholarship, awarded each year, allows a group of young farmers to travel internationally.*







# approach to growing

Nowadays the business supplies a range of outlets with tomatoes and cherry tomatoes, from the major supermarket chains down to corner shops and restaurants. "We're not locked into any one particular market," said Anthony. "In fact, our third biggest customer is a corner shop in Hobart."

As successful as the family business is, there's always more to learn. Though exhausted by the whirlwind nature of the

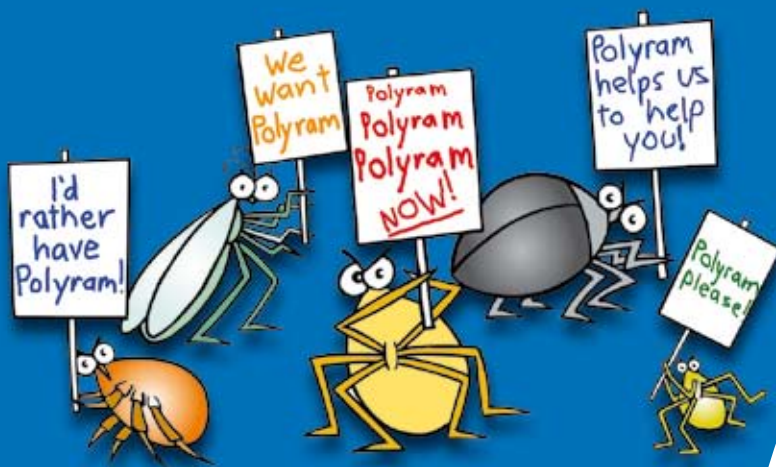
Nuffield tour, Anthony is enthusiastic about his immersion into global agriculture.

"The tour itself was mind blowing, just the exposure to so many different things," he said. "We didn't necessarily relate every experience to our own day-to-day operations, but it's important to look over the fence and see what other industries are out there, and how they cope with their issues."

The scholarship program was deliberately broad in its approach, taking tour members beyond their own familiar areas. "We looked across the whole range of crops and agriculture in general, including dairy, beef and lamb production, and grain growing and canola production. We did see a lot of vegetable production too."

*Continued on next page*

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## Taking a scholarly approach to growing (continued)

Of course, agriculture is about more than what happens in the paddock, as the grower grapples with outside forces like government policies and market movements. Anthony was intrigued to discover that growers across the world had similar problems and challenges in this area.

"The general problems were recurring – the removal of subsidies in the EU was an interesting subject. The cost of fuel in North America was getting higher and higher. And unskilled or seasonal labour seemed to be an issue all over the world, being able to get people to work for you when you need them at harvest time."

Another common factor discussed by growers across the world was the potential of China in the global market, either as an opportunity or a threat. Anthony takes a broad view of this issue, seeing the mammoth nation as a source of export opportunities. "The number of people moving into China's cities must be fed. And if they're adopting some of Western culture, they're going to adopt some Western tastes as well."

One of the side benefits of the Nuffield experience is the creation of a useful network among the group of recipients who travelled together. You might wonder if the 12 Nuffield scholars would be at each other's throats after being at close quarters over such an intense period of travel and study, but Anthony insists they stayed friendly, and is convinced of the value of the group experience.

"We all got on well because we had to - we were sort of thrust together. But everything we saw was different from what we were used to on our own properties, so that gave us plenty to talk about. But there's potential in any one of us to do something beyond our farm gate, so we were always talking about that as well."

Now that he's home, Anthony's next task is to spread the knowledge he's picked up from the experience. Nuffield scholars compile a report of the tour, and give presentations to growers at both formal and informal functions.

He'll also be picking up the threads of his other industry involvement in the Greenhouse Advisory Group, and as part of the Vegetables Australia editorial committee.

And he's also getting back to the challenges of greenhouse tomato growing in Tasmania, and eyeing up the possibilities of the export market to Asia. No doubt his co-manager and brother Marcus, and his father, will be glad to see the wandering scholar back home. ■



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# Taking the market to the people

Farmers' markets are providing a new avenue for growers to sell their produce. David Jarwood finds out more about this burgeoning new trend.



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*"Farmers' markets give the farmers control over what they grow and how they sell it."*

Farmers have the opportunity to get invaluable feedback from their customers, while customers get to connect a human face to the produce that they are buying, establishing a loyalty and trust not often possible through supermarkets and other mainstream retailing setups.

The growth of farmers' markets has been pretty dramatic. The first market was

organised in Victoria in 1999 and now across the country there are close to one hundred markets – from Carnarvon in north-west Western Australia right across to Tasmania.

Jane Adams is the chair of the Farmers' Markets Association and was the catalyst for the first market being established in Australia.

In 1998, with the assistance of a grant from the Australian Government, she conducted research on United States farmers' markets. When she returned she ran the first workshop for a farmers' market in Victoria.

Jane said after a slow start the number of markets has quickly taken off. In November 2002 there were 35 markets and in August 2005, at the time of the second conference of the Farmers' Markets Association, there were more than 80. Plans are underway for several more markets to be established in

coming months and there is even a guide book on the markets being published at the end of the year.

Jane said the growth of the markets has had a lot to do with the timing.

"(When we started) typically farmers were increasingly frustrated by the concentration of the food market, with two main supermarkets dominating the retailing of produce," she said. "This was impinging on their return.

"Farmers' markets give the farmers control over what they grow and how they sell it. The farmers once again become price makers rather than price takers.

"There were also a lot of food scares in Europe, and this made people more aware of the risks in the food chain. People wanted to know how and where their food was grown. There is no better way to find this out than asking the person who is standing in front of the food as it is being sold."

*Continued on next page*

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**LETTUCE!**



Source: RMW Classic Publications

## Taking the market to the people (continued)

Farmers' markets have quickly grown from being a novel community experience to one that is becoming a major financial component of Australia's vegetable industry, Jane said.

Research conducted by the Department of Primary Industries and Victoria in 2004 showed that farmers' markets had an estimated turnover of \$40 million and economic impact of \$80 million each year.

*"It is the old-fashioned way of shopping, based on service and people interaction."*

Jane said this figure would be much higher now with more farmers' markets established, and she also believes that it had been a conservative figure.

Jane said farmers' markets were a good testing ground for many producers, who could use them to trial new products.

"It is a very cost-effective form of market research," she said.

For Victorian market gardener Shona Crawford, farmers' markets offer a very worthwhile supplement to her and her husband's business. Three times a month, she heads out from her Mornington Peninsula property, taking spring onions, Dutch carrots, silverbeet, radishes, turnips and herbs to a farmers' market.

She believes the honesty aspect of the markets is a major appeal, and provides a great balance to the uncertainty and cynicism that many customers felt throughout the larger markets.

"People know that this produce is fresh and can interact one-on-one with the grower," she said.

"It is the old-fashioned way of shopping, based on service and people interaction."

Setting up a stall at a farmers' market costs roughly \$60, plus the petrol of transporting produce to the market. But for many growers this is a very profitable experience, and some of them survive solely on the farmers' market, Shona said.

"You can definitely make a living from farmers markets," she said. "From an economic point of view, it is very important to grow a variety of produce. Specialising in one product is not going to appeal to a broad range of people.

"The important thing is being able to interact socially with customers. I just love working the markets, and it is a real buzz when people are return customers."

Farmers' markets look like they are here for the long run, Jane Adams said.

She said the growth of the markets had not abated and overseas indicators were for continued growth.

"If I could look into my crystal ball, I would imagine that more communities will start farmers' markets," she said.

"In the United Kingdom, the first farmers' market started in 1996, and there are now over 500 farmers' markets across the UK. In the United States, there are over 4000 farmers' markets." ■

**i** For more information on how to establish a farmers' market or become involved in one contact Jane Adams on (02) 9360 9380 or [jacom@bigpond.net.au](mailto:jacom@bigpond.net.au).



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## Q & A Virginia Greville, FTA Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

**As the Australian Government continues talks with China on a Free Trade Agreement, growers face some confusion as to what this may mean to their future. Youna Angevin-Castro speaks to Virginia Greville, Assistant Secretary, Agriculture of the FTA Unit with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.**

***Why is Australia entering into Free Trade negotiations with China? Why is a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) necessary?***

Australia is interested in reducing trade barriers into all our markets, wherever we trade – and China is an important market already for many agricultural products and has extraordinary potential into the future. While Australia's highest trade priority is global reform through the multilateral (World Trade Organisation) round, we would be foolish to ignore an opportunity to create real commercial advantages for Australian exporters, while we wait. Even without an FTA, we will continue to trade with China and that trade is likely to grow. But the FTA is an opportunity to make the trading relationship more worthwhile for Australian producers.

***What gains can growers expect from a Free Trade Agreement with China?***

We will be working hard to negotiate preferential access across the board for Australian agricultural goods. We want to remove China's tariffs – at least for Australian goods – and to remove the effects of China's tariff rate quotas and other restrictions of trade. We want our growers to be able to enter the Chinese market on better terms than they can now and more easily than their competitors. China sees these as very sensitive issues, however, so the negotiation will be difficult.

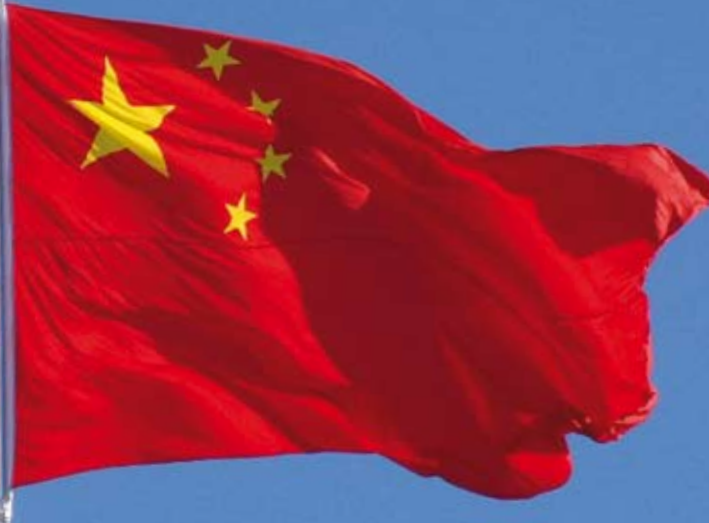
***What are the trade-offs for horticulture and other agricultural industries in coming to an agreement with China?***

China is interested in reducing any barriers facing their products into our market. As it happens, Australia has extremely low tariffs and no quotas or other restrictions so, realistically, China can not expect to make much of a gain in agriculture access. Our agriculture industries are not protected in the same way as Chinese growers – so any change to our tariff regime is not likely to have a big impact on our domestic industry. Of course, no grower likes competition from imports – but competition from China (and other low-cost producers) is already a fact of life and will continue to be so with or without an FTA.

***What safeguards will be put in place to protect local Australian vegetable markets from being swamped by Chinese produce?***

Given that China already faces low – or, in many cases, no – tariff barriers into Australia, there is no reason to expect an FTA to provoke a flood of Chinese vegetables. An FTA can include mechanisms to take account of sudden increases in imports and Australia has agreed to some in other FTAs when they have helped progress towards a liberalising outcome. Proposals for safeguards (from either side) could be

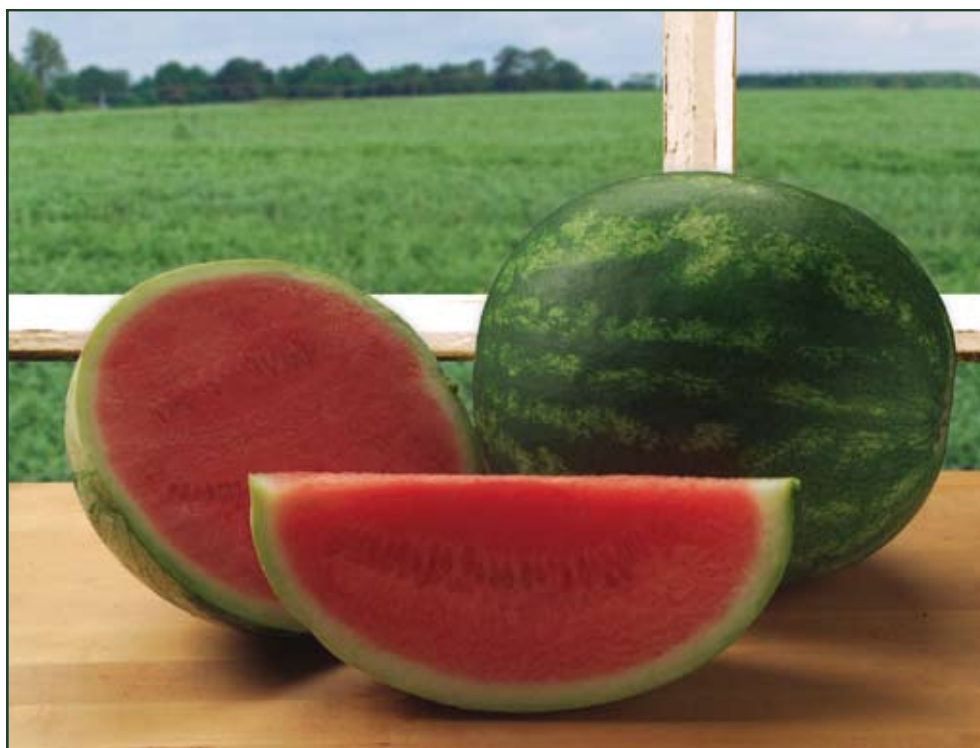




discussed as part of the negotiations but we would need to consider, as part of the overall agreement, their efficacy, utility and, indeed, what concessions might be extracted in return.

