

Fruit & Vegetable news



TAYLOR FAMILY PRODUCE *A growing vegetable dynasty*

GROWERS BEAR THE BRUNT OF MOTHER NATURE | UPDATE ON THE AUSTRALIAN AGRICULTURE VISA | HORTICULTURE AWARD PIECE RATE DECISION | HORT CONNECTIONS 2022 RETURNS TO QUEENSLAND



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The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has released an updated factsheet about the Australian Agriculture Visa (Ag Visa). Growcom and other industry bodies have worked closely with government throughout the development process, and we are pleased with how the visa is taking shape.

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The Fair Work Commission has published its much-awaited decision about the implementation of changes to the piece rates provisions. The essence of the changes released in December 2021 remain the same however, the submissions from various employers and industry bodies including Growcom did result in some minor wording changes to increase clarity of the intent.

12. Hort Connections 2022 returns to Queensland

Growcom is pleased to announce the return of Hort Connections to the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre this June following a successful event in 2021. To celebrate growers can for a limited time purchase an all-access pass, including entry to the Gala Dinner, for only \$500! See inside for more details.

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welcome

Growcom Chief Executive
Stephen Barnard

Welcome to the March edition of Fruit & Vegetable News magazine. It certainly has been a challenging start to the year with growers facing a series of natural disasters in quick succession. Our thoughts are with everyone impacted by Ex-Tropical Cyclone Seth and the catastrophic flooding events in south-east Queensland. Growcom has mobilised and is assisting our members. As support packages are activated, we will communicate details with members.

Since our last magazine we have also seen many pending decisions coming to fruition.

In positive news, the Queensland Government last month agreed to restore Paradise Dam to its original capacity. This is a fantastic decision and one many growers will be pleased to hear. Growcom would like to pass on our appreciation to the Queensland Government for backing the horticulture industry. We'd also like to acknowledge the advocacy work carried out locally, in particular by the Bundaberg Fruit & Vegetable Growers, without which I'm sure we would not have reached the same outcome.

Also last month the Fair Work Commission published its much-awaited decision around the implementation of changes to piece rate provisions. The essence of the changes released in December 2021 remain the same however, submissions from various employers and industry bodies including Growcom did result in some wording changes to increase clarity of the intent. Growcom held a webinar in late February for members to cover these changes in more detail. A link to that recording can be found on page 7 of this edition. Some further practical clarification is still required, and we are currently working with the National Farmers Federation (NFF) and Fair Work Ombudsman to clarify some of these issues. We will provide ongoing guidance as information is clarified.

Growcom's Fair Farms program continues to gain industry support with the NFF Horticulture Council officially endorsing and supporting the program. Fair Farms is an industry led solution, created by Australian growers to support Australian growers through the complexity of workplace requirements at a state and federal level, with awareness and training, one-on-one support, and formal certification.

Endorsement of Fair Farms by the NFF Horticulture Council sends a strong signal to those nations from where we gratefully receive many migrant workers that our industry is serious about continuously improving the experience of their citizens while engaged in essential harvest work. It also serves to set the message straight that the majority of growers are doing the right thing.

Results of our 2021 Members Survey are now in and have been analyzed. As an organisation one of our key focus areas for 2022 is to ensure the needs of our members continue to be met. Effective grower engagement, and the delivery of valued and relevant products and services is our highest priority. I would like to thank those members who took the time to complete the survey. Your feedback is extremely important to us to gauge how we can be of most benefit to our members. You can read the key findings of the survey on page 9 of this edition.

Thanks also to everyone who has participated and contributed feedback towards Growcom's Future Fields initiative. The quality of feedback, ideas and the overall commitment and collaboration of those involved has been exceptional. I am excited in anticipation that this initiative to develop a coordinated strategy for the fresh produce sector across Queensland will set the scene and a roadmap of key strategies to build and grow our sector into the future.

Finally, returning to Brisbane this June is the industry's biggest event – Hort Connections. The 2022 conference theme "Growing together" symbolises the industry adaptation and growth post-pandemic in the Australasian region. The entire event will focus on how and where the horticulture world can connect and grow our great industry.

I would encourage all members to attend this worthwhile event which showcases the exciting and new opportunities that will help shape your business. Take advantage of the early bird discount and book your ticket before 21 March. A link to the Growcom Members registration page can be found on page 12 of this edition.



Helping Queenslanders' recover from natural disasters

With La Niña declared, Queenslanders knew to expect plenty of rain this summer. However, the damage that was caused is still being felt by producers across many regions.

In January 2022, Ex-Tropical Cyclone Seth hit the Bundaberg, Fraser Coast, Gympie, North Burnett and South Burnett Regional Council areas, bringing heavy rainfall and flash flooding.

QRIDA's Regional Area Manager for Burnett, Cynthia Godden, says the event wasn't just devastating, but widespread.

"For many producers in my region, this disaster will take months to clean-up and rebuild. Many lost key on-farm infrastructure and won't make it back to normal production for quite some time. It's good to see these producers, as well as non-profit organisations and small businesses applying for the financial assistance available," Cynthia explains.

"Grants of up to \$50,000 are available for primary producers, small businesses and non-profit organisations with an initial \$10,000 to help provide an immediate cash injection and assist producers to plan their recovery activities and once repairs are completed, they can apply for the further grant amount up to the balance of \$40,000 by providing evidence of payment of the works completed. These applications will remain open until 29 July 2022."

Affected primary producers, small businesses and non-profit organisations can also access Disaster Assistance Loans of up to \$250,000 to assist with their longer-term recovery needs.

The La Niña weather pattern is expected to last until early Autumn, but Queenslanders are resilient. Keep an eye on qirda.qld.gov.au and QRIDA's social media pages to stay up to date with the latest disaster recovery assistance available.



Advertisement

Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority

Disaster loans and grants available

Disaster Assistance Recovery Grants and **Disaster Assistance Loans** are available for primary producers impacted by the **Central, Southern and Western Queensland Rainfall and Flooding** and **Ex-Tropical Cyclone Seth** weather events*.

- **Grants of up to \$50,000** to assist with immediate clean up and recovery efforts
- **Disaster Assistance Loans of up to \$250,000** to assist with restocking, re-planting, and restoring areas affected and for working capital expenses
- **Essential Working Capital Loans of up to \$100,000** to assist in managing short term cashflow

For full details including defined disaster areas, eligibility criteria and application forms, visit qirda.qld.gov.au. To find out more talk to us on **1800 623 946**

QRIDA administers financial assistance to disaster affected primary producers, businesses and non-profit organisations under the joint Commonwealth / Queensland Government funded Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements 2018.

**The information contained herein is for general information purposes only. You should not rely upon this information as a basis for making any business, legal or any other decisions.*



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Growers bear the brunt of mother nature

The Queensland horticulture industry has once again been on the receiving end of mother nature's wrath. Within two months our industry has recorded widespread damage from Ex-Tropical Cyclone Seth and more recently heavy rainfall and flooding in South-East Queensland. Our thoughts are with all members who have been directly impacted.

Ex-Tropical Cyclone Seth

The fall-out from Ex-Tropical Cyclone Seth saw growers in Gayndah, Isis and Maryborough witness never before seen floodwater levels in the Biggenden, Gregory, Elliot and Mary Rivers, and in the Barambah and Boonara Creeks of the South Burnett.

