



QUEENSLAND FRUIT  
& VEGETABLE GROWERS

## QFVG - THIS IS YOUR LIFE

*Rachel Chambers, QFVG CEO  
100 Year Celebration - 23 November 2023*

At the beginning of this year, we self-declared 2023 as the Year of Horticulture in Queensland as a way of celebrating our 100<sup>th</sup> year supporting the horticultural industry. It was important for us to celebrate those whose lives we work every day to improve, rather than celebrate ourselves.

However, a century in operation does not come easily or often. So tonight, for just one moment, we are celebrating Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers, as the organisation – we are taking a trip down memory lane to pay homage to the impact this organisation has had on a century's worth of horticulture.

Many of you here in this room would have been a part of this journey in some way, you may have been a staff member, a board member, a grower member, an industry member, or a corporate member. You may have partnered with us on the journey to develop and grow our sector, or you may be a valued link in our supply chain. Whatever your role, we thank you for your contribution to this legacy.

Part of paving the way forward in any organisation is understanding and having respect for its past. However, I must admit that some of the stories I've been told about our history have left me a little speechless. I've never been involved with an organisation with so much juicy gossip, and I've worked in government so that's saying a lot!

Alas, now is not the time for gossip, instead I'll be following the lead of J Campbell the secretary of COD as he wrote in the first edition of our magazine.

The 1928 Fruit Growers Gazette says, "The facts will be stated in these columns without any boost or balderdash. In fact, every effort will be made to confine the copy to matter that will be interesting, instructive and of definite value to fruit growers."



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Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers – this is your life...

It's 1919, World War one has just ended. We had just been in drought. This rainfall chart from 1916-1923 demonstrates the heartbeat of agriculture.

Discharged soldiers are returning home and looking for employment. To support land settlement, the Queensland Government offers every discharged member of the armed forces the opportunity to apply for land and financial assistance to build houses.

Of course, this opportunity was embraced by returning soldiers and their families and quickly two soldier fruit settlements were established. Beerburrum was chosen for growing pineapples, and the Stanthorpe district for deciduous growing.

In common with all the other states of Australia, the fruit industry of Queensland expanded very rapidly with both civilians and ex-soldiers attracted to fruit-growing because of the publicity attached to land settlement and the generous advances made by the Agricultural Bank. It also helped that at this time prices were very lucrative.

It seemed nothing was going to burst this bubble. Fresh produce was in demand as was the inexhaustible demand overseas for Australian jams and canned fruits. As the saying goes, make hay while the sun shines – and as a result farms invested in much capital.

As everyone in this room could testify, fresh produce is a supply and demand game, and reaction came around 1920, in the form of a very severe slump in the prices of fruit and fruit products.

During the decade 1910-20 although population growth was high, fruit acreage and production was higher! Resulting in a fluctuating, often glutted market.

But here is one of my favourite takeaways from this time. Discussion of the fruit industry's problems was had in newspapers, parliamentary debates, and government publications. However, all suggested the main problem to be solved was under-consumption rather than over-production.



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They used the term **underconsumption** rather than the term we now use, oversupply – how clever is that!

Imagine if we all got back into using this term. With 9/10 Australians eating less than the required amount of fresh fruit, vegetables, and nuts – it's real!

Imagine if we all ate the recommended nutritional values – we wouldn't have waste, we wouldn't have such a big health care burden, we would be paid more as growers.

Underconsumption people – let's bring it back!

Anyway, back to the story, they blamed this underconsumption on poor marketing and distribution arrangements.

A research paper had this to say of the time:

*In the fruit industry the first two decades of the century had been notable for a complete lack of organised marketing and distribution on a scale sufficiently large to prevent the conflict of one co-operative with another or with independent growers.*

*The inability of farmers to judge the capacity of the market for any particular commodity led to blind production which aggravated the position by causing further gluts, at the same time denying the producer a just reward for his labours.*

*A very small proportion of the commodity sold independently, could affect and depress market. So, the co-operative was always at a disadvantage unless the commodity concerned was in chronic short supply or the co-operative had monopolistic control of an essential marketing facility such as transport, storage, or processing.*

Is it just me, or does this sound all too familiar?



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The Labor government of the day hotly debated with the opposition as to why they should intervene in a market failure.