***Will the Free Trade Agreement be tackling issues relating to biosecurity?***

Lack of technical market access (that is, quarantine approvals) is a very real market access barrier but it differs from the kind of market access we have been talking about. Quarantine decisions must be taken on the basis of science and must take into account the pest and disease status of exporting and importing countries and the level of risk the importer is prepared to accept. Quarantine decisions cannot be negotiated in the same way as tariff concessions and so an FTA can not (and must not) include deals on specific technical market access problems. But FTA negotiations can be very helpful in identifying – and then reducing – communication, coordination or technical capacity problems which complicate and contribute to delays around technical market access. The FTA will contribute to a better relationship between the relevant Chinese and Australian agencies and that can only help to make our respective risk analysis processes work more smoothly. ■



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## Queensland labour market study identifies major vacancies in labour practices

**The availability and cost of labour are major issues for growers because of the intensive nature of the horticulture industry in Queensland, according to the results from an extensive analysis of the Queensland labour market.**

Growcom has concluded a detailed study into the current labour practices in the Queensland horticultural industry and the results confirm the primary issues facing growers are the availability and cost of labour.

The research found that grower concerns included a broad range of issues relating to labour including the availability, cost, training needs, skills levels, management, administration and productivity of staff.

The consultation process went beyond a producer survey, covering a broad segment of industry, including industry organisations, labour hire organisations, backpacker hostels, government departments and other bodies that have an interest in the horticultural labour situation.

Growcom Chief Advocate Mark Panitz said the findings of the study showed why the horticultural industry needed to develop a greater understanding of labour related matters.

Queensland's fruit and vegetable industry is worth about \$1.5 billion and employs an estimated 25 000 people, across 3500 enterprises.

"This is a dynamic, sophisticated growth industry that requires high input from growers," Mark said.

"It's a high risk investment with a high labour content and relies on a high use of technology to be successful.

"Labour availability and cost are major issues for growers because of the intensive nature of our industry, which is why we are seeking to develop a greater understanding of labour related matters.

---

*The situation was so bad at times that growers had been forced to leave their crops in the ground because of a lack of availability of labour.*

---


"The supply of labour in horticulture is critical and will affect the competitiveness of the industry unless policies and solutions are introduced to counter these difficulties."

Mark said the cost of labour was the highest single value input into the industry, comprising between 15 and 55 per cent of the total costs of production.

"Farm labour is also the most critical factor in ensuring the smooth running of field preparation, planting, maintenance, harvesting and packing activities on-farm," he said.

Mark said labour-related problems could have a tremendous impact on the farming operations of growers.

He said the situation was so bad at times that growers had been forced to leave their crops in the ground because of a lack of available of labour.

Mark said the study examined the various issues impacting on the horticulture industry and makes some recommendations about how the production sector may be provided with a framework to develop the skills, systems, experience and structures necessary to develop the industry. 

### The bottom line:

- Labour supply issues in horticulture are becoming critical and will effect the competitiveness of the industry.
- Growers generally have a low awareness of issues relating to employment compliance management and are unaware of strategies to improve employment structures.
- Current national apprenticeship and traineeship schemes are not well supported by the industry.
- There is a lack of a co-ordinated approach in dealing with labour supply issues with both federal and state governments.

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Keywords: Labour shortages

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*Not all workers coming through the service are backpackers.*

# Taking



**A new federally-funded resource service is working with growers to take the pain out of finding labour during peak harvest periods. By Tim Richards.**

It's the long-running story of a happy marriage between people and produce. Every year, tens of thousands of people take advantage of Australia's Working Holiday Maker Visa program, which allows visitors to earn money from fruit or vegetable picking while they travel around the country.

Recent changes to the Working Holiday Visa rules have greatly increased the pool of workers, as backpackers are now allowed to extend their visa after working in regional Australia for three months. However, Australia is a big country, with much variation in crops and peak harvesting times. This means that picking opportunities vary greatly across the calendar, and across geographical regions. This variety sometimes results in frustration, for growers as well as potential workers.

How can these two groups be matched up neatly as need arises?

Enter the National Harvest Labour Information Service (NHLIS), an organisation dedicated to streamlining the process. This free, federally-funded service helps match harvest labour to jobs along what has become known as the Harvest Trail.

The service started up in order to meet the needs of both growers and workers. "There was a problem attracting out-of-town workers into key harvest areas at peak times," explained Max Polwarth, manager of the NHLIS. "There needed to be a national

# the pain out of labour 21



coordination to help growers source workers, and direct them into the areas that needed them most."

How does it work? Firstly, growers lodge their harvest labour needs with the service. Once this information is available, the NHLIS can act as a central point of contact, mobilising workers from areas which have finished harvest, to regions desperate for their eager hands.

And defying the stereotype, not all workers coming through the service are backpackers.

"Backpackers are the majority, about 70 per cent, but there's an increasing contingent of early retirees travelling around," said Max. "Then you've got your traditional itinerant workers who move around the country, and other job seekers."

There are three ways the service matches up workers to suitable opportunities. The first is through its National Telephone Service, operating via the freecall number

1800 062 332. Operating from 8am to 8pm (EST) on weekdays, it takes calls from both growers and potential harvest workers.

The call centre operators then match up the callers with the organisation or person they're looking for.

Another way of recruiting workers is through the National Harvest Guide. This booklet is a 'bible' of harvest work opportunities. In addition to outlining locations and seasons, the guide also covers working conditions, transport and accommodation.

However, the NHLIS' most potent tool is the Harvest Trail website <[www.jobsearch.gov.au/harvesttrail](http://www.jobsearch.gov.au/harvesttrail)>, a subsite of the Australian government's JobSearch site. It neatly encompasses everything a would-be harvest worker needs to know. With a click, the website user can discover which crops are harvested in a chosen month, and where they are located. The site also details harvest labour providers in each state, and profiles the nation's various harvest towns.

And word of the service is spreading to potential labourers. "We advertise in all the major backpacker publications around the country," said Max. "We also go to the backpacker expos, and we've got flyers in many of the hostels."



So how can growers take advantage of the services offered by the NHLIS? By registering their labour requirements, so they show up on the Harvest Trail website. Registration can take place via a local harvest labour office or job agency, or through the NHLIS directly on 1800 062 332. ■

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# Climate warnings heat

As growers across Australia contend with increasingly the uncertain weather patterns, Simon Adams discovers there is much evidence to suggest that climate is changing in many regions, posing new challenges for the industry.

A recently completed study into climate warming in Australia has warned of temperature increases of up to two degrees Celsius over the next thirty years, which could lead to changes for growers in crop planting seasons and less availability of irrigation water in some areas. But some locations could benefit from the changes.

The study, which concluded that temperature change is likely to be greatest inland, examined the historical climate change in nine selected vegetable production areas around Australia (Mareeba, Toowoomba, Bundaberg, Gatton, Manjimup, Forthside, Bairnsdale, Hay and Mildura), and assessed factors such as season length, frequency of frosts and the number of hot days (over 35 degrees Celsius) each year which are affected by changing climate.

A positive effect from the predicted climate warming is some locations in Southern Australia, such as Forthside and Bairnsdale, will be able to continue to produce a wide range of crops. However growers in most current vegetable production regions are likely to find the changes will pose significant problems for the future.

"The major challenge for the vegetable industry will be to find ways of responding or adapting to changes which are going to have a significant effect on a number of aspects of their production systems," project researcher Peter Deuter from the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries in Queensland (QDPI&F) said.

"Some regions are going to become much more difficult to grow crops, and the

production season and the marketing But some regions that are currently considered to be at risk of frost or cold effects will become more useful production districts as a consequence," he said.

The hotter days predicted will increase irrigation water use and demand, but could also affect growers' crop quality through sunburn, while pollination failures could increase if an increasing number of heat stress days occur during flowering.

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*Growers in most current vegetable production regions are likely to find the changes will pose significant problems for the future.*

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"Temperature has a major influence on horticulture, and is the main factor which determines where crops are grown, making it more important in this respect than rainfall," Peter said.

Warmer temperatures could mean that the range and the effects of some pests which are currently unable to survive in some regions (e.g. Silverleaf whitefly) will extend, while climate change can also lead to more intense rainfall, which could result in the increased incidence and spread of soil borne diseases.

From the limited assessment of the nine sites around Australia, the largest historical and future warming trends are in northern as well as inland regions of Queensland while south-eastern Australia has the lowest historical and future warming trends.

Historically there has been a larger increase in the number of heat stress days at places such as Mildura and Gatton, with a similar trend expected to continue for the next 30 years.

The study, which focused on identifying historic trends and future scenarios, has suggested a number of actions growers can take to adapt to climate change, but has emphasised further study is needed to develop and better understand the options.

Among its recommendations, the study suggested growers plan for earlier harvest times, including all necessary marketing issues; improve water management by making use of accurate moisture monitoring systems and increasing water storage capacity; investigate less at-risk locations; and develop crop varieties more suitable to a warmer climate.


Peter cited the example of the South East Queensland lettuce industry in the Lockyer Valley where the production season is likely to diminish from its current April to September season to become a May-August season, effectively losing two months over the next twenty years as the summers get longer, and the winters shorter.

"Individual growers have invested millions of dollars in land and infrastructure, and it's not an easy thing for them to consider how they might consider moving to another production district," Peter said.

Some farmers have already responded to the current drought conditions and have purchased properties in other locations which may also give them some advantage when facing future climate change," he said.

# up for growers

The study has recommended additional work be undertaken to identify specific areas at significant risk from climate change and then develop adaptation strategies to provide options which will allow industry and growers to respond.

"The comment I often get from growers who are suffering from the current drought is - I want more information about what the climate change is likely to be for my farm, because I want to make good quality management decisions now and over the next 30 years to ensure my business is a viable business," Peter said. 

#### The bottom line:

- Climate warming studies indicate that Australian temperatures may increase by two degrees Celsius over the next 30 years.
- Growers will need to plan accordingly as the vegetable growing capacity of some areas will change.



For more information: Visit [www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm](http://www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm)  
Project number: VG05051  
Keywords: Climate, drought

Although growers will face generally tougher conditions due to the climate change, the climate warming study has indicated the increasing levels of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) will enable plants to more efficiently use fertiliser and water, but it is uncertain if this effect will be offset by increases in temperature.

Carbon dioxide fertilisation is a common practice in overseas vegetable industries where it is used in enclosed greenhouse environments to improve productivity.

Increasing CO<sub>2</sub> levels without changing anything else will cause plants to become more efficient in using water and fertiliser, but raises the question for growers whether or not future increases in temperature will cancel out the improved plant efficiency.

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JOHN LEWIS  
Lewis Farming Company

# Cucumber fight goes nationwide



Fiona, tech officer with NSW DPI, applies microbial biocontrols to cucumbers in an on-farm trial. Source NSW DPI

**A new research project being conducted by NSW Department of Primary Industries is investigating the use of microbial bio-controls in an effort to reduce cucumber crop losses. Graham Gosper reports.**

Researcher Len Tesoriero will enlist the support of growers in four states in a project to significantly reduce greenhouse cucumber crop losses and boost greenhouse farm hygiene throughout Australia.

Growers will be offered the opportunity to participate in on-farm evaluation trials for promising cucumber disease management strategies and treatments, including the latest being used overseas. The strategies include application of microbial bio-controls and the grafting of cucumbers onto resistant or tolerant rootstocks.

Len, a plant pathologist with the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) based at the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute in Sydney, led a recently completed project which found the most serious greenhouse cucumber crop losses in Australia result from root rot and wilt diseases. The project found that *Pythium* and *Fusarium* fungi are the main causes of such diseases. Similar pathogens are considered to be the major cause of greenhouse cucumber disease and crop losses in Europe and North America.

Those findings, together with others supporting the need for improved farm and crop hygiene in effective disease management, led to a follow-up project for Len and his team. This began in April this year and is aimed at developing and evaluating greenhouse cucumber disease management strategies and reducing crop losses.

Len said the initial study underlined the need for local evaluation of such strategies.

"We determined that the strains of the *Fusarium* fungus causing wilts and root rots in Australia are different from those found in Europe and North America," he said.

"Microbial bio-controls and potential rootstocks, for example, commonly differ in their response to different plant pathogens and this can work at the sub-species level.

"The current project will help us to develop a use-pattern and efficacy spectrum for microbial bio-controls and support their registration in Australia."

Growers from the Sydney Basin, the Bundaberg region in Queensland, the Virginia region north of Adelaide in South Australia and from near Perth in Western Australia are among those who will be invited to participate.

"We will hold grower meetings in each of the major production areas over the next six months to outline the project aims and strategies," Len said. "Interested growers will then have farms audited for compliance with draft farm and crop hygiene standards.

"Each grower will be given a list of improvements required to meet minimum standards of hygiene. About six months later farms will be re-audited to check for their compliance with the standards."

Farms that meet these minimum standards will then be offered the opportunity to hold on-farm evaluation trials for promising disease management strategies and treatments.

Len is recruiting another plant pathologist to assist with various aspects of the current project. He said the high priority given crop and farm hygiene in the study reflects its importance in effective disease management.

"Our initial study found that harmful pathogens are easily spread by water, through the air and via insects such as sciarid flies (fungus gnats)," he said.

*"Harmful pathogens are easily spread by water, through the air and via insects such as sciarid flies (fungus gnats)."*



# High hopes for the ultimate weapon

More than 16 years involvement with quality biological products has left company director Tony Zady with no doubts about their value in the war against crop disease.

"The direct auditing of farms as part of the project should identify problem areas, offer ideas for improvements and lead to the development of a hygiene manual as a valuable guide for growers.