Reported impacts of flooding included flattened citrus and macadamia trees; significant infield erosion and damage to roads, creek crossings and causeways; losses and damage to irrigation infrastructure; rubbish and sediment deposited in orchards; small trees and pineapples inundated beyond recovery; and mains power cut slowing required flood recovery action such as hosing mud off leaves/trees, and resumption of irrigation in areas not impacted by flooding.

Fruit drop in citrus has been reported as well, and growers of crops susceptible to fungal viruses and diseases anticipate further crop losses from Pythium and Phytophthora which thrives in these wet, humid conditions.

Ginger and sugarcane growers Shane and Julie Templeton have farms located in both the Maryborough and Gympie regions and experienced flooding at both properties. They lost irrigation and fencing infrastructure and expect that recovery from this event will take roughly six months or so depending on how they get on preventing Pythium affecting their ginger.

Maryborough pineapple and grains grower Scott Maxwell sustained a devastating loss of 300,000 pineapples, as well as damage to machinery, pump house and other irrigation infrastructure. The estimated total damage is substantial coupled with the loss of 60 hectares of cotton and 20 hectares of soybeans.

Citrus and beef producer Emma Robinson of Crossroad Citrus also suffered significant losses. Sections of her orchard in the South Burnett on Boonara Creek were completely wiped out but she also lost pumps, pump sheds and irrigation infrastructure leaving her in an unenviable position of not being able to irrigate the intact parts of the orchard. She commented that flood water was at least a metre higher than the 2013 flood event which resulted from Ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald; local Ergon Energy contractors agreed that this was the case.

Extraordinary Disaster Assistance Recovery Grants of up to \$50,000 along with low interest Disaster Assistance Loans are currently available to primary producers in the following Local Government Areas (LGAs):

- Bundaberg
- Fraser Coast
- Gympie
- North Burnett
- South Burnett

Applications for the Extraordinary Disaster Assistance Recovery Grants close 29 July 2022 and are being administered through the QRIDA. For more information or to apply, visit: www.qrida.qld.gov.au/primary-producers

South-East Queensland Rainfall and Flooding

At the time of writing the full extent of the devastating South-East Queensland floods was still being assessed. Growcom is working with the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and impacted growers to assist and support. Whilst flooding was experienced in many local government areas the most catastrophic damage was recorded around Maryborough and in the Lockyer Valley.

Growers are reporting significant erosion along with damage to infrastructure such as packing sheds and on-farm water storage. Across the Sunshine Coast many macadamia growers had nuts washed away. Food safety issues are also emerging with produce left sitting in water for extended periods.

Growcom is confident disaster assistance under the jointly funded Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangement (DRFA) will be activated providing much needed financial support. Should this funding be activated Growcom will communicate assistance measures with members via email and in person.

Download your natural disaster toolkit

Growcom has developed Natural Disaster Toolkits for the horticulture industry which include emergency contacts, checklists, risk assessment templates and much more to help you be prepared whatever the weather. To download your FREE copy, visit: www.growcom.com.au/services/climate-adaptation-disaster-resilience

Rural Financial Counsellors

Rural Financial Counsellors are located throughout Queensland and are available to provide free, confidential, and impartial rural business financial advice and support. To locate your nearest RFCS, visit: recovery.gov.au/rural-financial-counselling-service-locations

Protect your mental health

Finally, in times of recovery from natural disasters it is important to look after yourself particularly your mental wellbeing. If you are feeling overwhelmed or having trouble coping, please reach out to one of the many confidential and skilled counsellors at Lifeline (13 11 14) or Beyond Blue (1300 22 4636).



policy & advocacy

Growcom Manager, Policy & Advocacy
Richard Shannon

BIG WIN FOR BUNDABERG GROWERS

In enormous news, not just for the growers of Bundaberg but the residents of any part of Queensland that depends on a dam for its wealth and job creating, it was confirmed late last year that the Queensland Government would restore Paradise Dam to its original full supply level.

This announcement was quickly followed by news that the Federal and Queensland Government's would split the \$1.2 billion bill, with each contributing \$600 million to the restoration works.

While there is clearly much work now to be done, we want to take this opportunity to firstly thank the Queensland Government, Premier Palaszczuk and Minister Butcher for backing the irrigators of Bundaberg. This is a huge shot in the arm for such an important horticultural growing region.

We'd also like to acknowledge the amazing advocacy work by the individual growers and regional groups, in particular the

Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers (BFVG), without which there's some doubt whether we'd be where we are today with the wall going back up.

Sunwater will lead the next stage of the project, which includes progressing design, environmental and planning approvals, early contractor engagement, and procurement activities necessary before major works can commence.

A detailed project timeframe will be developed as part of this next stage and, early works are expected to commence in 2023, followed by major works at the dam commencing in 2024, subject to Queensland and Australian Government approvals.

Sunwater will continue investigating constraints within the Bundaberg Water Supply Scheme's existing distribution network to support the region's diversification and expansion into high value crops.



UPDATE: AUSTRALIAN AG VISA

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has released an updated factsheet about the Australian Agriculture Visa (Ag Visa).

Growcom and other industry bodies have worked closely with government throughout the development process, and we are pleased with how the visa is taking shape, although it can't come soon enough.

The Ag Visa is moving ahead with a phased approach with a select number of Approved Employers.

The first phase will focus on low-skilled workers and act as a trial for the visa program before the fully operational Australian Agriculture Visa.

You can view the updated DFAT Ag Visa factsheet online here: www.dfat.gov.au/people-people/international-labour-mobility/australian-agriculture-visa

Information on becoming a Temporary Activity Sponsor (TAS) can be found here: immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/employing-and-sponsoring-someone/sponsoring-workers/becoming-a-sponsor/temporary-activities-sponsor



workplace relations

Focus HR Founding Director
Naomi Wilson

Horticulture Award piece rate decision

On 1 February 2022, the Fair Work Commission published its much-awaited decision about the implementation of changes to the piece rates provisions.

The start date for the changes will be 28 April 2022.

The essence of the changes released in December 2021 remain the same however, the submissions from various employers and industry bodies including Growcom did result in some minor wording changes to increase clarity of the intent.

The key changes to the Award include:

- The crux of the decision is that, while piece rates remain in the Award, there is now a requirement to ensure that all employees are paid at least the minimum hourly rate (including casual loading for casuals) for each hour worked.
- There is also the addition of a definition for 'competent' being a pieceworker who has at least 2 weeks' (76 hours) experience performing the task (e.g. picking apples, picking strawberries, pruning grape vines).
- The need for 'genuine negotiation' in setting piece rates has been removed, meaning that the employer can set the piece rate as long as they comply with the terms set by the Award.
- The calculation to be used for determining the 'average productivity' for the purpose of applying to 15% uprate is defined.
- There is a distinction made between work performed under

the piece rate agreement vs additional tasks.

- The requirement to ensure compliance of the piece rate to hours worked exists on a daily basis (ie. not over a full pay period).
- The details to be stated in the piecework agreement are specified and an updated Piecework record provided.
- Employers are required to keep records of the piece work agreement and hours worked.