In his report to the Agricultural Council in 1923, the Director, Macgregor, said,

*"Whatever else is done for the agriculturalist, if prices remain unpayable and marketing is disorganised little advantage will accrue to him from the new Organisation. The stabilisation of prices and a paring of the margin between producer and consumer is desirable from the standpoint of both the agriculturalist and the general public."*

Let me read that last part of the statement from 100 years ago again:

*"The stabilisation of prices and a paring of the margin between producer and consumer is desirable from the standpoint of both the agriculturalist and the general public."*

The government decision to intervene was made, and on the 15 November 1923, COD is formed under the Fruit Marketing Organisation Act. It acts like a co-operative however growers became shareholders when using COD services and then received rebates.

This is the first committee - and from the 1 January 1924, these guys really get cracking!

They take over all transport on growers' behalf. They control the marketing in the southern states by limiting the number of agents handling Queensland fruits to approved agents under a signed agreement which offered safeguards for growers.

They started publishing average prices received to create a healthy rivalry amongst agents.

They took complete control of pineapple marketing and did all the negotiations to raise prices with the pineapple canners.



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Just five months in, all bananas marketed in Brisbane were sold by the Committee and six months later it issued another directive that it would act as sole wholesale commission agent for Queensland tomatoes in Brisbane.

Safe to say this committee was on a mission, and safe to say they also managed to spark a little hostility amongst growers and agents. Regardless of the Minister assuring Queenslanders that the legislation did not intend on COD taking over industry completely and putting agents out of business – supreme court action ensued.

The ruling – was that the committee had no power to prohibit fruit produce agents from carrying on their business on behalf of growers or owners of fruit; or of prohibiting the latter from consigning their fruits to agents for sale. The decision was upheld in the High Court.

Not one to be put off by a bit of a bump in the road, COD got busy again and by December 1924 established a selling floor in Rockhampton.

In 1925 changes to the act widened COD's scope.

1926 saw them begin experimenting with refrigerated transport.

In 1927, Mr W. Ranger, General Manager of COD travelled to USA to investigate American fruit methods returning to publish a report *What America can teach us!*

Then 1928 saw COD publish *The Fruit Growers' Gazette* the first medium for fully acquainting growers on the policies of the various sections and to explain any proposed marketing reform before taking action. An extract from the editor from the first issue of the gazette says:

*"The Committee hopes, by this means [the Gazette], to acquaint the growers with its policy, and by explaining the problems affecting our industry, to obtain a better mutual understanding. The facts will be stated in these columns **without any boost or balderdash.**"*



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*In fact, every effort will be made to confine the copy to matter that will be interesting, instructive and of definite value to fruitgrowers."*

1929 - State Government decides to get out of the canning business after making losses and sells to Victoria Cross Manufacturing Co.

The same year, a ballot was held to see if growers wanted to continue with the COD scheme – 87.2% were in favour.

So, after a bit of a rocky start, COD was off and racing. And what a time to be alive.

A decade where Queensland has a labor government for seven out of the ten years.

We have three prime ministers.

Vegemite is invented.

The top song is about a Greek fruiter trying to sell anything else as he is out of bananas – the songs mentions string beans, onions, cabbage, scallions, coconuts, walnuts and raspberries as alternatives to the nonexistent banana, and Phar Lap wins the Melbourne Cup.

The decade ends however in depression – with over 30% of the Queensland workforce unemployed.

Thanks to Queensland being the only state with a scheme to support unemployed workers along with its large primary production industries which were required, the Queensland economy was somewhat shielded from the crisis.

To better utilise unemployed workers on relief payments – a relief work arrangement was offered where unemployed people could work in local councils and state government departments seeing streets, seawalls, sports grounds, railway, and bridges built. Farming and mining development work was also offered.



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Looking back, we can now clearly see how this is but example in history where, when the going gets tough, people start to recognise the importance of the work farmers do in feeding people. Not only did farms continue to operate to help prop up the economy but canneries continued to operate throughout the time sending much needed supplies both domestically and overseas.

1938 – Brings about another change for COD where it comes to an agreement with The Victoria Cross Manufacturing Company where each organisation took a half share in the cannery and operated it as “Queensland Canneries”.