"We expect the project will result in an overall improvement in farm and crop hygiene standards across the greenhouse vegetable industry."

## The bottom line:

- Cucumber crop losses in Australia are commonly caused by root rot and wilt diseases.
- A new study will investigate hygiene management and bio-controls as measures for controlling crop losses.



For more information: Visit [www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm](http://www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm)  
Project number: VG04011  
Keywords: Cucumbers, disease

Tony is the president of Zadco for Quality Gro Pty Ltd, a Sydney company which is affiliated with leading US biotechnology company JH Biotech. As the Australasian distributor for the US company, Zadco has helped pioneer the supply of leading-edge biological products to agriculture in Australia.

Zadco will provide two JH Biotech products for assessment during the on-farm trials to be held in conjunction with Len Tesoriero's latest greenhouse cucumber disease project.

Tony said the products have already proved successful in managing root diseases in a variety of crops overseas and he has no doubt they will perform well under Australian conditions. "Whether used separately or in combination the products add beneficial fungal and bacterial populations which will help to create a safer environment around the roots," he said. "This rejuvenates soil life and health and enables the crop to increase its performance and productivity."

Tony also expects the products to perform well against the Australian strains of plant pathogens. He has been encouraged by the success of the products in some preliminary trials on greenhouse cucumbers and other crops already conducted by Len.

Tony said the trials would benefit Zadco by increasing grower awareness on the use of the bio-control products and by providing data that could support registration of the products for use in Australia. Regulations which came into force last year require registration of bio-control products used in Australia as biological pesticides.

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# A risk worth taking

Australia's largest private exporter of broccoli has taken control of its destiny by developing a broccoli harvester that has improved yield from crops. Jodie Powell investigates.

There are times in life when you just have to take a risk. And the people behind Queensland's Matilda Fresh Foods have done just that, creating the world's first broccoli harvester.

Matilda Farms managing director James Jauncey is the man behind the harvester's development, and while he jokes that there's now a big pile of spare parts "behind the shed", creating the technology has had its serious side.

*A clear choice: improve the production process or consider the companies' future.*

As he tells it, Matilda Farms and its sister company, Toowoomba-based processing plant Matilda Fresh Foods - Australia's largest private broccoli exporters - were faced with a clear choice: improve the production process or consider the companies' future.

"From a business point of view, it was either make it work or, as much as you like to support the community, if we were relying on casual labour we were really going to struggle," James said.

The decision to invest in innovation did not come lightly - talks began three or four years ago - but James said the companies were finally seeing the fruits of their investment.

"We hit a lot of dead ends - there's a lot of spare parts behind the shed," James said. But there was massive incentive to ensure the project came to fruition.

"Because there's so much trial work it's very hard to allow you to pour money in and not get a return."

James said while creating the harvester was important, just as critical to the success of the project was the decision to take a whole-systems approach.

"We look at the harvester as being part of our whole system (which is) everything from preparing the ground, right through to putting the broccoli into the containers - the harvester is just part of that.

"The harvester is something that's always been on the back-burner, thinking about how we can improve how we do things and solve some of the problems we have had," James said.

The success of the harvester will allow those behind its creation to breathe a little easier.

"We did what research we could, but being the first one in the world there was not too much for us to research," James said.

"We dived into it and said 'we just have to make it work'," he said.


The company spent years tinkering and refining the machinery - hampered in part by the relatively short broccoli growing season.

"Because we're growing the crop during winter, we had to build a lot of stuff on spec in the off-season and hope it would work," James said.

The machine allows Matilda Farms to harvest broccoli to meet a range of needs.

"Using mechanical means, and a little bit of human labour on the machine itself, we are able to deliver a leaf-free product to the shed that's suitable for going to the fresh market and for processing," James said.

"We are not necessarily getting rid of heaps of people, but we can better use labour where it is really needed.

"We can pay people better and have them doing things that are not determining how our business is run." 

## The bottom line:

- Investment in innovation has paid off for Queensland-based broccoli producers Matilda Fresh.
- The mechanical harvester can process the same amount of fresh broccoli as a team of 25 people.



For more information: Visit [www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm](http://www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm)  
Project number: VG03083  
Keywords: Broccoli harvester



## Making the mechanics work

A world-first broccoli-harvesting machine created in Queensland's Darling Downs region looks to be rewarding the companies behind it in its first real season of work.

While the project has been in production for about four years, this growing season is its first proper test.

James Jauncey believes the years of monetary and physical investment were well worthwhile - although he emphasises the machine is still in development.

"This is really its first complete season with it and we are just starting in the season now and everything's looking as though it's what we were hoping for," James said.

"The early signs are that we will increase yield by up to 30 percent and the labour savings could get as high as that as well.

"At this point in time we are interested in getting the machine going and having it improve our business."

The harvester is able to process the same amount of fresh broccoli in a day as a team of 25 people, and at a higher yield.

James said the machine could also be set differently, depending on whether vegetables were intended for the fresh broccoli market or for processing.

"The quality (for processed broccoli) is still high, but we cut it with a shorter stem," he said.

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## Womens' training creates a sense of adventure



**Barbara Hall discovers a new kind of training program targeted at providing women in horticulture with the necessary skills for success.**

Participants in an innovative farm business training program have been finding a new sense of adventure in their work.

They have been attending workshops, mostly in Tasmania but also on the mainland, run by Rural Development Services. What makes them different is that the focus is on recognising and enhancing the role of women in managing farms.

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*"Today 47 per cent of people on Australian farms are female."*

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This has been particularly the case for the WinHort Industry Development Officer program, focused on developing business and leadership skills of women in horticulture.

Louise Smith, a potato company field officer, and grower of beef and sheep in Tasmania, recently attended WinHort marketing and leadership workshop alongside women from several horticultural businesses. She said it had inspired her to develop a business plan for her property. "It was really good to listen to other peoples' perspectives on farming," she said. "You can always learn from someone else's experience. I learnt lots of simple things to make a better business, all without much cost and time, but which are invaluable to us now.

"I learnt to be proud of what we have as a business, and most of all to enjoy what you do. I learnt to listen to others, to observe,

and adapt to the market place, to be realistic. Changes are often long term and not quick fixes.

"My partner and I are turning our beef and sheep venture into an adventure. The networking, the transfer of information, has been invaluable, and a real motivator."

Pam Brown, a farmer and small business owner, was with Louise at the three-day FarmBis subsidised workshop, which featured a case study of the Bruny Island Cheese Company.

"The feedback and encouragement from people who are out there 'going for it' was really wonderful," Pam said.

A diversified horticultural producer, Ulla Knox-Little said it gave her fresh confidence in the future of her business. "I came away buzzing and bubbling with inspiration." And for Ingrid Heather, the course helped her redefine herself as the 'farm manager', not 'just a farmer'.

Amabel Fulton is the CEO of the Hobart-based Rural Development Services which has been running the business, marketing and leadership skills project for three years. The people at Rural Development Services saw that rural skills training was mostly targeting men. The notices for field days and conferences are traditionally mailed to them. And when they get to the field days, conferences and committees, most of the leaders are men.

*"I came away buzzing and bubbling with inspiration."*

"The images of farmers – in publications, posters, magazines and videos – are almost always of men. We have training days that reverse the rule: ours focus more on people than technology," Amabel said.

"But we felt the culture of the public events and services was saying that women are not really welcome.

"With our WinHort program, we started with women-only events then moved to mixed farm teams. Now we target and encourage women and we are finding when they get the chance to come with their partners, that both of them get a lot out of activities that they do together. They have been very popular."

Rural Development Services runs programs on a regional basis in Tasmania. This gives more opportunity for local networking than the traditional industry-by-industry style.

"Our shortest courses are a half day, our longest are three days. Topics have been accessing funding, developing marketing strategies, managing teams; and property management – the business, people and environmental aspects," Amabel said

"Some sessions are just about facilitation skills or public speaking. The most popular with women have been business skills. Women have traditionally been the financial managers of farms when there is a team or partnership, but very few women – single or married – run farms on their own.

"Men and women are pretty much equally interested in long term planning.

"In Tasmania, we've had 300 women attend training. It's part of a national drive by Horticulture Australia, and it's funded 50 per cent by Rural Development Services. The other half comes from participant fees and programs such as FarmBis."

The RDS can offer a FarmBis subsidy of 60 per cent for two farm partners to attend and a further 50 per cent discount for three partners.

#### Recent training programs have included:

- Marketing and Leadership, which covers personality styles, leadership strategies, networking techniques and strategic planning.
- Agribusiness marketing, which covers time management, basic farm finances and creating a business plan.

- "Tall Poppies" which is a national training meeting for women in horticultural industries, with three days of speakers, workshops and excursions.

#### The bottom line:

- A new Tasmanian rural skills training program has been developed by Rural Development Services specifically for women in horticulture.
- Participants can undertake training in a variety of areas, including marketing, leadership, farm management and strategic planning.
- For further details on any events/programs, contact the Tasmanian WinHort Industry Development Officer Naomi McGrath-Kerr on 02 6231 9033, or email [naomi.mcgrathkerr@ruraldevelopmentsservices.com](mailto:naomi.mcgrathkerr@ruraldevelopmentsservices.com).



For more information: Visit [www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm](http://www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm)  
Project number: HG04027  
Keywords: Women, training

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*Production went from 500 kg to 20 tonnes per week, and their workforce grew from four to 32.*

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## Woman of the

**Maureen Dobra of the Loose Leaf Lettuce Company in Western Australia speaks to David Jarwood about what makes her business such as success.**

Service to customers and maintaining a consistent quality of supply are the key behind the success of Western Australia's Loose Leaf Lettuce Company.

The company, which is based at Gingin, 84 km north east of Perth, has gone from strength to strength since Maureen Dobra revolutionised its operations.

Maureen took over the company eight years ago, a company her two daughters founded two years earlier after identifying the potential of loose leaf salads. At that stage Maureen and her husband Barry were growing gourmet carrots, turnips, radishes, beetroots and lettuce.

"We had a customer to whom we had been supplying whole gourmet lettuces, and he told us one day that he wanted loose leaves," she said. "The girls saw this opportunity and picked it up themselves and the business was born."

Maureen said the business grew quickly, but was very exhausting for her daughters.

"They were hand cutting everything and did it three days a week. They were pretty tired by the end of the day," she said.

After two years of running the business, her daughters decided to travel overseas and handed the business over to Maureen, who has been a vegetable grower for 30 years.



# West setting new standards

Maureen made some crucial decisions, mechanising the operations and changing the packaging, and the business grew quickly. Production went from 500 kg to 20 tonnes per week, and their workforce grew from four to 32.

Underpinning her success has been Maureen's skills in people management, and providing employment opportunities for an older workforce, with the majority of them being women.

In the process she received attention from her peers and last year was awarded the RIRDC Rural Woman of the Year in Western Australia in recognition of her contribution to the role of women in the industry.

"I was really surprised to be named Rural Woman of the Year," Maureen said. "But I think my enthusiasm for the industry and my support of women won the judges over. At least half of my workforce is female, and they do everything from administration to driving trucks."

Maureen said the award played a vital part in supporting the role of women in an industry that is a traditionally male dominated area.

She said with farms having a greater reliance on mechanisation, rather than brute physical strength, there was no reason why women couldn't carry out most of the tasks on the farm. And in some ways women may be even more suited to some of the tasks on the farm. *Continued on next page*

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- Excellent yield potential.



### Bendigo

- Open field type and therefore quite rugged
- BLS 1,2,3 resistant
- Large, blocky fruit
- Fruit are dark green turning deep golden-orange
- Fruit are thick walled, firm and have a good shelf life.



### Olga

- Multi-disease resistant
- Large, firm fruit with good wall thickness
- Blocky shape fruit, dark green to intense red at maturity
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## Woman of the West setting new standards (continued)

"With the tractors and other machines we have these days, women can operate them easily," Maureen said.

"Also women can do a lot more of the repetitive type of work on a farm, whereas a man tends to lose interest very quickly.

"In my experience, I find women are reliable, strategic business people, yet we often get overlooked by employers because a lot of women want to work part-time due to family and other commitments, and modern workforces just don't support flexibility.

"I pride myself on offering our staff flexibility, and I also work hard to involve all of my staff in all aspects of the business – from developing OH&S systems, to providing feedback on improving our quality assurance."

And this work environment is certainly paying off. Loose Leaf Lettuce is now a \$4 million-a-year company, predominantly supplying the food service industry.

On both a personal and professional level, Maureen said the Rural Woman of the Year award gave her and the industry respect and prominence.

"This is something you need to have," she said. "Vegetable growers are often looked upon as being at the bottom rung of the ladder. Vegetable growing is a complex industry and deserves more respect."

Maureen said she hoped winning the award would encourage children growing up in the country to view vegetable growing as a viable opportunity.

"Kids growing up today view vegetable growing badly," she said. "This award should lift the profile of vegetable growing so that kids look at it more seriously."

Recently Maureen went to the vegetable industry conference in Queensland, where a grim future for the Australian vegetable industry was painted.

"We were told by a representative of the National Australia Bank that in the next five years it is predicted there will be only 500 vegetable growers left in the whole of the country," she said.

"The reason for this is that suburbia is encroaching on valuable farming lands, economic reasons are forcing farmers out and age reasons are causing farms to close."

Maureen said there were still good opportunities for vegetable growers, despite increasing difficulties in the market.

"It is a matter of getting up and finding your markets," she said. "Farmers' markets are proving to be very popular – just one of the new opportunities available."

Maureen received \$15,000 for winning the Rural Woman of the Year, and used it to travel through New Zealand, France and the Netherlands to have a look at overseas' operations.

What she saw there was confirmation of the outdoor work that she is doing on her property as well as a high reliance on innovation.