What 'next steps' should your business take?

It is important for growers covered by the Horticulture Award to be aware of this decision and plan towards the 28 April implementation. In particular, this may impact on:

- time clocking practices
- payroll processing
- recording keeping
- employment agreements.

Of course, there is also the impact on cost of production and resource planning which needs to be considered at a business profitability level.

If you would like to discuss this or another workplace relations matter in more detail, please don't hesitate to contact Growcom's Workplace Relations Team on 07 3620 3844 or wrtteam@growcom.com.au



In February Growcom and Focus HR hosted a webinar covering the IR implications of this change in detail. If you missed the webinar, or simply want to re-watch it, you can find the recording online here: <https://youtu.be/G-BI2biUyo8>



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AUSVEG

AUSVEG FEDERAL ELECTION PRIORITIES: BOOSTING CONSUMPTION, IMPROVING EFFICIENCY AND INCREASING RESILIENCE

Driving increased consumption of vegetables and potatoes, developing more effective businesses and becoming a more resilient industry are the core priorities of AUSVEG's 2022 Federal Election Priorities, released ahead of the upcoming Federal Election this year.

AUSVEG, Australia's peak industry body for the vegetable and potato sectors, has published its priority list in the lead-up to the upcoming Federal Election, which highlights opportunities to combine the broader social benefits of eating more vegetables and potatoes with the positive employment and economic benefits that growers generate for their regional communities.

AUSVEG's 2022 Federal Election Priorities are grouped into nine critical areas that will help improve health benefits for the Australian public, as well as economic benefits for fresh producers and their communities: increasing domestic consumption of Australian vegetables, workforce, regenerative farming, biosecurity, emergency preparedness and prevention, competition and business, international trade, infrastructure and the next generation.

AUSVEG CEO Michael Coote said that this list has been the result of extensive consultation from growers and industry associations from every major vegetable production region.

"AUSVEG represents over 3500 vegetable producers that account for 3.83 million tonnes of vegetable production worth \$4.9 billion in farmgate value and over \$5 billion in retail value annually – it is one of our strongest performers of Australia's agriculture industry," Mr Coote said.

"The production and supply of fresh produce is truly a national industry that employs over 60,000 workers, not to mention the tens of thousands of additional jobs through the supply chain to process, transport and stock produce.

"AUSVEG's 2022 Federal Election priority list is endorsed by our state and territory grower associations and reflects a unified vision for the future success of our industry. This includes driving increased demand of Australian vegetables, securing a productive

workforce, protecting the future of vegetable production through biosecurity and sustainable growing practices, and futureproofing the industry through upgraded infrastructure and attracting the next generation of skilled people to the industry.

"Our Federal Election asks include a range of issues that will help the industry recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as help place the industry in the best possible position for the next 5, 10 years and beyond.

"A key ask will be to secure funding for a national behavioural change campaign that will address the trend of declining vegetable consumption, with the average Australian eating around 13 kilograms fewer vegetables per year than 20 years ago – equating to around half a serve per day.

"According to the Fruit & Vegetable Consortium, which comprises members across the health, nutrition and agriculture sectors and has developed a compelling business case to support a behavioural change campaign, an increase vegetable consumption by a serve per day would conservatively generate an increase in industry returns of \$1.3 billion per annum shared by all parties along the food supply chain.

"Increasing vegetable consumption will lead to improved health and well-being outcomes that drive reductions in mental and physical health issues, obesity and other illnesses, which will generate as much as \$1 billion economic value after 11 years to Australian taxpayers and Governments at all levels. Not only that, but every new job created in the Australian food industry supports an additional job in the regional economy.

"Addressing the issues that are hindering the industry's future growth now will allow growers to run more efficient and effective businesses and help the vegetable and potato industry to play its role in agriculture reaching its \$100 billion target by 2030."

To view the AUSVEG 2022 Federal Election priorities and grower case studies from each state, visit: www.ausveg.com.au/ausveg-advocacy/ausveg-2022-federal-election-priorities/



2021 MEMBER SURVEY: WHAT YOU TOLD US

Growcom recently completed our 2021 Member Survey. Key focus areas this year include ensuring the needs of members continue to be met and the delivery of valued and relevant products and services. We are pleased to provide you a breakdown of some of the key findings from the 2021 Member Survey.

Overall Satisfaction



72% of respondents scored Growcom 7/10 or higher

Promoters



92% of respondents would recommend Growcom to another.

How well does Growcom advocate on your behalf?



3.63 / 5

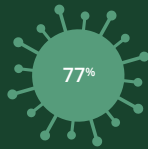
Top 3 issues impacting members in 2022



Access to & retention of labour



Regulations & Compliance Costs



COVID-19

Top 3 member services



News & Information



Workplace Relations Services



Policy & Advocacy

Top 3 publications



Fruit & Vegetable News magazine



Horticulture Now e-news



Workplace Essentials e-news



Workplace Relations Services

76% of respondents scored Growcom's workplace relations services 7/10 or higher
Respondents generally spent less than one hour per year with our workplace relations advisor.

What could Growcom do better?

- Greater work around reducing regulations and compliance costs.
- Be more forceful about issues affecting grower profitability.
- More active promotion of Australian produce and educating consumers around the true cost of production, seasonality, and farming in general.

Thank you for your feedback, watch this space for some exciting new developments as a result.



TAYLOR FAMILY PRODUCE

A growing vegetable dynasty

Granite Belt farming enterprise, Taylor Family Produce, has been growing vegetables in Queensland for over a century. Today the business grows iceberg and cos lettuce, celery, silverbeet, wombok cabbage and cauliflower across 344 hectares of land spanning two locations.

Founded in 1914 in the north-western Brisbane suburb of Mitchelton, the family found success growing a range of English-style vegetables. By 1968 they had outgrown their land in Mitchelton so picked up and moved to the east-Brisbane suburb of Redland Bay.

In the early 90s, in order to extend their growing season, the family acquired a property on the Granite Belt in Amiens. At the same time the Taylor Family Produce company was established, and the reigns handed down to the fourth generation of Taylors - brothers Ray, Geoff, and Wayne.

Ray's wife Connie, who also works in the business said purchasing the property at Amiens was a strategic one allowing them to harvest 12 months of the year.

In December 2021 the Taylors wrapped up their Redland Bay operation which, much in the same way as the Mitchelton property did, saw farming pushed out in favour of residential development.

In order to fill the gap left behind in their harvest schedule with the sale of the Redland Bay property, the family recently purchased another in Kalbar on the Scenic Rim.

"This will be our third growing season at Kalbar, with about 60 hectares of vegetables currently in the ground, up from 40 hectares last winter season," Connie said.

Taylor Family Produce is certainly a family affair with three generations of Taylors currently working in the business. Eldest born son Ray is Managing Director of the Amiens property, Wayne is Managing Director of the Kalbar property and Geoff

oversees transport, logistics and marketing. Connie looks after business administration while the brothers father William remains actively involved in the day-to-day running of the farms.

Over the past couple of years, the Taylors have seen a dramatic decrease in their production output brought about by the ongoing drought and COVID-19.