During this time, COD also predicted a glut of pineapples to come, and instigated marketing tactics to generate demand for the pineapple to be used for breakfast lunch and dinner.

1939 signalled the start of the second world war – a war with profound social political and economic impact.

The 1940's

We begin this decade with a royal commission into fruit and vegetables. An enquiry which ultimately leads to an amendment of CODs work to now include vegetables.

It's a post war era of growth with a report from the Queensland Secondary Industries Development Committee October stating “by 1947/48 existing canneries would need to be enlarged or new canneries erected to process prospective crops from established areas.”

In 1946 – After some conflict on price, Victoria Cross Manufacturing Co buys COD's 50% stake in Queensland Cannery for the face value of the shares.

To put it back into perspective where we are in history – this was the year after the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



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In 1947 – COD builds its own cannery in Northgate. The company was originally called 'Queensland Tropical Fruit Products', with 'Golden Circle' used as their brand name.

The same year the State starts to produce daily market and crop reports.

In its first year of operation, the cannery reported a profit of 34,584 pounds, handled 13,202 tonnes of pineapple, 1,166 tonnes of other fruits. In its third year, the cannery reported a profit of 159,915 pounds.

The 1950's find the COD relocating itself to Turbot Street in Brisbane and the first issue of the Fruit & Vegetable News is published and displayed in the foyer. The same magazine our members read today.

1953-1962 is known as the 'research era' with the Department of Primary Industries really going hard in trials and studies. It was also the decade that television came to Australia, Melbourne held the Olympics and the construction of the Berlin wall commenced.

It was decade of floats and taking science to the people.

The years between 1963 - 1972 saw the Brisbane Markets opened at Rocklea with COD's Major P. J. Savage and Bernard Flewell-Smith part of the first Brisbane Market Trust.

The same year the COD building housed a near fully-automated banana processing facility and there was a decision made to leave the Northgate cannery – meaning this was now known as the Golden Circle Cannery.

Advancements in farm equipment also ensued in this decade. During this time JF Kennedy, Dr Martin Luther King and Robert F Kennedy are assassinated. We land on the moon; Australia holds its 1967 referendum; the first ATM is invented; the Queen sends her first email and Woodstock becomes a legendary event.





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The 1970s begin with the COD celebrating our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1973. The quotes from the special edition magazine could have been a quote from any of the board meetings I've been in.

It was also a demonstration that 50 years ago the Department loved a good pun as much as they do today!

1974 is best known as the year of the Brisbane floods with trading at Brisbane markets temporarily moved to COD's Curzon St premises.

A door-to-door survey in November 1977 found 68% of households kept a tin of pineapple vs 61% peaches, 43% pears, 38% apricots.

With the 1980s came a further amendment to the act meaning we could now trade in flowers and nursery.

The government report for the years 1984 - 1987 defines this time in agriculture as Computerisation, multi-disciplinary endeavour, and overseas involvement.

In 1988, expo entertains us all, and in a lovely act of appreciation and acknowledgement the DPI released a book called Harvest and Heartaches – with a lovely dedication to their staff and the industry. The stories testament to the innovative spirit of farming.

The 80s and 90s brought about some troubling world events including the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster, Chernobyl, the Pan Am terrorist bombing and the Gulf War.

During this time and closer to home the Mabo case results in the Native Title act being passed in 1993.

1990 saw COD mentioned in parliament for all the wrong reasons with the Auditor General making public their concerns that COD had been making large trading losses since 1982. He outlined a very unsatisfactory financial position and acknowledged the actions that had been taken to mitigate it.



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Ministerial statements of the time included criticism of COD not being properly structured to allow to respond to changes – in this day we would call it a lack of ability to pivot.

That same year a study found that 92% of consumers purchased fresh bananas and 50% of buyers purchased fresh pineapples. Today we see 93% of consumers purchasing fresh bananas and 43% purchasing fresh pineapples.

1991 – saw a few more changes to COD as we separated the commercial and industry services, selling our commercial operations which included selling floors at Brisbane Market.

During this transition time we also changed our name from COD to Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers or QFVG.

In 1993 The world trade centre was bombed and the world changed around it.