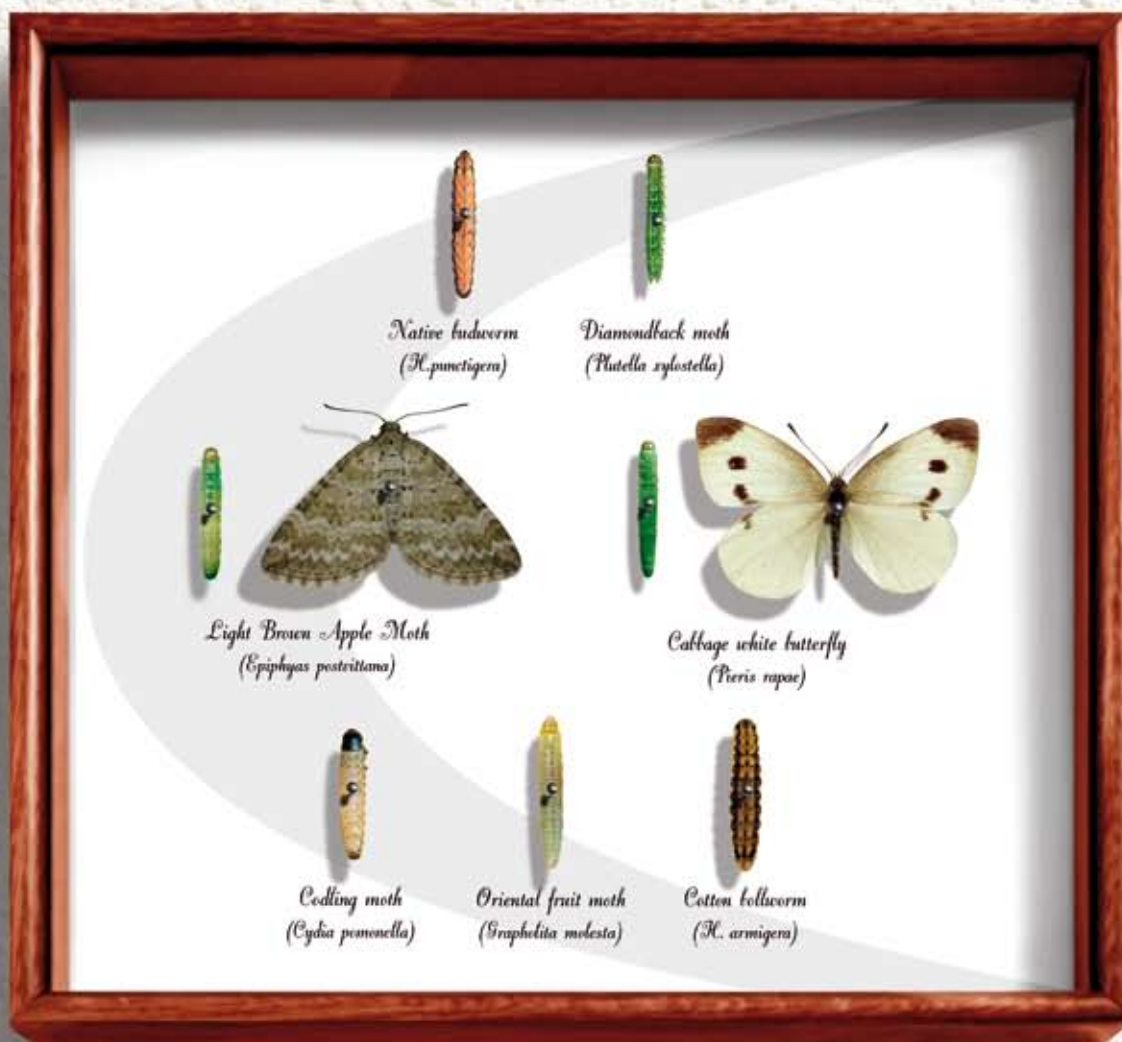
She also got a good insight into the benefits of hydroponics and is looking to introduce hydroponics into the business.

Maureen's next move is to increase her growing area, continue to provide a reliable, consistent supply to the local market and expand the export market from the current 20kg a week of produce to Hong Kong. ■

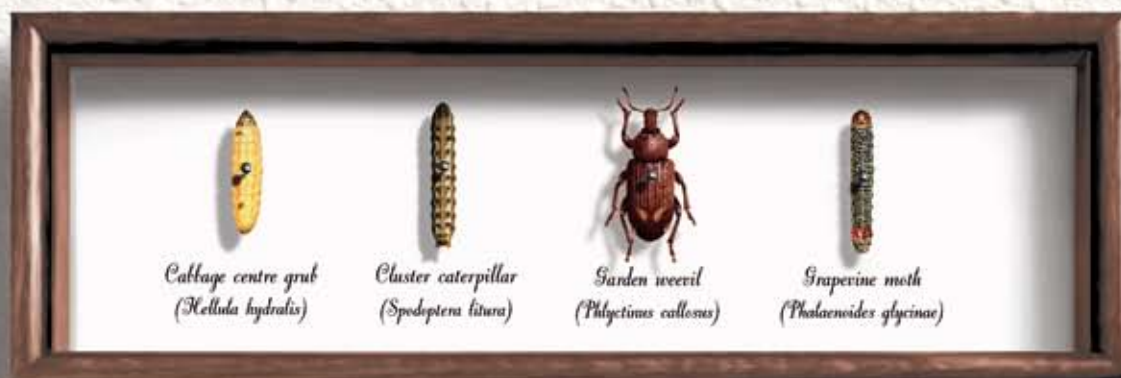




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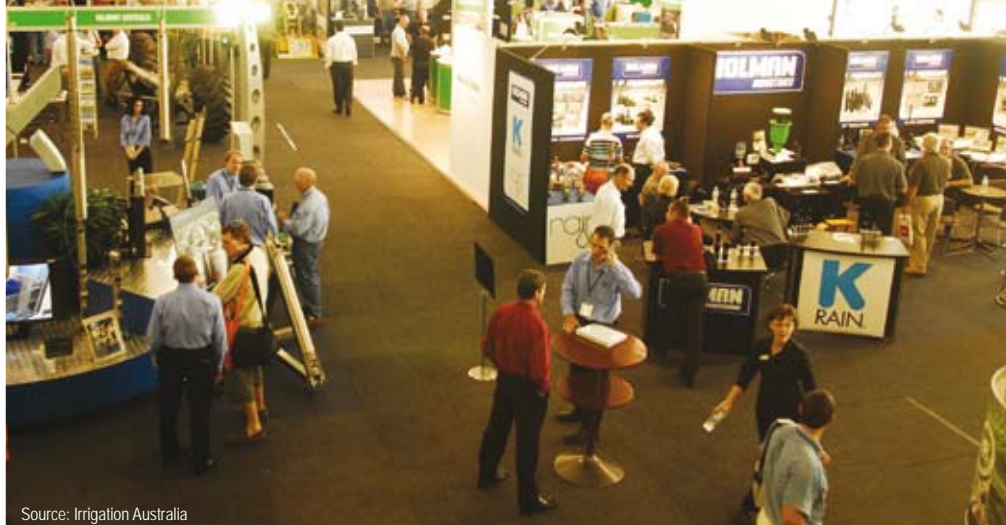
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Source: Irrigation Australia



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# Irrigation conference highlights



**As the driest country on Earth, Australia is leading the world in irrigation technology and Australian growers can reap the benefits.**  
By Kaye Sutton

The Irrigation Australia conference, held in Brisbane in May this year attracted record crowds with its theme 'Time To Deliver'. With many regions of Australia still experiencing water restrictions, the pressure is on to stop talking about it, and to actually make a difference.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 98 per cent of Australia's total vegetable production value is due to irrigation, the highest proportion of any crop. This makes irrigation an important issue for growers, as competition for this resource increases.

Key note speaker, Dr Steven Raine from the Cooperative Research Centre for Irrigation Futures, discussed the benefits of improving the performance of irrigation systems.

"Many existing systems are not applying water uniformly to the field," he said. "Improving the uniformity of application in the vegetable industry has been found to increase yields by up to 20 per cent and reduce water requirements by 10 per cent. This has led to improvements in the consistency of produce size and quality as well as reductions in the amount of fertiliser needed. The result is lower labour and harvest costs."

This is good news, as Australia leads the world in the development of efficient irrigation technology, and the conference presentations and workshops highlighted the diverse range on offer to growers.

Participants were advised on everything from pump maintenance and choosing the right drip system, to business skills and financing options.

Irrigation Australia CEO, Jolyon Burnett said, "We wanted the growers to be able to make informed choices when discussing new technology with sales managers so that they'll have the confidence to change."

*According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 98 per cent of Australia's total vegetable production value is due to irrigation, the highest proportion of any crop.*

One of the many new technologies on show was a moisture probe designed to monitor the moisture content of soil. This is especially important for growers using a drip system, where the degree of moisture may not be evident, but it's a useful tool for any grower serious about gaining optimum yields. The probe can be linked to an irrigation system that will switch on automatically when the moisture content deems it necessary.

While the probes can deliver around 30 per cent savings, a CSIRO survey has found that only five per cent of growers are currently using them.

Jolyon Burnett said the Brisbane conference revealed that on-farm implementation of new irrigation practices was still a major issue.

"Although we've had ten years of reform and we now have the knowledge, the products and services to lift production while reducing water use, there are significant problems getting the services and products on to farms."


He believes there is insufficient motivation for growers to install new technology.



Source: Irrigation Australia

guys putting pipes together. Today it isn't easy or cheap and growers have to be educated," he said. "Underground water is getting salty or disappearing so we have to make the most of what we have."

By all accounts, the conference was a great success, attracting growers from all over Australia, and even from as far a field as Vietnam and France.

"It gave growers a chance to learn about the latest, most efficient products and systems to go away with new perspectives and networks," Simon said. 

**The bottom line:**

- Irrigation is likely to become a major problem for growers as water supplies diminish.
- A national conference in Brisbane has identified some strategies for dealing with irrigation into the future.
- Industry still faces a problem in converting knowledge and services into on-farm practices.

**i** For more information: Visit [www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm](http://www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm)  
Project number: HG05007  
Keywords: Irrigation, conference

# need for change

"Water is still available and cheap enough for growers to turn a profit, but this is going to change," he said.

The National Water Initiative has recommended that rural water should be available for trade to urban areas and this is already happening in outer Brisbane and Adelaide.

"This has the potential to greatly affect growers, especially those on the fringe of

urban developments because they'll have to compete with cities that are willing to pay high prices for water," Jolyon said.

The chairman of the Conference Organising Committee, Simon Cooper agreed. He has been in the irrigation business for over 40 years and has seen many changes.

"Twenty years ago, irrigation wasn't considered a profession. It was just a few

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Source: NSW DPI

## Drought prompts water research study

The vegetable industry is one of the most efficient users of water, but as more attention turns toward water usage in Australia, the question is being asked 'what more can be done'? By Simon Adams.

Although vegetable growers are embracing more efficient water conservation techniques, recent drought conditions have emphasised the continuing need for better irrigation management information and a change in the way growers think about their economic planning, according to a recently completed study into the industry's use of water.

The study, completed in June 2006, found growers are increasingly turning to technology such as drip irrigation, on-farm water recycling, irrigation scheduling and soil moisture monitoring to better manage water resources, particularly in drought prone areas such as the Lockyer Valley in Queensland, Werribee in Victoria and the Lachlan Valley in NSW, but there was also a need for more attention to measuring water usage in the industry.

As water supply and pricing become increasingly important factors, the study suggested that growers need to focus more on assessing their economic performance against a water benchmark, rather than an acreage benchmark which requires more accurate information about day to day water usage.

"It's more about producing farm budgets which give growers an expected return per megalitre (ML), rather than budgets that look at an expected return per hectare," project leader Mark Hickey of the NSW Department of Primary Industries said.

The study, which assessed water use across Australia's major vegetable production regions, found growers, particularly in

drought affected areas, were increasingly switching to drip irrigation and automated sprinkler systems for crops that had previously been watered by spray or furrow irrigation, such as potatoes, melons, sweet-potato, onions, lettuce, brassicas, beans and sweet corn.

*"If you're not measuring it, it's very hard to make a judgement about how effective your water usage is."*


In addition to the obvious water economising benefits, case studies conducted at the farm level found drip irrigation offered follow-on benefits including improved quality of crops, earlier season production with some crops, the ability to irrigate while harvesting (which can extend the harvest period), and more flexibility in implementing integrated pest management strategies (by allowing groundrig access to fields during irrigations rather than having to wait for the ground to dry).

During the study, it became apparent to Mark and his team that there was little uniformity in irrigation across the industry as a diverse range of crops were grown under widely differing conditions of soil, resource availability and climate.

This diversity highlighted the need for growers to accurately assess their local resources and how they were used, particularly with respect to water use.

"The advent of more pressurised systems has provided the opportunity for metering water use, allowing more accurate measures of what's being applied to the crop, which would enable growers to consider ways to improve their water use efficiency," Mark said.

"If you're not measuring it, it's very hard to make a judgement about how effective your water use is."

Mark noted that many of the principles of water conservation were similar to the aims of Precision Agriculture. This term describes a production-based farming system that aims to integrate the management of a whole farm by gathering specific information on the requirements of fields (such as soil nutrition and composition) and tailoring technology to meet those requirements. 

### The bottom line:

- Growers are embracing water conservation techniques in the face of severe drought conditions.
- More growers are switching to drip irrigation and automated sprinkler systems in an effort to reduce water consumption.
- More accurate measures will enable improvement of water efficiency.