"Where we would usually plant in excess of 20 million seedlings per year, we're now at half production," Connie explained.

"Drought was the first major influencer for us which saw production drop around 20 per cent. Then with COVID we saw a further 30 per cent reduction. So, we're currently sitting at around 50 per cent of what our 'normal' production quantities would be."

When asked about drought mitigation strategies Connie said unlike other vegetable industries such as tomatoes or capsicums, it wasn't viable for the Taylors to consider bringing in water.

"We did look into bringing in water but for the products we grow the margins are not there, so we just didn't plant," Connie said.

"Instead, we implement other water-saving techniques such as switching from overhead irrigation to trickle tap."

In addition to supplying major supermarket chains domestically, Taylor Family Produce was a large exporter with product going to international markets such as Hong Kong, Singapore, the Pacific Islands and cruise liners.

"With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic we saw the demand for export dry up overnight," Connie said.

"With COVID also came the shortfall in staff. Today we are just growing to what staff we can get. But that's ok, because we are growing something, and we are able to harvest it."

Connie explained that there was very little in the supply chain that hadn't been affected by the pandemic in some way.

"We've struggled to access consumables such as film for the flow wrapping machine, pallets, those sorts of things," she said.

"There have also been massive increases in the cost of fuel which has driven the price of everything through the roof.

"The other opposite extreme is that we've had seriously low pricing for our product.

"There are many other growers just like us, we're all trying to sell the same product to the same market. It's all a big juggling act.

"I like to think that there is a light at the end of the tunnel with the domestic borders and Australia opening back up. I think people are wanting to move, eat and be back to 'normal'."

Taylor Family Produce employs a large local workforce with 44 local employees supported by a multi-national harvest workforce. Respect is an important value for the farm with Connie saying they like to treat their staff as if they were their own family.

"We've always said that if our own children decide to work on a farm, that's how we would like them to be treated. So, we aim to be approachable and respectful to our staff," she said.

In December last year, Taylor Family Produce became Certified through Growcom's Fair Farms program.

"Fair Farms is a good tick to have for your business," Connie said.

"We supply Woolworths direct and you either had to do Sedex or Fair Farms. Yes, Sedex probably covers more global requirements but for the last three years we've been local and Fair Farms has been good for us.

"A real positive for us with Fair Farms is that because we do the right thing and treat our staff well – we now don't have to do the audit again for another three years.

"The education component also opened us up to learning certain things like staff accommodation for example, which we had in place, but we've never had a recourse in place to go yes, that is right and refer back to.

Connie said the journey to becoming Fair Farms Certified was a simple one.

"We already had a lot of the required policies and procedures in place it was just a matter of doing a bit of a tidy up and update to make sure we were up to scratch with current requirements," she said.

Connie added that she would absolutely recommend the Fair Farms program to other growers who are looking to complete a social compliance audit.

Taylor Family Produce has also recently commenced Growcom's best management practice program for horticulture, Hort360.

"Again, we feel Hort360 is another great asset to have for the business," Connie said.

"It's about doing everything possible to reduce our impact on those around us and farming in a sustainable manner."

With the Kalbar farm backing onto the local township, the Taylors are particularly aware of the noises, smells and impact the farm has on those around them.

"We're used to farming in close proximity to residential developments having done so for many years at Redland Bay. So, participating in Hort360 is really a natural flow on and affirmation of those practices that we were already doing."





HORT CONNECTIONS

6-8 June 2022
Brisbane Convention Centre

Growing together



HORT CONNECTIONS 2022 RETURNS TO QUEENSLAND

Growcom is pleased to announce the return of Hort Connections to the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre this June following a successful event in 2021. This year's theme, Growing Together, aims to highlight the importance of uniting and supporting each other in building a stronger more resilient food system.

With current labour and supply chain issues, an increasingly unpredictable climate, and an ever-tightening bottom line, Hort Connections offers growers and industry professionals the perfect setting to come together and discuss the issues important to their industries.

Whilst you are at the event be sure to come and say hello to Growcom at our trade booth (160 – 162). Always a hive of activity this year our staff will once again be on hand to answer your most pressing questions. As part of the trade show program Growcom will also be launching the much-anticipated Future Fields Report the new industry strategic plan for the next decade and providing an update on Growcom's Fair Farms program.

Growcom in partnership with AUSVEG welcomes all growers to come along and celebrate the best of Australian horticulture. Be sure to take advantage of the heavily discounted early bird registration and book your ticket before 21 March.



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\$500 Early Bird Grower Tickets!

The horticulture industry has endured many challenges over the past couple of years. To recognise the tough times faced by growers, Hort Connections is offering the opportunity to purchase an all-access pass, including entry to the Gala Dinner, for only \$500.

bit.ly/HC22Growcom



EARLY BIRD
CLOSES
21 MARCH
2022





Growcom and Australian Pineapples invites you to join us this July for the 2022 Favco Pineapple Field Days!

Tickets are now on sale for this must attend two-day event showcasing the latest in research and development being undertaken by the Australian pineapple industry.

The 2022 event will be held on Queensland's Sunshine Coast and will include tours of local farms, machinery demonstrations, trade stalls, industry updates and of course the industry Gala Dinner and Awards night.

For more information or to register, visit: www.growcom.com.au/pfd2022



The Pineapple Field Days are funded by Hort Innovation using the pineapple industry R&D levy and funds from the Australian Government.

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Materials

Net made of 100% cellulose yarn

Film made of 100% paper with stripes of heat sensitive adhesive that allows closing the bag.

edp.com.au

sales@edp.com.au
(03) 5820 5337



Brisbane monthly summary for February 2021

Compiled by Market Information Services. Ph (07) 3379 4576. Fax (07) 3379 4103.
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Growcom and Ausmarket Consultants have entered into a partnership providing Growcom members with access to monthly fruit and vegetable market price information and data. Through this partnership, members also have the opportunity to access daily market reports at a discounted rate.

Visit Growcom's website to download your monthly market data report: growcom.com.au/news-information/ausmarket

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Brisbane Monthly Special 6 - 10 Crop Summary