By 1999 a change in legislation around statutory compulsory membership meant QFVG restructures from a statutory body to a company limited by guarantee with Henry Palaszczuk expressing during the second reading of the bill his desire to end the compulsory funding of Agri political representative bodies.

At the turn of the century the State Government sold the Brisbane Markets by way of tender. After a fierce bidding process, Landacq Limited, a public company comprising 150 predominantly industry-based shareholders, was the successful bidder, purchasing the then 72-hectare site for \$74 million.

The noughties also saw the start of the war in Iraq; Melbourne hold the commonwealth games; the global financial crisis; and Barack Obama sworn in as US President.

It also signifies more changes for QFVG with 2003 signalling the end of levies.



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In 2004 we restructure to become commercially focused and adopted the trading name 'Growcom'. We also packed our bags and left our offices at the Brisbane Markets at Rocklea – now called the Fresh Centre.

A decade later in 2014, Hort Innovation becomes the new levy funded, national, not-for-profit R&D Corporation.

A year later Growcom leaves its Fortitude Valley address and moves in with the Queensland Farmers' Federation.

Another move in 2022 saw Growcom take up office in George Street, where we are today.

This brings us full circle to 2023. The **Year of Horticulture** in Queensland.

In February this year, we announced our restructure and that we would be reclaiming the name QFVG after discussion with our members as we all believed it better describes who we are, what we do and how we do business. Growcom has been retained as our project and program delivery arm.

To launch the Year of Horticulture we built a pineapple farm in Queens Park in Brisbane's CBD - the location of the first pineapple plantation in Queensland to celebrate our growers, we went back to the Ekka to educate our consumers and advocate to decision makers.

As the year went on we celebrated many more commodities including melons, carrots, macadamias, vegetables, berries, apples, bananas, tropical fruits, avocados, citrus, as well as our first horticulturalists during NAIDOC week.

A lot has changed in 100 years yet so much has stayed the same.

It was a challenge to wrap up 100 years in 30 minutes as a human, so I enlisted the help of AI to summarise the century into a poem. This is the result.



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*In 1923, a vision took flight, QLD Fruit and Vegetable Growers, shining bright. A century unfolds, a tale to be told, Of horticulture's journey, brave and bold.*

*Soldiers returning from war, seeking a place, Land settlement beckons, a new embrace. Pineapples in Beerburrum, deciduous in Stanthorpe, Agriculture blooms, a promising scope.*

*The roaring twenties, a time of delight, Fruit prices soared, everything felt right. But a slump arrived, a harsh twist of fate, Overproduction's challenge, a bitter debate.*

*Underconsumption, a term so wise, A call to action, a change in guise. Marketing flaws, distribution askew, Cooperative dreams, a breakthrough anew.*

*1923, COD takes the stage, A cooperative force, ready to engage. Transport under control, marketing in hand, Pineapples, bananas, a strategic stand.*

*Supreme court battles, a rocky start, COD prevails, a determined heart. 1924, a Rockhampton floor, Expansion begins, a dynamic lore.*

*Refrigerated transport, an innovation spree, American insights, a fruit industry decree. The Fruit Growers' Gazette, a voice so clear, Sharing policies, a bond sincere.*

*1939, war's shadow cast, A time of change, a resilience blast. Post-war recovery, a fruitful twist, COD's role expands, vegetables enlist.*

*A cannery partnership, a visionary pact, Marketing tactics, pineapples attract. Through decades of trials, a research phase, COD adapts, thriving in many ways.*

*Brisbane Markets open, a vibrant space, Automation rises, a banana-processing grace. Troubles in the 80s, a storm to weather, COD transforms, endeavors together.*

*1990, financial concerns arise, A challenging period, a market's cries. Rebranding in '91, a new identity, QFVG emerges, a shift with tenacity.*

*Levies end in 2003, a pivotal year, Commercial focus, a name to revere. Board changes, a dynamic cast, Growcom evolves, a future vast.*

*2014 brings Hort Innovation's glow, A national presence, a seed to sow. In 2023, a restructure, a name reclaimed, QFVG stands tall, Growcom remains.*

*The Year of Horticulture, a joyous decree, Celebrating growers, educating with glee. A century's journey, echoes so grand, In the heart of horticulture, we firmly stand.*