For more information: Visit [www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm](http://www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm)  
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# Brassica canker solution depends

**Australia's brassica industry is under threat from a new fungal disease.**

**SARDI researchers have isolated the problem but more research is needed to solve it.**

**By Angela Brennan.**

A fungal disease with the potential to devastate the brassica industry in Australia has been the subject of a year long research study by the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI).

Plant death from 'Brassica stem canker' is caused by stem rot and subsequent plant collapse or stem breakage at harvest. Preliminary studies carried out in South Australia found cauliflower to be the most severely affected crop with total loss of some plantings in 2005. Brussels sprouts, broccoli and red cabbage were also found to be affected.

The study found the cost to growers is catastrophic. In South Australia alone growers faced an estimated loss of up to \$8,000 per winter planting with 100 per cent of plantings affected in some cases. Researchers claimed that of the 38 winter plantings inspected in the Northern Adelaide Plains the potential loss was calculated to be as much as \$308,000 per week.

The aims of the project, which commenced in September 2005, were to determine disease levels in brassica crops in Australia, identify the soil fungi causing plant death and determine economic importance. It also looked into whether the problem arose in the nursery or developed after planting in the field.

The study found that much of the crop loss was due to a newly discovered complex of several fungi. Identified fungi include *Rhizoctonia*, *Phoma* (Black leg), *Fusarium*, *Pythium* and *Sclerotinia*. Researchers named the disease 'Brassica stem canker'.

Symptoms include white fungal rot, superficial scurfing/russetting on the lower stem, discrete lesions of various sizes covering up to 25 per cent of the stem and complete stem rot. Research to determine if other pathogens are involved is continuing.

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*Symptoms include white fungal rot, superficial scurfing/russetting on the lower stem, discrete lesions of various sizes covering up to 25 per cent of the stem and complete stem rot.*

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Catherine Hitch and Barbara Hall, researchers with the SARDI Horticulture Pathology Laboratory in Adelaide have been working intensively with growers on the Northern Adelaide Plains in South Australia. Collaborating with researchers and pathologists in Queensland, Victoria, NSW and Western Australia, Catherine and Barbara have compiled results from plant and soil samplings and grower surveys to evaluate the extent of the problem in Australia.

The disease, first observed in South Australia in 2000, has not been described overseas.

Although stem symptoms were found in each state, the symptoms and organisms causing the problem varied between survey sites. 112 different plantings of cauliflower, red cabbage, Brussels sprouts and broccoli were assessed.

"We've found that infection is worst in spring and early summer," said Catherine.

"South Australia appears to be the worst affected. Some winter plantings of cauliflowers on the Northern Adelaide Plains suffered up to 100 per cent loss last year," she said. Infection levels in other states ranged from seven per cent in Queensland, 28 per cent in Western Australia, 73 per cent in NSW and 38 per cent in Victoria.

"The disease appears first in the field," said Catherine, adding that severe canker was found on cauliflowers planted on new ground. "It was not found in nursery seedlings," she said.

To determine the progression of the disease, researchers assessed winter and summer cauliflower crops every two weeks from planting to harvest. Catherine said that their results indicated the disease can appear about two weeks after planting in the field and then increased as the plants matured.

She said the study was successful in determining the extent of the problem in Australia and the cause.

"It was not part of the initial 12 month research to determine management strategies", said Catherine. "We were looking for incidence, what pathogens were involved and their economic importance."

"We have located the problem fungi. Now we need to work on effective solutions," she said. "We are not working with just one disease. Our results have shown that this disease is caused by a complex of several fungi. Managing one disease may not solve the problem," she said.

Catherine said that future research will involve the development of seed, soil and plant treatments.



# on additional research

“Management will need a mixture of cultural and chemical control,” she said. “More work is vital. Without further work and effective management strategies the brassica industry in Australia could become unsustainable.”

### Photograph captions

- A.** Lesion on cauliflower stem caused by Brassica stem canker. Source: SARDI Horticulture Pathology
- B.** Sclerotinia infection on cauliflower stem. Source: SARDI Horticulture Pathology
- C.** Severe stem canker on cauliflower. Source: SARDI Horticulture Pathology
- D.** Cauliflowers collapsed in the field from Brassica stem canker. Source: SARDI Horticulture Pathology

### The bottom line:

- A fungal disease, referred to as ‘Brassica stem canker’ has been identified by researchers, and is found to affect cauliflower, broccoli, brussels sprouts and red cabbage.
- Symptoms include varying levels of stem rot in the plant.
- Further research is likely to identify effective management strategies.

**i** For more information: Visit [www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm](http://www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm)  
 Project number: VG05005  
 Keywords: Brassica stem canker

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## Researcher profile

**Marc Coombs**



Marc Coombs enjoyed catching cicadas in his backyard as a child.

# Making bugs a life's work

**Marc Coombs has made bugs his life work. Graham Gosper speaks to the CSIRO entomologist about what attracts him to these creepy-crawlies.**

Marc Coombs doesn't remember exactly when he first became interested in insects. He grew up in the 1970s in a semi-rural area around Gosford on the NSW Central Coast where beetles, moths, butterflies and cicadas were a conspicuous feature of every summer. From an early age he recalls collecting and studying insects in the backyard of his home. "I spent a lot of time catching cicadas either by climbing trees, pulling them out of spider webs or waiting for them to emerge in the evenings to shed their nymphal skins," he said.

*"The project was particularly rewarding because it took an industry which was entirely pesticide dependent for the control of Green Vegetable Bug, to one using no pesticides at all."*

That fascination for the insect world has been with Marc ever since. In fact, it has been a driving force in a career that has established him as a leading expert on the introduction of biological control agents for horticultural pest management in Australia.

After leaving school, Marc completed a science degree at the University of New England on the Northern Tablelands of NSW, majoring in Invertebrate Zoology and Botany. Honours study and a PhD supported by a string of part-time jobs followed.

Since 1992, when he joined CSIRO Entomology in Queensland, his work has focused on implementing pest management in horticultural crops with particular emphasis on biological control.

Now 43, Marc says his involvement with a project to control Green Vegetable Bug (*Nezara viridula*) in Queensland pecan nut crops has been a highlight of his work with the CSIRO. It involved the introduction and quarantine evaluation of a parasitoid (a tachinid fly) from Argentina in South America. Marc led a team which evaluated the parasitoid against native non-target bugs, kept cultures alive and healthy, released the parasitoid in the field and recorded its impact on the pest. "The project was particularly rewarding because it took an industry which was entirely pesticide dependent for the control of Green Vegetable Bug, to one using no pesticides at all," Marc said.

Marc is currently based at Indooroopilly and is involved with a project aimed at biological control of the Silver leaf whitefly (*Bemisia tabaci B-biotype*) – a major pest in vegetable crops in Queensland, northern NSW and parts of the Northern Territory and Western Australia. This time the parasitoid is a tiny wasp (*Eretmocerus hayati*) which is native to Pakistan. Marc's responsibility has again been to evaluate, mass rear and distribute the parasitoid. About 600,000 of them have been released in Queensland in the past two years. Early results have been good and it is planned to extend the work to Western Australia and the Northern Territory over the next few months.

Marc says in some ways his work with the CSIRO is a sophisticated

extension of the insect study he began as a boy in his backyard at Gosford. "And I enjoy it just as much now as I did then," he said.

Marc also has plenty of interests outside work. He is married with three children and has been involved in cycling as a sport since he was 14, racing on velodromes and in criteriums. "I've switched to longer events as I've become older," he said. "Anything around the 150–200km range is good." Marc's best long distance ride to date was 610km in a tick under 27 hours. 🐛







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## Sclerotinia Lettuce Drop

Sclerotinia lettuce drop is a fungal disease affecting lettuces, caused by *Sclerotinia minor*. Related fungus *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* is also known to affect lettuce crops, as well as a range of alternative crops, and produces similar affects as *S. minor*. Found to occur more commonly in cool to moderate temperatures, lettuce drop is most likely to occur following periods of high humidity and wet conditions following rainfall or irrigation. In some areas of Australia, lettuce drop has been known to lead to crop losses of up to 45 per cent.

### Effects of lettuce drop

Early signs of lettuce drop include wilting and browning of the lettuce leaves. Starting at the base of the stem, brown lesions quickly spread to the roots and the head of the lettuce, until the plant collapses and eventually dies.

*Lettuce drop has been known to lead to crop losses of up to 45 per cent.*

A white, cotton-like mould also forms on the rotting areas. This mould contains hard black fungal bodies, called sclerotia, which can survive in the soil for several years without a host.


Spread of the disease is often assisted by the presence of fallen vegetation which, when combined with favourable moisture conditions, provides these fungal bodies with the necessary energy and nutrients to propagate and contaminate lettuce seedlings.

### Management strategies for Sclerotinia lettuce drop

A number of research programs have concentrated on the development of integrated management strategies for the control of Sclerotinia.

Sclerotinia is best controlled through strict hygiene procedures. The hygienic removal of affected plants and crop trash is important to reduce disease spread, while strategies such as crop rotation and improved soil management may reduce contamination between crops. Studies have shown that the application of brassica green manure may also help reduce the effect of the *Sclerotinia minor* pathogen by suppressing its growth. This approach is also likely improve the overall health of the soil, thereby providing longer term benefits in the battle against lettuce drop.

Chemical fungicides may be useful if applied early, as they may prevent further spreading of the disease, however their use has been found to be variable across different regions. Concerns about chemical resistance and excessive use of chemical management solutions are also strong arguments for adopting an integrated approach to managing this disease.

Alternative control measures may also include the use of microbial bio-control treatments, though the effectiveness of these measures may be dependent on soil characteristics, such as temperature and pH. Organic soil amendments that act as biofumigants may also assist in Sclerotinia control. 

### Controlling Sclerotinia lettuce drop

- Planting crops into well-drained soils will avoid excessive moisture levels.
- Rotation of crops with non-host crops may prevent contamination from one year to the next.
- Alternative hosts, such as broad-leaved weeds, should be controlled to avoid cross contamination.
- Spread of the disease may be reduced by sowing plants further apart.
- Crop trash should be removed after harvest.
- Bio-control through the use of beneficial microbes is being trialled.
- Well-timed application of chemical fungicides may provide effective control.
- Brassica green manures and organic amendments which act as biofumigants may also aid in managing the disease.

 For more information: Visit [www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm](http://www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm)  
Keyword: Lettuce drop

# New posters take guesswork out of lettuce disease

A series of new posters are taking the guesswork out of identifying lettuce diseases and pests.

The posters, produced by NSW Department of Primary Industries are designed to assist growers in recognising some of the most common pests and diseases of lettuce crops.

With contributions from senior NSW DPI researchers Leigh James, Sandra McDougall and Len Tesoriero, the lettuce posters are the third in the series addressing pest and diseases of vegetable crops. Previous posters have featured cucumbers and tomatoes.

For a copy of the poster, contact the vegetable Industry Development Officer in your state.



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## Improving fuel efficiency on-farm

**As petrol prices continue to rise, growers can take measures to cut costs by improving fuel efficiencies on-farm.**

With growing petrol prices creating financial strain for all Australian households, the need to maximise fuel efficiency is becoming a growing concern to individuals and businesses alike.

On-farm fuel costs can represent a major operational expense for growers. With the cost of diesel rising to as much as \$1.50 per litre in some Australian cities, many businesses are seeing their bottom line eroded daily by the constant price hikes at the petrol pump.

So how can growers achieve maximum fuel efficiency on-farm? Here are some suggestions which may reduce fuel use.

### *Reduced tillage*

Growers may be in a position to adopt low-tillage techniques for crops, thereby reducing the need to operate heavy, fuel-consuming machinery. While not all crops may be suitable, much research has been conducted on low-till techniques, and the benefits may well exceed the fuel savings. By applying alternative cultivation techniques to their crops, growers can reduce the long-term impact to their soil, and improve overall soil health.

### *Investment in fuel efficient technology*

When deciding to upgrade or replace machinery, growers may seek to compare a number of options for maximising fuel.

Biofuels, such as ethanol and biodiesel, are now alternatives to traditional petroleum based fuels, and are found to burn more efficiently than regular fuels. As pressure mounts to find environmentally-friendly and renewable fuel sources, manufacturers are working to develop machinery which supports the use of ethanol and biodiesel fuels.

However, while the long-term benefits of investing in these technologies are apparent, such capital investment in new technology may create a significant financial burden for growers in the short-term. The Australian Government recently revealed plans to support fuel modifications of private vehicles (refer to breakout), however similar financial support has not been extended to farmers for on-farm vehicles. As such, the capital outlay for large, high-fuel consuming machinery – such as tractors – may be a major deterrent to growers who would otherwise support more fuel efficient systems, unless financial incentives are introduced at a business level.

### *Appropriate use of machinery*

Fuel efficiency can be greatly affected if a tractor is too big or small for a load. Efficiency declines dramatically if excess tractor horsepower is used for a task, while an overloaded tractor can also cause fuel efficiency to suffer. If a high horsepower tractor is used for a light load, fuel can be

saved by running in a higher gear, but lower engine speed.

Growers should also try to avoid driving their field equipment on the road. More appropriate vehicles should be used to carry crops to storage facilities.

### *Modification of equipment*

Where possible, growers may be able to modify equipment to perform multiple operations in a single pass. This allows growers to reduce the number of trips across the field, thereby reducing fuel consumption.

### *Tyre pressure*

Tractor tyres should be inflated to the correct pressure. Over-inflated tractor tyres are believed to reduce productivity and increase fuel consumption, while under-inflated tyres can increase wear.

### *Maintenance of equipment*

By staying on top of general tractor maintenance, such as keeping air and fuel systems clean, and performing regular services, growers can maximise the fuel efficiency of their equipment.