Page No 1

Species/Group/Variety	Tonnes	Pack	Low	High	Best	Avg	Species/Group/Variety	Tonnes	Pack	Low	High	Best	Avg
AVOCADOS,Gwen	1609.94	18LCtn	30.00	32.00	32.00	31.00							
Hass		18LCtn	16.00	20.00	20.00	18.00							
Reed		18LCtn	16.00	18.00	18.00	17.00							
Shepard		18LCtn	12.00	34.00	34.00	23.07							
Reed		7KgTray	12.00	18.00	18.00	15.37							
Hass		SLTray	12.00	28.00	30.00	19.99							
Shepard		SLTray	12.00	26.00	26.00	21.18							
BEANS,Butter	385.65	Kg	5.00	12.00	12.00	8.79							
Flat,Continental		Kg	5.00	10.00	10.00	8.24							
Round S'less		Kg	1.00	12.00	12.00	4.65							
Snake		Kg	5.00	12.00	12.00	9.63							
BERRIES,Blackberries	287.95	125g	3.75	4.50	5.00	4.14							
Blueberries		125g	2.00	6.00	6.00	4.05							
Kiwiberries		125g	4.00	4.50	4.50	4.25							
Raspberries		125g	1.00	5.00	5.00	3.05							
BROCCOLI,Baby	643.70	2.4Kg	16.00	26.00	26.00	21.84							
		8KglPk	12.00	50.00	60.00	32.38							
LEMONS,Eureka	937.10	1/2CP	30.00	40.00	40.00	35.00							
Eureka		BulkCP	10.00	80.00	90.00	31.51							
Eureka		CP	60.00	90.00	90.00	75.00							
LETTUCE,Baby Cos	808.79	Carton	12.00	26.00	26.00	22.76							
Baby Cos,Sweet Gems		Carton	16.00	26.00	26.00	22.84							
Cos		Carton	18.00	40.00	40.00	28.65							
Headed		Carton	6.00	40.00	40.00	24.42							
Open Varieties		Carton	12.00	18.00	18.00	16.00							
Open Varieties,Green Oak		Carton	14.00	18.00	20.00	16.68							
Open Varieties,Red Oak		Carton	12.00	16.00	18.00	14.68							
Radicchio		Tray	16.00	30.00	30.00	23.95							
ROCKMELONS	1138.34	30LTray	14.00	28.00	28.00	18.03							
		32LCtn	12.00	16.00	16.00	13.26							
TOMATOES,Egg	3338.71	10KgCtn	4.00	50.00	55.00	24.11							
Field Gourmet		10KgCtn	4.00	40.00	40.00	21.50							
Baby Egg,Grape		200gLP	1.00	2.00	2.00	1.66							
Cherry & Grape,Medley Mix		200gLP	2.00	3.00	3.00	2.50							
Cherry Red Truss		250g	2.20	2.50	2.50	2.39							
Baby Egg,Grape		250gLP	1.80	2.00	2.00	1.90							
Cherry Red		250gLP	0.80	1.80	1.80	1.44							
Cherry & Grape,Medley Mix		400gLP	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.50							
Baby Egg,Grape		5KgCtn	16.00	26.00	26.00	22.11							
Cherry Red		5KgCtn	15.00	25.00	25.00	20.92							
Egg		5KgCtn	15.00	32.00	32.00	24.66							
Heirloom		5KgCtn	30.00	45.00	45.00	39.74							
Cherry & Grape,Medley Mix		5KgTray	30.00	45.00	45.00	37.50							
Gourmet Trusses		5KgTray	6.00	20.00	20.00	14.16							
Baby Egg,Grape		7KgTray	20.00	30.00	30.00	26.42							
Cherry Red Truss		9LCtn	15.00	25.00	25.00	18.16							
WATERMELONS,Long Varieties	3814.00	Kg	0.50	0.60	0.60	0.56							
Seedless		Kg	0.20	1.20	1.40	0.66							
ZUCCHINIS,Green	913.67	10KgCtn	10.00	55.00	55.00	30.76							

STATE: A=ACT, N=NSW, Q=QLD, S=SA, T=TAS, V=VIC, W=WA,
Y=NT, I=IMPORTED

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AUSMARKET
CONSULTANTS



FRUIT AND VEGETABLE WHOLESALE MARKET PRICE REPORTING

Ausmarket Consultants is an independently owned and operated business located in the Brisbane Produce Markets, Queensland. Ausmarket has been servicing the horticulture industry since 1996.

Ausmarket has been supplying price data to all sectors of the horticulture industry for 20+ Years. Clients include State and Federal Government, grower organisations, financial institutions, business consultants, educational facilities, industry organisations, restaurants/hotels, independent and major retailers, primary and secondary wholesalers, transport companies, and individual growers.

Our primary business activity is the supply of Australian fruit and vegetable market price data.

- Daily, weekly and/or monthly ongoing fruit and vegetable price data.
- Daily, weekly, monthly, and annual historic fruit and vegetable price data for 20+ years.
- Industry and grower organisation projects, programs, and market activity reporting.
- Grower subsidised wholesale fruit and vegetable market price reports.
- Price data from Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide markets.

In addition to the data and information services, Ausmarket offer a wide range of quality assessment and quality mentoring services which include fruit maturity testing, loss assessments, independent outturn and arrival assessments, retail monitoring and pre-shipment compliance inspections.

SPECIAL GROWCOM GROWER MEMBER OFFER!

Growcom and Ausmarket Consultants have entered into a partnership providing Growcom Grower Members with access to monthly fruit and vegetable market price information and data. Through this partnership, members also have the opportunity to access daily market reports at a discounted rate.

Visit Growcom's website to access your discount:
www.growcom.com.au/ews-information/ausmarket

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MEMBER UPDATE: GROWCOM'S WORKPLACE RELATIONS SHOP

Growcom is pleased to announce that we have completed a major re-vamp of our Workplace Relations Shop products. With the assistance of Growcom's workplace relations delivery partner, Focus HR, members can now access a range of new policies, procedures and kits that will help your business stay ahead of the game.

New kits cover topics such as:

- Performance management
- Probation / Qualifying periods
- Parental leave
- Recruitment.

While new policies and procedures include:

- Employee entitlements (long services leave, parental leave, and public holiday guidelines)
- Standards of conduct (employee code of conduct, workplace harassment and bullying)
- Conditions of employment (drug and alcohol policies, company equipment, and standards of presentation)
- Employee relations (performance management, grievance, conflict, and dispute management).

Be sure to have a look today:

www.growcom.com.au/growcom-shop



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A PAID GAP-YEAR PROGRAM TO KICK-START YOUR CAREER IN AG.



INTRODUCING YOUNG AUSTRALIANS TO A CAREER IN AGRICULTURE

The National Farmers Federation (NFF) in collaboration with industry groups such as Growcom is delivering the Australian Government initiative – AgCAREERSTART.

The structured program introduces young Australians to a career in agriculture. Over 12 months, candidates will be matched with an on-farm job, given training and development, and gain access to industry events and experiences with their AgCAREERSTART cohort.

The first on-farm placements for AgCAREERSTART will get underway in March 2022. Applications for both farmer hosts and participants are now open.

If you are interested in hosting a young Australian, please use the online form here to register your interest: <https://bit.ly/3LJWEx6> or give Growcom's Blair Brown a call on 0456 639 098.

#HortCon22



HORT CONNECTIONS



6-8 June 2022
Brisbane Convention Centre

EARLY BIRD GROWER REGISTRATIONS NOW ON SALE!

Welcome Reception!

We are bringing back the Welcome Reception on **Monday 6 June** to officially open the conference, grab a drink, and network with peers and your suppliers in the Trade Show.

We are giving the Trade Show a facelift - newly designed Floor Plan, brand-new booth designs, more networking lounges and resting areas, as well as a growing Trade Show speaker program on Tuesday.

Extended Trade Show hours:

Tuesday will be dedicated to the Trade Show - allowing attendees enough time to walk around and grow their connections.

EARLY BIRD
CLOSES
**21 MARCH
2022**

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PROCLAIM® OPTI is the ideal cornerstone of your spray program; it's effective, selective and fast-acting on lepidopteran pests. Being a Group 6 mode of action also means it will slow the onset of resistance while helping deliver fruit and vegetables so good you'll want to frame them.