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For more information on the Environment for vegetable growing, contact Helena Whitman, AUSVEG Ltd on 0409 535 051.



## PM launches \$1.6 billion fuel program

Last month, the Prime Minister outlined a \$1.6 billion fuel program to be rolled out over the next eight years, in an effort to ease the pain of rising fuel costs.

Included in the package was the announcement of grants of up to \$2000 for the conversion and installation of LPG tanks in private use vehicles.

Ian Macfarlane, Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources, said the scheme represents a significant step forward in addressing Australia's future energy usage.

“There are around three million cars in Australia that could be converted to LPG, representing a huge saving to motorists. In fact, in taking up this offer, the average motorist could start to recoup the cost of the conversion and begin to save money at the pump in just four months.

“The scheme will benefit families in both metropolitan and rural areas given that there are more than 3,200 outlets across Australia and nearly half of the filling stations are in regional or rural areas,” he said.

However, the plan is expected to have limited benefits for growers, as most farm machinery is reliant on diesel, which cannot be converted to LPG.

In a bid to increase ethanol-blended fuels consumption, a three-year plan has also been unveiled to assist fuel retailers to adopt equipment for selling ethanol blended fuel. However the Government has ruled out any plans to mandate the introduction of ethanol-based fuels.

For more information on the LPG Vehicle Scheme contact the AusIndustry hotline on 13 28 46 - [www.ausindustry.gov.au](http://www.ausindustry.gov.au).



# Economic Outlook

**AUSVEG Economist Ian James looks at the factors which have led to recent interest rate rises by the Reserve Bank.**

## Reserve Bank Conundrum - Interest rate decision not easy

**On 2 August the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) announced a 0.25 per cent increase in the cash rate. The cash rate is the base rate for interest rates in the economy. All other lending interest rates flow from this rate.**

The major trigger for the rise was the increase in the inflation rate as measured by the consumer price index. The consumer price index jumped an alarming 1.6% in the June quarter leading to an annual inflation rate of 4%. The Reserve Bank has a policy to keep inflation somewhere within the band of 2%- 3%. Some one-off events, such as the recent hike in oil prices and the impact of Cyclone Larry on the price of bananas, may contribute to explaining the leap. Nonetheless the Reserve Bank suggests that the underlying rate of inflation will stay around 3% over the next two years, and that this warranted a rise in interest rates.

However the Reserve Bank is keen to point out that it takes into account a number of factors when making its decisions on interest rates.


One of these considerations is high levels of household debt. Despite the high cost of petrol, consumers continue to spend freely and retail trade remains strong (refer to Graph 1). Consumers continue to binge on credit with the annualised increase in household credit at 15% in the year to June, and accelerating. The interest burden on the average home mortgage is now as high as when the home mortgage rate hit 17% in 1989 (due to an increase in the size of

mortgages) and overall interest commitments are now at a 25 year high – close to 11% of household income. The Reserve Bank is worried that unless consumers' desire for debt is curbed, some households will collapse, with the consequences resonating through the economy. So the interest rate increase, although small, is hopefully a warning to consumers.

A further problem that the Reserve Bank has had to grapple with in making its decision was the impact on the domestic economy of strong overseas demand for Australian mineral and energy resources. This demand is fuelling growth in the domestic economy and business capacity utilisation is the highest in a decade. Gross operating profits of mining companies are outstripping other businesses (refer to Graph 2). This has underpinned strong prices for Australian mining stocks on the stock market, increasing shareholder wealth and supporting spending. In addition there has been strong investment in mining projects, where investment has roughly doubled in the last year, and heavy demand for labour associated with these developments.

The resources boom has created a two speed economy. The mineral resource rich States, namely Western Australia and

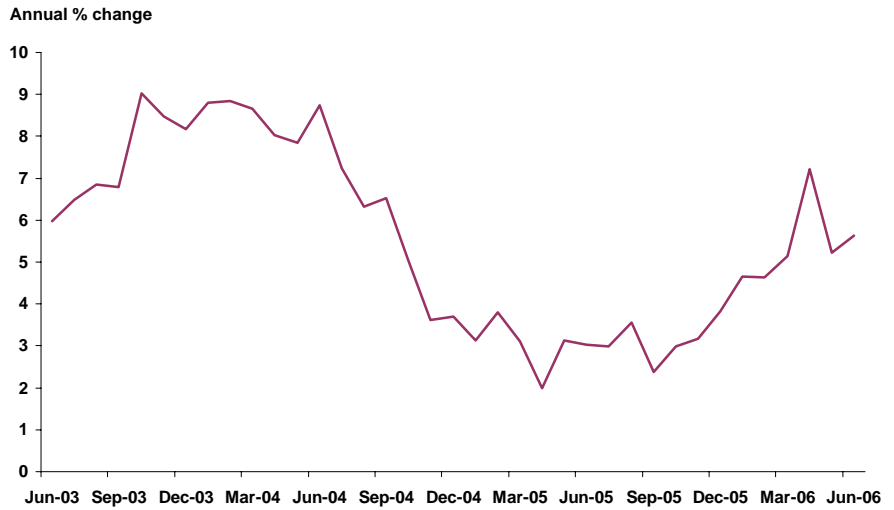
Queensland, have enjoyed boom conditions and these States are outperforming the rest of the economy (refer to Graph 3). In Western Australia in particular, unemployment is at record lows (3.1%), labour is scarce and there has been strong upward pressure on business costs. However, for other States who are more dependent on manufacturing and service industries, the commodity boom is a negative. Financial markets view the Australian dollar (AUD) as a commodity currency – that is, they tend to link the value of the dollar to the demand for commodities. As such the Australian dollar has remained high, disadvantaging Australian manufacturers and hurting other exporters, including vegetable growers. Conditions throughout manufacturing remain weak despite strong retail trade. And the housing industry in these States remains subdued. So for these States, and other industries, the hike in interest rates to rein in the resources boom undermines economic growth and raises the possibility that some households with high debt may be pushed over the brink.

So how far will the Reserve Bank push interest rates? Not far. There are signs that the commodities party may be nearing its end. It is a fine balancing act between reining in household expenditure and pushing households over the brink. It's a similar balancing act to counter boom conditions while preventing the economy from recoiling into recession. So if you are in one of the resource rich States, enjoy the sunshine but carry an umbrella just in case. 



**Graph 1:  
Retail turnover  
monthly data**

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics



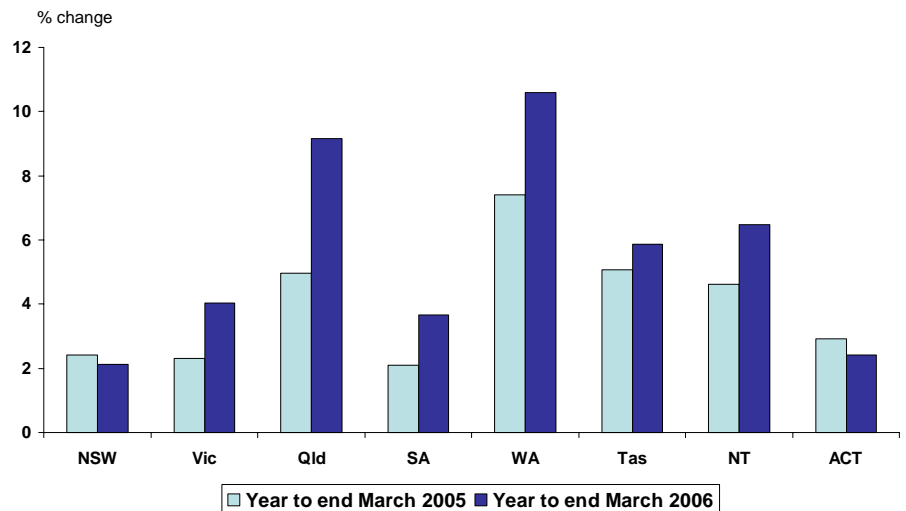
**Graph 2:  
Business gross  
operating profits**

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics



**Graph 3:  
State final demand**

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics





## Industry shows support for 'Australian Grown' labelling

**As retailers commence the implementation of the new Country of Origin Labelling laws on the supermarket shelves, the industry continues to work towards improving information available to consumers regarding the source of food products.**

### Country of Origin Food Labelling Brochure

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) recently released a consumer brochure on country of origin labelling of food, to help consumers understand the new labelling requirements for fresh and processed fruit and vegetables, nuts and seafood. The new guide will help consumers make informed choices about their food purchases. A copy of the brochure is available at [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)



*"Consumers will be able to make buying decisions based on this with the peace of mind that the products they are buying are actually grown in Australia."*

Following the formation of a Cabinet-appointed food labelling working group, discussions are currently underway to review the Trade Practices Act to include additional information to consumers of where their products are actually grown.

Currently the Trade Practices Act allows manufacturers to include 'Product of' and 'Made in' information on their food labels. At present, processed foods must be grown and produced in Australia to carry the 'Product of Australia' label, while 'Made in Australia' requires that more than 51 per cent of value be added to a product during the processing stage.

Industry is currently advocating for an additional 'Grown in' label, which would enable manufacturers to promote the country the vegetables were grown in, irrespective of where it was packaged.

"The current Trade Practices Act allows for Australian buyers to make buying decisions based on 'Product of' and 'Made in' labels," said AUSVEG CEO, John Roach.

"What is being suggested by the changes to the Trade Practices

Act is that food processors will be able to use 'Grown in Australia' or 'Australian Grown' as a positive selling point for their produce, while simultaneously satisfying the country of origin requirements of the Food Standards Code.

"In turn, this means that consumers will be able to make buying decisions based on this with the peace of mind that the products they are buying are actually grown in Australia, as laid out by the Trade Practices Act." ■



## Coles Myer takeover talks create concern



Recent media reports indicating the possible sale of the Coles Myer Group to international consortium Kohlberg Kravis Roberts (KKR) has created some industry concern regarding the future of Australian-grown produce in Coles supermarkets.

While Coles has indicated that the sale is not yet finalised, there is some fear amongst growers that the takeover could jeopardise the position of local produce on supermarket shelves.

“The industry is concerned, given that the product we produce is for Australian consumers,” said AUSVEG CEO John Roach. “However, the real fear is that this takeover could lead to the importation of high volumes of product, and basically force local growers out of the market.

“We’re asking for an assurance, going forward, that if there is a change of ownership, that the Australian content of 90 to 97 per cent of Australian product is not lost in this changeover.” ■

## Top Horticulture Awards Nominations Open

Horticulture Australia is calling for nominations for the 2006 Graham Gregory Award for excellence in horticulture and for the 2006 Young Leaders Award.

The Graham Gregory Award recognises outstanding achievements from all sectors in horticulture throughout the whole supply chain. The Award is named after the late Graham Gregory AO who made an exceptional contribution to research and development in Australian wine and horticulture industries.

The Young Leaders Award is open to nominees under 35 who are able to demonstrate leadership in any discipline related to the horticulture industry.

Horticulture Australia Managing Director, John Webster said the Awards have attracted nominations for many high calibre candidates.

“Every year the judges are faced with the difficult task of selecting two winners from the nominations of very talented people,” John said.

“The judges recognise that the most prestigious awards in horticulture reflect the full range of work being undertaken in our industry.

“We want to encourage nominations from all sectors of horticulture as the Awards are an opportunity to recognise the achievements of all nominees, including the eventual winners,” John added.

To be eligible, a nominee must have demonstrated excellence in an area that has enhanced the industry, either in research and development, market research or other activities that have developed the industry such as education, training or technological transfer.

Nominations close on 9 October 2006, and the selection panel will then review all nominations with the winners announced at



2005 winner of the Young Leader Award, Daryl Wilson, with Ben Swane, Graham Gregory Award winner and Nigel Steele Scott, Chairman of Horticulture Australia.

the Horticulture Australia Industry Forum on 22 November.

Nomination forms are available on HAL's website [www.horticulture.com.au](http://www.horticulture.com.au) ■

## Residents vote 'NO' in Toowoomba recycled water poll

On July 29, Toowoomba residents voted against a proposed water recycling program which would have seen the Queensland city become the first Australian city to implement a recycled drinking water program.

Driven by Toowoomba Mayor Dianne Thorley, the proposal aimed to address drought conditions by introducing recycled water to the State's drinking water supplies.

Media coverage leading up to the poll drew attention to the severe effects of drought on Queensland primary industries – a situation which is likely to be compounded in years to come by falling dam levels, reduced rainfall, and future impacts of climate change.

However, despite the strong push, over 61 per cent of Toowoomba residents voted 'no' in the July poll. ■

## Report highlights rural R&D benefits

A report released by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry underlines how research, development and innovation are keeping Australia's primary industries competitive and sustainable.

Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Sussan Ley, who released the latest edition of *Innovating Rural Australia*, said it provided a snapshot of the broad range of projects commissioned by the 15 rural R&D corporations and companies (RDCs).

"It highlights the diversity of skills among people in our primary industries and the ongoing investment to improve their skills levels," Sussan said.

"People are our most vital resource in undertaking research and creatively applying it.

"The case studies in *Innovating Rural Australia* illustrate the range of skills and the extent of RDC investment to build and maintain this capacity.

"RDC funding ranges from providing traditional research scholarships and helping local grower groups to addressing the wool industry's skills shortage with a national shearer and wool handler training program."

Apart from skills improvement and capacity building, the report gives examples of many other high-quality R&D projects that

are delivering benefits to industry and the community.

"The Australian Government and industry partnership through the RDCs spent more than half a billion dollars on rural research and development in 2004-05," Sussan said.

"The research the RDCs are undertaking reflects the National Research Priorities the Prime Minister announced in 2002.

"With R&D contributing to the agriculture sector's productivity growth rate of 2.8 per cent a year for the past 30 years, the benefits are clear in keeping farmers ahead of international competition and compensating for our steadily declining terms of trade." ■

## More support for Australian farmers battling drought

**Farmers battling prolonged drought across many areas of Australia will continue to have increased access to drought relief payments.**

A \$10,000 increase to the off-farm income test requirements for Exceptional Circumstances Relief Payment (ECRP) is to be reinstated, Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Peter McGauran, announced recently.

More farmers will now continue to be eligible for the relief payments, and those

receiving part payments will continue to receive higher benefits.

"Continuing the \$10,000 increase will give more farming families the opportunity to work off-farm, through the prolonged drought conditions and maintain their farms' long-term viability.

"The measure will apply to farmers in all Exceptional Circumstances (EC) drought declared areas.

"This again demonstrates the Australian Government's commitment to supporting farm families suffering enduring the long, severe drought," he said. ■



# Australian retail business confidence in decline

Australian grocery manufacturers are feeling the effects of slow consumer spending with 53 per cent saying retail business conditions have been in decline over the past 12 months, a report released recently by leading marketing information company ACNielsen has revealed.

Results from the survey revealed that only 17 per cent of manufacturers had seen an improvement in retail business conditions over the past 12 months, while close to half (47%) expected business to deteriorate further over the next two years – a 10 per cent increase from November 2005. Interestingly, it was the multi-national companies that were the most pessimistic with half (50%) expecting business conditions to decline over the next two years, compared to 43 per cent of Australian companies.

Asked to rate issues of most concern in terms of the impact on their businesses, pressure on trading terms was the most likely concern to keep manufacturers awake at night, followed by Private Label growth, the ability to pass on price increases, retailer supply chain strategies and petrol prices.

“There are clearly a number of issues which are having a flow-on effect on manufacturers’ business confidence, particularly in the area of trading term pressures, Private Label growth and the challenge of being able to pass on price increases,” says Ben Dixon, Executive Director, ACNielsen Australia.

When asked to rate retailers’ performance based on a number of specific attributes German retailer Aldi emerged as the top overall performer. Consistent with ACNielsen findings that Aldi continues to be the key driver behind Private Label share gains in Australia, it was also rated the strongest in six of the eight performance attributes including understanding the needs of the consumer; quality of the range review process; fairness of trading terms and negotiations; store compliance; supply chain efficiency; and strategies for success.

Findings from the research also showed that the number of manufacturers producing Private Label products had declined to 56 per cent. And of those not currently supplying Private Label, 69 per cent say it was unlikely that this will be undertaken in the next three years, with the majority citing global policy as the key reason. ■

## \$1.6 million for QLD agriculture education and training

Farmers will experience greater returns through tailored education and training in agriculture. Online professional training for cattle producers and electronic access to industry training for pig producers are two projects to receive funding.

Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Peter McGauran, together with Tim Mulherin, Queensland Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries, recently announced \$1.6 million for nine Queensland education and training projects.

“If we are serious about helping farmers and our industries become more competitive and self reliant, we must invest in education and training,” Mr McGauran said.

The nine successful projects will be funded by the Australian and Queensland, and have also attracted significant industry support, both cash and in kind.

### Successful projects:

- \$383,530 - **Australian Centre for Lifestyle Horticulture** - looking at the development of small to medium sized enterprises
- \$316,125 - **Growcom** (QLF Fruit & Vegetable Growers Ltd) - the development of horticultural training delivery model
- \$361,271 - **Agforce** - understanding the current and future needs of the beef, sheep and grain sectors
- \$156,000 - **North East Downs Landcare Group** - aims to provide an integrated and accredited training approach for Natural Resource Management (NRM)
- \$151,168 - **Australian Poultry CRC** - improving the uptake of vocational education and training systems
- \$119,000 - **CFI Developments** - an online professional development training program for cattle producers
- \$96,580 - **Greening Australia** - looking at the benefits of environmental planning and management for landholders
- \$38,918 - **IAS Management Services** - establishing an electronic portal providing access to specific industry training
- \$29,948 - **Cotton RDC** - identifying and assessing training competencies to highlight future possibilities for producers

The Minister said that the nine successful projects will deliver practical education and training programmes and will promote the benefits of industry-initiated partnerships.

The new Targeted Industry Initiative (TII) strategy recognises a key role in raising the profile of education and training in agriculture.

The Australian and Queensland Governments have made \$22 million available under the AAA FarmBis program to assist primary producers in Queensland to continue to improve their business management skills and knowledge. \$2 million of this has been allocated to the Targeted Industry Initiative. ■

## Export boost for Australian tomatoes to New Zealand

A new quarantine agreement with New Zealand has opened the way for the Australian tomato industry to expand exports across the Tasman.

Peter McGauran, Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Minister, announced that New Zealand had agreed to improve the inspection regime for tomatoes, which greatly expands market access for Australian growers.

“This is great news for the Australian tomato industry, which exports \$5 million worth of tomatoes to New Zealand each year.

“Successful technical consultations between Biosecurity Australia, the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service and their New Zealand counterparts have resulted in the improved regime for Australian tomatoes” he said.

More than 2 million tomatoes that were exported to New Zealand from 2002–2004

were inspected without any fruit flies being detected.

### The revisions to the quarantine requirements include:

- removal of an additional set of inspections
- a reduction in dip sampling requirements
- removal of the requirement to label individual pallets post-treatment.

“The revised quarantine requirements take effect immediately”, the Minister said.

“This is good news for the Australian tomato industry, which currently exports \$5 million worth of tomatoes to New Zealand each year.

“New Zealand’s decision improves market access for tomatoes that are grown all year round, particularly from Queensland.

“It also allows the Australian industry to improve and expand its exports to New Zealand by reducing export costs,” he said.

“Many growers and exporters are in a position to take immediate advantage of New Zealand’s revised quarantine requirements.

“This is a great example of the results that can be achieved by government and industry working together on biosecurity issues.” ■

# Tasmanian Strategic Plan Aligns with **vegvision 2020**



The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA) and the Tasmanian State Government through the Department of Economic Development have commenced the important task of preparing a five year Strategic Plan for the Tasmanian Vegetable Industry. The plan, being facilitated by Melbourne based EMBARK, aims to provide a clear direction for the Tasmanian Vegetable Industry as it grapples with declining terms of trade and increasing import competition.

The preparation of the Strategic Plan was a key recommendation from the Premier's Vegetable Industry Taskforce and underpins the implementation of the remaining 41 recommendations generated by the taskforce. The taskforce was formed following the highly successful Fair Dinkum Food Campaign, waged by Tasmanian growers last year and headed by Tasmanian of the Year, Richard Bovill.

A high level committee has been established to oversee the development of the plan:

- **Bob Wilson**, Strategic Plan Committee Chairman, Classic Foods
- **Brian Bonde**, Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA) Vegetable Council Chairman
- **Wes Ford**, General Manager, Primary Industries Division, Department of Primary Industries and Water (DPIW)
- **Richard Bovill**, Chairman, Australian Vegetable Industry Development Group, Tasmanian of the Year, Vegetable Grower
- **Michael Hart**, Manager, Vegetable and Associated Industries Branch, (DPIW)

- **Anthea Pritchard**, Marketing Manager, J. Boag and Son
- **Peta Sugden**, Manager, Food and Beverage, Department of Economic Development
- **Ian Young**, TFGA Vegetable Council
- **Les Murdoch**, McCains Foods
- **Peter Wise**, Tasmanian Independent Grocers
- **Phil O'Keeffe**, Simplot Australia
- **Mike Frost**, Gaffney Machinery
- **Neil Armstrong**, Harvest Moon
- **Denis Leonard**, Executive Officer, TFGA Vegetable Council
- **Euan Laird**, Managing Director, EMBARK

Bob Wilson, Chairman of the committee stated that, "the mission of the committee is to produce a focused, yet visionary plan to provide a clear sense of purpose and a direction forward for the Tasmanian Vegetable Industry."

"The plan will outline what opportunities exist for the industry and where investment should be directed to capitalise on emerging consumer trends in the global market."

"All sectors of the industry are invited to engage in the development of the plan. The plan is not just about working to make the processing supply chain more competitive, but about how the broader Tasmanian Vegetable Industry can position itself in the future to take advantage of emerging global consumer trends across the full breadth of vegetable products."

The planning process involves a range of workshops and discussions with key supply chain stakeholders. Public meetings are also being held in each major growing region to enable all industry participants a chance to provide their input.

The Tasmanian Strategic Plan will complement the national VegVision 2020 plan which has just been released by AUSVEG and the Federal Government. At the same time, specific research and development plans are being developed by AUSVEG for the Processing Potato, Fresh Potato and Onion industry. Each plan has a slightly different focus and will together build a national, state and commodity focused direction for the industry. ■



## TFGA provides active voice for Tassie growers

Members of the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA) can enjoy a range of benefits, at both a local and national level.

The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA) is the peak body representing the interests of Tasmanian farmers. With approximately 5000 members across all commodity groups, the TFGA has the member support necessary to effectively lobby the Tasmanian Government on a range of issues affecting farmers.

*The TFGA will actively lobby to ensure positive outcomes for Tasmanian farmers.*

Vegetable growers are represented by the TFGA through the Vegetable Commodity Council. Providing a combined voice for all vegetable growers, the Vegetable Council represents growers of a range of vegetable crops, including potatoes, onions, beans, peas, carrots and brassica crops.

"Members of the TFGA can enjoy a range of benefits, including access to the Farm Card, a membership initiative of the TFGA that is designed to provide members with identifiable discounts on their purchases or access to special member-only deals," said TFGA President Roger Swain.

"The TFGA also has alliances with a range of sponsors and business partners, including discounts on Telstra Country Wide phone packages and new Mitsubishi motor vehicles, as well as specialist agribusiness services from Westpac."

And, of course, one of the major benefits for growers is the knowledge that TFGA representatives are constantly monitoring potential changes to Government regulation at both a local level, and at national level through membership to AUSVEG. If changes are believed to affect the farming operations of members, the TFGA will actively lobby to ensure positive outcomes for Tasmanian farmers.

The last twelve months have been particularly active for the TFGA Vegetable Council, and have produced great results for both TFGA members and the broader vegetable growing community.

In June 2005, the TFGA was integral in coordinating the TFGA Fair Dinkum Food Campaign, which saw hundreds of Australian vegetable growers rally in support of the Australian vegetable industry. A convoy of tractors travelled from Tasmania, through Victoria and New South Wales, before arriving in Canberra in August 2005 to address Prime Minister John Howard.

Subsequent to the rally, much attention has been drawn to the importance of vegetable growing to the Tasmanian landscape.

"Global food purchasing trends are leading to worldwide industry rationalisation and compelling local industries to provide either a cost or product point of difference to remain competitive," Brian Bonde, TFGA Vegetable Council Chairman said recently.

"The Tasmanian vegetable processing industry is particularly vulnerable to these impacts. The whole Tasmanian vegetable industry must proactively respond to the changing marketplace to capitalise on opportunities, and to minimise negative impacts in order to maintain their long-term sustainability."

Recognising the need for an industry-wide approach, the TFGA Vegetable Council, in conjunction with the Tasmanian Government, is currently developing a Strategic Plan which will help guide the local industry to a profitable and sustainable future. ■

For more information about the Tasmanian vegetable industry's strategic planning process, turn to page 53.

**i** For more information about the TFGA and member benefits:

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## AUSVEG

### *A Time for Change*

A strong vegetable industry needs a united voice to make sure the interests and welfare of Australian vegetable growers are heard in a cluttered global world.

AUSVEG is this voice and we strive every day to put the vegetable industry on the map as equal counterparts to other agricultural industries such as meat, dairy and grains. This means getting a place at the Government table when important decisions are being considered that effect our industry.

One of the most recent examples of this united voice is the 'Country of Origin' labeling campaign on fresh vegetables. Growers united, AUSVEG and its member associations worked together to speak to Australian consumers and now you can see the result. Labeling on fresh produce is everywhere and large retailers are launching 'fully Australian grown product' labels.

But the job is not over and AUSVEG continues to work towards clear 'Country of Origin' labeling on packaged product. Please see page 48 in this edition of *Vegetables Australia* for an update.

In other news, AUSVEG continues to work with members on the Mandatory Code of Conduct to ensure a fair go for growers. We will also continue to lobby government to make sure that the fertilisers and chemicals that growers need to be globally competitive remain available, where regulation on these products is becoming tighter as the world faces the increasing threat of terrorism.

To meet the needs of this changing industry, your national peak industry body-AUSVEG is changing as well. VegVision 2020, the new vision and strategic plan for the vegetable industry will be launched shortly by the Minister of Agriculture, Peter McGauran and AUSVEG will be ready to embrace it. Only with the full involvement of the industry across the supply chain can this plan be bought to fruition to make real differences to growers.

In my short time as CEO of this passionate organisation, I have been increasingly

impressed by the dedicated efforts of the growers that constitute the AUSVEG Board. And the changes have been immense. AUSVEG has taken on a professional management structure, finance system and performance indicators. This structure has given strength to the organisation to support the industry as it moves forward.

As well as lobbying, AUSVEG also manages the processes that make sure your National Vegetable and Potato Levies are invested wisely. In this role we work closely with HAL to achieve the research and development outcomes that protect and maximize innovation in our industry. There are many changes happening here as well and you will be seeing the outcomes over the following months.

Biosecurity is another area in which AUSVEG has been working hard. In cooperation with Plant Health Australia we are sorting through the problem areas in biosecurity and have a process in train that will provide answers and certainty for growers.