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FAIR FARMS NEWS

MARCH / APRIL 2022



THIS MONTH

Nerrigundah Berries is for Fair Farms

FAIR FARMS - READY TO GROW
INTRODUCING OUR CERTIFICATION BODIES
NFF HORTICULTURE COUNCIL BACKS FAIR FARMS
FAIR FARMS TRAINING - HAVING A POLICY IS GOOD POLICY



Join Fair Farms before 30 March 2022 and you'll receive:

- Free customised Fair Farms certification logo pack for you to use on trade-level communications (once certified) valued at \$200;
- Up to 5 free training modules;
- Up to 2 hours of free consultation with our Fair Farms Industry expert;
- And access to regular Fair Farms webinars.

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video here!





Program Update

Fair Farms National Program Manager
Sachin Ayachit

Fair Farms – ready to grow

Growcom's Fair Farms program was officially launched in June 2019 and has since thrived despite a global pandemic adversely affecting the horticulture industry. As the world continues to change, and hopefully returns to a calmer state of operation, Fair Farms stands ready to serve the horticulture industry.

Since joining Growcom in December 2021 as the National Program Manager, I've seen just what the program can do and the potential it can grow into. Fair Farms as a social compliance program is fast becoming an integral part of Australian horticulture business management and there are multiple reasons why.

One distinction Fair Farms has over other certification schemes is that it offers comprehensive and relevant training for horticulture growers. Very few social compliance programs offer extensive consultation and training from the very moment their members join. Fair Farms has always operated to support members by providing extensive and relevant training – tailor-made for the horticulture industry. While the program has been designed by Growcom to support the horticulture industry and provide a solution to a problem, it also works to proactively identify growers who want to demonstrate to industry and consumers that they treat their employees in an ethical, lawful, and responsible manner. As it stands Fair Farms is the only program in Australia that deals exclusively with the most important risk in horticulture – workplace relations compliance.

The program's solid foundation and framework in conjunction with industry and stakeholder consulted rules and standards has allowed Fair Farms to flourish. This partnership with industry and stakeholders has helped direct the Fair Farms offerings to its members including the launch of its Member Portal and Learning Management System (LMS) consisting of 13 modules for online training late last year. There are plans to also launch an upgraded Auditor and Buyer Portal shortly. These system developments all form part of Fair Farms' commitment to providing its members with up-to-date systems to enable success for our members particularly when it becomes time to book an audit. We will continue to work on improving these offerings for our members as we grow.

The Fair Farms ethos has resonated so well within the industry that the support can only be described as overwhelming. With support and funding from the Federal Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Fair Farms is well-positioned to serve its members and will continue to raise its national profile by engaging with all peak industry bodies.

Industry leaders such as Fresh Markets Australia and AUSVEG, and audit certification bodies AUS-QUAL, Intertek, SGS, and SAS Globe have been staunch supporters of the program. Most recently, the program celebrated one of Australia's biggest peak industry bodies officially backing the Fair Farms program - the National Farmers Federation (NFF) Horticulture Council.

Moving forward Fair Farms will continue to build on its existing systems, ensuring our learning portal and rules and standards are continually evolving and adapting to state and federal legislation. The rollout of webinars and information alerts for our members will also be more frequent enabling our members to possess the most up-to-date information to do with workplace relations. Fair Farms will continue to promote best practice at industry events. As part of evolving and improving Fair Farms we will also be continuously seeking feedback from our members on a regular basis.



NFF Horticulture Council backs Fair Farms

The National Farmers Federation (NFF) Horticulture Council in late January announced their official endorsement and support for Growcom's Fair Farms program. With ongoing support from industry groups like the NFF and the Australian Government, the Fair Farms program is poised to grow dramatically in coming years.

In their statement NFF President and Horticulture Council Chair, Fiona Simson said endorsement of Fair Farms by the NFF Horticulture Council sends a strong signal to those nations from where we gratefully receive many migrant workers that our industry is serious about continuously improving the experience of their citizens while engaged in essential harvest work.

Growcom Chief Executive Officer Stephen Barnard said with the ongoing support from industry groups like the NFF and the Australian Government, the Fair Farms program was poised to grow dramatically in the coming years.

"As the provider of the Fair Farms program, on behalf of the Australian horticulture industry, Growcom was glad last year to receive ongoing funding commitment from the Commonwealth to extend the program," Mr Barnard said.

"This funding will allow Fair Farms to roll-out comprehensive training and awareness programs across the horticulture sector and guarantee real results for the industry.

"Through this funding Federal Agriculture Minister David Littleproud has shown his faith in our industry, and in the Fair Farms program.

"It is our intention to do justice to the overwhelming majority of employers across Australia horticulture who we know are exemplary employers."

Nerrigundah Berries

is for Fair Farms

Family owned and operated berry farm in the Yarra Valley, Nerrigundah Berries grows a delicious variety of berries including boysenberry, blueberries, and raspberries. They also made the move to become Fair Farms certified this year.

Nerrigundah Berries has been managed by Brialey Brightwell's family for four generations and the move to become Fair Farms certified has been described as 'straightforward and simple.'

"Fair Farms just makes sense for Australian Farmers," Ms Brightwell said.

Ms Brightwell decided to become Fair Farms certified after finding out about the Australian-centric social compliance program a couple of years ago at an industry event on Queensland's Gold Coast.

"We were at this industry event, and we found out about Fair Farms there and were genuinely interested in it," she said.

"We listened and asked questions and found it was super relevant to us.

"We were already with another social compliance program at the time but decided that in the future we would look to Fair Farms after hearing about it at this event."

When it came time to audit Ms Brightwell said that the Fair Farms process was easy to understand and the resources available assured them that they were ready for audit when the time came.

"We decided to go with Fair Farms because it just makes more sense – it was more relevant to who we are and how we do things," Ms Brightwell said.

"We had been with a previous social compliance program and some of their questions on audit were just not relevant to us, or to any Australian farmer I know."

Ms Brightwell said that Fair Farms' emphasis on worker wellbeing aligned with how she treats her employees on a day-to-day basis.

"We're on a first name basis with our employees and I recognise them – in recent times we've got to know our employees better because we have to do daily health checks because of COVID," Ms Brightwell said.

The realities of managing a family-owned farm means that Ms Brightwell is constantly donning different business hats. At times she'll function as human resources, and at other times when she is short on pickers, you can find her out with her team harvesting – this means that being a part of a straightforward program like Fair Farms makes farming life a little easier.

"I love farming, it is a constant challenge of production and the elements," she said.

"We were one of the first farms to start early with hydroponics - which was a game changer.

"Every year we look at what we do and what we want to improve, and Fair Farms has been part of that.

"I would tell people who are thinking about joining Fair Farms that it is a good system and covers everything worker related that you should be doing in farming."





Introducing our Certification Bodies

AUS-QUAL are Australia and New Zealand's leading provider of agribusiness auditing, certification and training services, supporting over 70 different programs and is one of Fair Farms four certification bodies conducting independent third-party audits.

A non-for-profit organisation, AUS-QUAL is a market leader - their auditors are all Exemplar Global registered and the business operates under internationally recognised quality management systems. Established in 1998 as AUS-MEATS, AUS-QUAL works closely with the Australian agricultural and horticultural industries and has been a staunch supporter of Fair Farms since the very beginning.