AUSVEG also manages national levy funded projects on behalf of growers, in areas of communication, industry development, economics and environment. Make sure you visit the AUSVEG website on [www.ausveg.com.au](http://www.ausveg.com.au). Here you can find the latest news but also information on hundreds of vegetable and potato research and development projects funded by your levies.

My first six months as CEO have been challenging, fast-paced and rewarding. Over the next few months AUSVEG will work closely with its members, the state associations, to ensure AUSVEG remains a robust, viable organisation that is well resourced and structured to meet the challenges ahead and protect the future of Australian vegetable growers.



John Roach  
Chief Executive Officer  
AUSVEG



John Roach, Chief Executive Officer, AUSVEG



## Queensland

While Queensland growers continue to face water availability issues resulting in reduced productivity, the contamination of an aerial spraying tank with herbicide in the Bowen region has cost growers in the region more than \$1 million.

Six properties were affected by the herbicide spraying incident which in this case was identified as glyphosate (commonly known as Zero or Roundup) by the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries.

In other news, Growcom wishes to congratulate the three Queensland applicants who were successful in securing a place in the AUSVEG Young Growers Tour to the U.S. in October. Timothy Harslett, Stanthorpe, Desley Jackwitz, Gatton and Daryl Wilson, Rockhampton will form half of the six person Australian team to tour with their New Zealand counterparts.

We wish them well and look forward to their continuing involvement in the Queensland vegetable industry in the future.

Jan Davis  
CEO  
Growcom



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Contact: Jan Davis

## Tasmania

### *Tasmanian Vegetable Industry Forum*

More than 160 farmers and industry representatives from across the state attended the inaugural TFGA Vegetable Forum at Ulverstone in August.

The forum gave Tasmanian growers the opportunity to hear and meet key national and international speakers and discuss the long-term future of the industry. Most presenters agreed that the industry needs to adopt a whole-of-industry approach in addressing issues and challenges, and that we must become better at responding to consumers' changing needs.

Keynote speaker for the Forum was Mr Albert Wada, Chairman of UNITED Potato Growers of North America. Mr Wada gave a fascinating insight into how UNITED has brought together the majority of potato growers in North America, and now manages over 80 per cent of all fresh and process potatoes grown there. Their vast scale and market dominance allows UNITED to influence products and market strategies as well as ensure growers work together and receive fair returns for their efforts.

Other speakers included Serge Canale (Simplot Australia Ltd), Colin Mues (ABARE), Ian Pavey (Coles Myer Ltd) and John Smirk (Westpac).

### *Tasmanian Vegetable Strategic Plan*

The Tasmanian Vegetable Industry Strategic Plan is now entering the final stages after an exhaustive consultation process which included one-on-one meetings, focus groups and workshops at all levels of the supply chain.

The final focus group workshops were undertaken on 7 September. Following this, a rough draft of the Strategic Plan will be distributed to all industry stakeholders for their comments and feedback.

The final plan will be released in early November and it is hoped funding will be secured shortly thereafter to begin implementation of the plan. The plan is expected to have a focus on business and product

innovation to equip the industry with the skills and structures required to enable Tasmanian vegetable businesses to grow and prosper.

The Strategic Plan is being managed by a committee Chaired by Mr Bob Wilson, former CEO of Classic Foods.

Denis Leonard  
Executive Officer  
TFGA



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## South Australia

### *Packaging And Processing Facility Installed For Growers*

Products that are flow wrapped, cryvaced, heat sealed in trays, or heat sealed in bags are now all options for growers choosing to use the VHC's demonstrations packaging and processing facility that has just recently been installed as part the community kitchen facility in Virginia.

The facility now offers the full suite for value adding products, from kitchen and preparation facilities to packaging, and marketing. The facility is available to all members of the VHC and offers the capacity to value add products for both test marketing/ production trials and on a commercial basis.

The facilities capital was funded by the federally-funded Sustainable Regions Program – Value Adding Adelaide Plains, which has just been completed. The management of the facility will now be taken on by the VHC.





## New South Wales

"The demonstration facility is an exciting opportunity for growers to trial different packaging, evaluate costs and effectiveness for businesses" says Maxine Grieve, Manager – Value Adding.

The demonstration facility will provide added opportunities for products entering the market, with the option to use the South Australia Grown brand.

"We see a huge number of producers who will be able to use this facility, and in many cases use it in conjunction with other growers and products to create unique products for the consumer market."

Machines have come from HELIX and ULMA packaging. The site is open by appointment through the VHC, for those who are interested in value adding their products.

Mike Redmond  
General Manager  
Virginia Horticulture Centre



VIRGINIA  
HORTICULTURE CENTRE  
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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Contact: Michael Redmond



South Australian Farmers Federation

Address: 3rd floor, 122 Frome St  
Adelaide SA 5000

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Fax: 08 8232 1311

Contact: John Mundy

### Security Sensitive Dangerous Substances (SSDS)

The office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) have set up a committee under the Product Safety and Integrity Committee (PSIC) to advise PM&C and then the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) what other products, aside from ammonium nitrate, should be included on a potential list of 'security sensitive products'.

Industry has still not been provided with a comprehensive list of all the products that are going to be included. It is believed that the list contains some widely used products such as potassium nitrate (fertilizer), Ivomec, phosphine, Sprayseed and a number of others.

Chemicals and fertilisers are expected to be categorized under a three tiered system according to potential risk. These tiers may then have different levels of regulation attached to them which will potentially have similar requirements to the existing Security Sensitive Ammonium Nitrate (SSAN) regulations. Another issue of concern is the potential lack of consistency in how these may be applied in various States around the nation.

Given the much wider use and application of many of these chemicals, the cost of regulation is potentially far greater than any thing we have seen to date as a result of the Governments response to potential terrorist threats.

NSW Farmers Association, whilst acknowledging the paramount importance of protecting Australians against any terrorist activity, will be working to inform Government of the impacts of regulating these mainstream products, and the need to see common sense in approaching this issue.

### NSW Horticultural Industries Dinner (NSWHID) A Raging Success

The second NSWHID was held at Darling Harbour in Sydney this year with over 300 in attendance from right across the various industry sectors in horticulture. Guests raged to the amazing sounds of the big band the Enormous Horns and great food and good wine made for an unforgettable evening. Congratulations to the organizing committee, particularly our IDO Alison Anderson and Regional Manager Frances Vella – well done!

Luke Jewell  
Senior Policy Analyst  
NSW Farmers Association

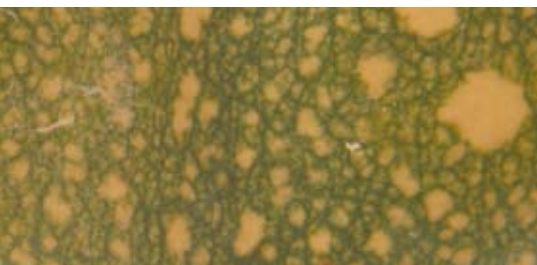


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Sydney NSW 2000

Tel: 02 8251 1885

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Contact: Luke Jewell



# Calendar of events

## SEPTEMBER 2006

3 - 6 September 2006

### 4th Australasian Soilborne Diseases Symposium

Queenstown, New Zealand  
The 4th Australasian Soilborne Diseases Symposium provides a forum for communication and knowledge transfer relating to all aspects of plant pathology and the soil.

For more information:

**Website:** [www.asds2006.org.nz](http://www.asds2006.org.nz)

13 September

### Launch of VegVision 2020

To be officially launched by The Hon. Peter McGauran, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
Canberra, Australia

24 - 26 September 2006

### Southern Hemisphere Congress

Cape Town, South Africa  
The Southern Hemisphere Congress, the leading annual conference and exhibition event for the Southern Hemisphere's fresh fruit and vegetable industry.

For more information:

**Email:** [john@producemarketing.com.au](mailto:john@producemarketing.com.au)

**Website:** [www.shcongress.com](http://www.shcongress.com)

26 September

### Vegetable Industry Product Group Meeting

Sydney, Australia

27 September 2006

### Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee Meeting

Sydney, Australia

## OCTOBER 2006

20 - 24 October 2006

### Fresh Summit, PMA's International Convention & Exposition

San Diego, USA

Fresh Summit is the world's largest fresh fruit and vegetable event. Network with other produce industry leaders, see new products, strengthen relationships with current suppliers, gather information for future purchasing decisions, and build your business.

For more information:

**Website:** [www.pma.com](http://www.pma.com)

22 - 26 October 2006

### SIAL France 2006

Paris, France

Every two years, SIAL showcases the entire global food offering, promoting the energy and vitality of the food industry in France and internationally. SIAL is an opportunity to meet more than 135,000 decision-makers from all over the world whose main reason for coming is to source new suppliers and products.

For more information:

**Website:** [www.sial.fr](http://www.sial.fr)

## NOVEMBER 2006

2-3 November 2006

### Australian Farm Institute, 2006 Strategic Roundtable Conference

Sydney, Australia

Attendance by invitation only.

For more information:

**Email:** [info@farminstitute.org.au](mailto:info@farminstitute.org.au)

23-24 November 2006

### 8th Annual Food Regulations and Labelling Standards Conference

Sydney, Australia

This annual food conference brings together leading industry, government and regulatory speakers to address the latest developments in food health claim standards; fortification of food; the role of food labels in fighting obesity and diabetes; allergens; country of origin and food miles; and managing the marketing – compliance relations.

Four Points by Sheraton, Sydney

For more information:

**Tel:** 02 9080 4307

**Email:** [registration@informa.com.au](mailto:registration@informa.com.au)

**Website:** [www.informa.com.au/food2006](http://www.informa.com.au/food2006)

29-31 May 2007

### Australian Vegetable Industry Conference

Sydney, Australia

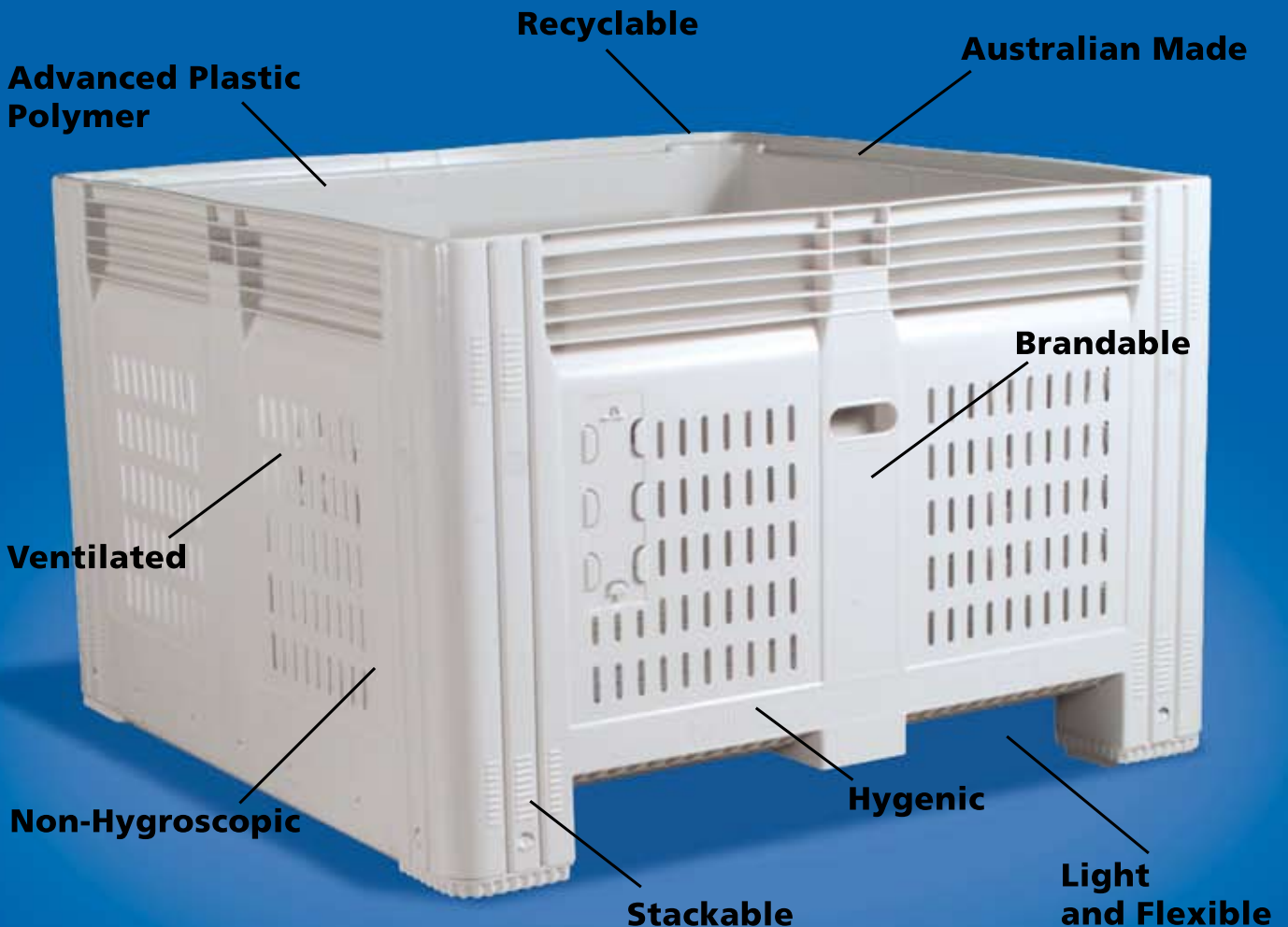
Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre  
Darling Harbour

For more information:

**Tel:** 03 9544 8098



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