AUS-QUAL provides a range of certification services, which includes Fair Farms, and is accredited by the Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand (JAS-ANZ). When Fair Farms was in its inception stage and had not yet launched AUS-QUAL was part of the pilot scheme for Fair Farms and even participated in pilot audits for the program.

To find out more information about AUS-QUAL head to contact www.ausmeat.com.au

Having a policy is good policy

Policies and procedures can be incredibly helpful guidance tools for farm management and workers. A well drafted policy and procedure that is effectively communicated to all workers can help a business manage and reduce operational risk.

The Fair Farms Standard requires that businesses maintain and comply with relevant employment policies including, but not limited to, those relating to:

- Free and Voluntary Employment
- Bullying, Discrimination and Harassment (including Sexual Harassment)
- Dispute and Grievance Management.

Free and Voluntary Employment

While Australia is lucky enough to have very strong democratic systems, high standards of living and one of the highest minimum wage rates in the world, we are not immune to instances of modern slavery.

Modern slavery is a term used to describe serious exploitation. It does not include practices like substandard working conditions or underpayment of workers.

Even if everything looks rosy on the surface, there may be hidden instances of unethical working arrangements. This risk is especially heightened if a business uses Labour Hire Providers (LHP's).

To comply with the Fair Farms Standard, a business must ensure all workers, including those provided through LHPs have freely chosen the employment and do not fall into the category of forced or bonded labour.

Bullying, Discrimination, Harassment and Sexual Harassment

The Fair Farms Standard and the law requires that employers must ensure a safe workplace. This means having policies and

systems in place to prevent and manage discrimination and harassment (including sexual harassment).

Some recent changes to the Fair Work Act 2009 following the Human Rights Commission's 2020 National Enquiry into sexual harassment in Australian Workplaces (entitled Respect@Work) mean that now is a good time for employers to review their policies and procedures relating to discrimination and harassment and particularly sexual harassment.

A person who sexually harasses someone else is primarily responsible for their behaviour. However, in many cases, employers can also be held responsible for sexual harassment by their employees. This is called "vicarious liability".

An employer may be found vicariously liable for sexual harassment in the workplace if they did not take "all reasonable steps" to prevent the harassment from occurring. Such steps include putting in place and enforcing a policy and procedure that may form part of a business's broader Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination policy and procedure.

Dispute and Grievance Management

Disagreements are inevitable in a workplace. Whether big or small, disputes and grievances can be stressful, time consuming and costly.

Even if a business has never previously had a workplace dispute or grievance, there are benefits to having a solid process for dealing with them, such as reducing exposure to risk; Managing your employee obligations with a consistent and objective framework; and showing workers, they will be fairly treated.

To comply with the Fair Farms Standard, businesses are required to provide a process to manage disputes and grievances.

To read the full article including some helpful tips for writing and communicating policies and procedures, visit the Fair Farms website: www.fairfarms.com.au

Growcom's Fair Farms program has standards and training modules that help farm businesses to keep up to speed on legislative requirements set at both the state and national level. Become a member of Fair Farms today.



QFF WELCOMES JO SHEPPARD AS CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) has welcomed Jo Sheppard as the company's new Chief Executive Officer.

Ms Sheppard joins QFF with a depth of experience across multiple industry sectors supported by strong advocacy, stakeholder, community engagement and government relations skills.

Most recently serving as Director of Stakeholder Engagement at the University of Southern Queensland, Ms Sheppard's previous roles also include the CEO of the Toowoomba Chamber of Commerce, Director on the board of Sunwater, and previously an elected Councillor and Mayor of Paroo Shire Council in South West Queensland.

Her passion for agriculture, and regional and remote communities, as well as experience across multiple sectors,

will ensure success in representing the interests of peak state and national agriculture industry organisations, and more than 13,000 primary producers across the state.

"Advocating on behalf of Queensland's farmers is a significant responsibility and, given the importance of the agriculture sector to the state's economy and regional communities, effective representation is critical," Ms Sheppard said.

"Despite facing ongoing challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic, rising input prices, biosecurity incursions and climate change, Queensland farmers continue to produce world-class food, fibre and foliage."

"I look forward to supporting and striving for a better deal for Queensland's farmers to strengthen their productivity and profitability into the future."

QFF President Allan Dingle thanked outgoing CEO Dr Georgina Davis who has moved on to new challenges and welcomed Ms Sheppard to her new role.

"Jo has demonstrated clear leadership and advocacy skills throughout her career, and her organisational and stakeholder engagement experience will be crucial assets for QFF, our industry members and the state's farmers," Mr Dingle said.

"Under her direction, QFF will continue to progress a broad range of economic, social, environmental and regional issues of strategic importance to improve the operating environment for Queensland's farmers."



Workforce shortages?

Growers all around Australia are seeing the benefits of recruiting staff through the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme. The PALM scheme allows eligible Australian businesses to employ people from 9 Pacific islands and Timor-Leste when there are not enough local workers available.

Bulmer Farms has welcomed women and men from Kiribati, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu, filling labour gaps and bringing fresh skills and perspectives to the business.

For more information: www.palmscheme.gov.au



”

Pacific island and Timorese workers are a blessing and they work right across our business.

They are harvesting, planting, packaging, working as leaders, in our processing shed and in semi-skilled roles.

**Karen Grant
HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER
BULMER FARMS**

FUTURE FIELDS

Because the future of fresh produce is in our hands

FRESH PRODUCE TO FOCUS ON FOUR KEY FIELDS

Growcom on behalf of the Queensland fresh produce sector and supply chain is pleased to announce the four key fields of strategic interest being pursued over the first two years of the industries new plan, Future Fields.

Through an extensive grassroots engagement and consultation process, these four fields have risen to the top in terms of the likely benefit to industry from taking action, and the level of collaboration required to bring that benefit about.

The final four fields are



Innovate2Access:

Reaching new markets through innovation in food processing, packaging and logistics.



Bio Strong:

Managing pests, diseases and biosecurity risks using data intelligence and collaboration.



Working Smarter:

Building skills to adopt and apply the new technologies that will reduce reliance on low skilled and labour intensive roles



Coordinated Compliance:

Making it easier for growers to comply with government regulations and meet market driven requirements through digitisation and eliminating duplication.

Chair of the Future Fields Advisory Committee Angus Ferrier said seizing opportunities in each of these fields would prove

instrumental if Queensland was to remain the preeminent state for horticultural production, supply chain innovation and food processing.

“While COVID-19 has caused enormous pain and disruption, it will also continue to create opportunity for those ready and willing to adapt. So now is a perfect time to be thinking and acting strategically to stay ahead of the game,” Mr Ferrier said.

“With limited time, resources and attention, the fresh produce sector must be targeted in those challenges and opportunities it chooses to attack. Many strategic plans collect dust on the shelf because they attempt too much and try to please too many.

“Very few significant pieces of work can be achieved alone. So putting Future Fields into action will be a collaborative effort, relying on many small contributions from a wide range of interested parties. This strategic plan will succeed where others have failed because we’re only taking action where there’s plenty of skin in the game.”

Growcom Chair Belinda Frentz said stakeholders across the sector could take credit for the quality of ideas that had shaped the final four fields. She said they could also have confidence in the rigorous process used to land on those fields of the highest priority.

“We kicked off consultation with a summit of over 120 industry leaders at the Brisbane Markets and have heard directly from more than 200 growers and supply chain partners at eight regional workshops around the state. And a further 90 responses have been fielded through the online survey,” Ms Frentz said.

“Future Fields is broad in its scope across the supply chain, and so we’ve obviously received a huge diversity of ideas, challenges and opportunities. We have only been able to distill these down by taking an objective approach, and have been led toward fields backed by an overwhelming weight of grassroots interest and support.”

An Interim Report has been released providing all interested parties with a summary of engagement activities, and an overview of the principles and methodology applied in identifying and prioritising our Future Fields.

A copy of the Future Fields Interim Report can be found online: www.futurefields.info



Future Fields is being delivered by Growcom and is proudly supported and funded by the Queensland Government.

Fresh produce leaders launch into action

A new team of existing and emerging leaders has been appointed to bring the Queensland fresh produce sector and supply chain together around an agreed set of actions that will set the industry up for success over the next 10 years.

The group of a dozen Future Fields Leaders had risen to the top through a competitive application process, demonstrating their appreciation for the key strategic challenges and opportunities to be grappled with by industry, and their willingness to work collaboratively for the common good.

Over the next few months, the group will work in small teams developing action plans around each of the four fields, or areas of strategic interest, that will be focused on over the first two years of the new plan.

Growcom CEO Stephen Barnard said it was exciting, and also essential, to have such a diverse and talented group to work with senior Growcom and Department of Agriculture and Fisheries staff in developing a strategic plan for the fresh produce sector and supply chain.

“The Future Fields Leaders are such an important part of our strategic planning process. To be successful, Future Fields must be owned by all stakeholders across the supply chain. Through Future Fields we are taking control of our own destiny, so it’s essential the team developing the plan and the actions we need to take together reflect the great diversity of interests and expertise in our industry,” Mr Barnard said.

Future Fields will be launched at the upcoming 2022 Hort Connections conference being held in Brisbane in early June.



Eddie Alvarenga



Femi Akinsanmi



Jennifer McKee



Jessica Volker



Johnathon Davey



Josh Maunder



Kees Versteeg



Kerry McCarthy



Kristy Banks



Paul Fagg



Phil Horton



Richard Clayton



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A photograph showing the lower half of a person wearing blue denim jeans and brown leather boots. They are standing in a metal pen or stall. Several sheep with thick, woolly coats are visible behind the metal bars. The floor is dirt and covered with some dark spots, possibly droppings. The lighting is warm and natural, suggesting an outdoor or well-lit indoor farm setting.

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At WFI, we're experts in insuring people who live in regional Australia because that's where our people live too. We think it's important to get to know our customers. So, give your Local Area Manager a call and they'll be happy to chat over the phone, at your property or at a WFI branch. It's how we've been doing business for over 100 years.

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BUILDING FARM BUSINESS RESILIENCE IN HORTICULTURE

Horticultural growers can now access the new Farm Business Resilience Program (FBRP) being delivered by Growcom. The new assistance measures will help you to review all aspects of your business, develop plans and access grants and loans through Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA) or private financier.

What is the Farm Business Resilience Program?

Jointly funded under the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund and Queensland Government's Drought and Climate Adaptation Program, the FBRP builds the strategic management capacity of Queensland horticultural growers to prepare for and manage business and climate risks. The program does this by supporting farm business planning to identify goals, business and climate risks, and strategies to manage these risks. The program supports growers to review their management practices and facilitates specific training and other activities to help assist growers address their risks and be more resilient. The new assistance focuses on greater preparedness and business planning to manage the ever-present risk of drought in Queensland. Growers can participate in this program irrelevant of their drought situation and do not require a drought declaration.

Who is eligible to participate?

All Queensland horticulture growers and primary producers across all agriculture sectors.

The Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA) defines a primary producer as the following when assessing eligibility for assistance:

- A sole trader who spends the majority of the sole trader's labour on, and derives the majority of the sole trader's income from, a primary production enterprise; or
- For a partnership, company or trust that carries on a primary production enterprise – the partners in the partnership, shareholders in the company or beneficiaries of the trust who spend the majority of their labour on, and derive the majority of their income from, the primary production enterprise

What financial assistance is available?

The following financial assistance measures are now available through the QRIDA. Growers will need to have a completed Farm Business Resilience Plan when applying for assistance. For more information or to apply, visit:

www.qrida.qld.gov.au/drought-support

Farm Management Grant Program

A rebate of 50 per cent to a maximum of \$2,500 for the professional cost of developing a Farm Business Resilience Plan.

Drought Preparedness Grants

A rebate of up to 25 per cent to a maximum of \$50,000 for on-farm capital improvements identified in your Farm Business Resilience Plan. For example, drilling of a bore.

Drought Ready and Recovery Loans

A concessional interest loan of up to \$250,000 to undertake preparedness measures identified in your Farm Business Resilience Plan. For example, installing water infrastructure, expanding dams, improving irrigation. This is a complimentary measure to the Drought Preparedness Grants.

Emergency Drought Assistance Loans

An interest-free concessional loan of up to \$50,000 for drought-declared primary producers to finance carry-on activities like paying wages or creditors during drought.

Drought Carry-On Finance Loan Scheme

A concessional interest loan of up to \$250,000 for drought carry-on finance. These loans will be available where the \$50,000 Emergency Drought Assistance Loans Scheme is insufficient. Applicant must be drought declared.



Want to learn more about Queensland's new drought assistance scheme?

Join Growcom and the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries on Monday, 21 March to learn more about the new assistance and how you can prepare for and manage climate risks, such as drought.

REGISTER ONLINE VIA THE GROWCOM WEBSITE:

www.growcom.com.au/portfolio/fbrp-horticulture



Getting started: Preparing your Farm Business Resilience Plan

A Farm Business Resilience Plan helps you identify, assess, and manage business risks such as drought, by developing strategies and actions to address these risks. You will need a Farm Business Resilience Plan or similar, to apply for the drought assistance grants and loans available through the QRIDA.

A business plan should be evidence-based, incorporate relevant learnings from training, and be tailored to the purpose of the business operation. It should outline an implementation approach and be monitored and reviewed regularly to respond to and manage changes and their impacts.

You can complete your Farm Business Resilience Plan in your own time online, or with the assistance of one of Growcom's Resilience Officers.

Growcom will be utilising our best management practice program for horticulture, Hort360 to develop business plans. A new Farm Business Management module has been developed within Hort360 to facilitate this process. This module upon completion

not only provides you with a list of actions to bolster your resilience on farm but also the auto-populated plan required to access funding.

To enroll in the program and use Hort360 to develop your Farm Business Resilience Plan:

1. Contact a Growcom Resilience Officer or go online to the Growcom website:
www.growcom.com.au/portfolio/fbrp-horticulture
2. If not already, you will need to register with Hort360.
3. Once logged into Hort360 you can complete the Farm Business Resilience module, obtain your risk assessment and action plan, and fill in the property details required to access further financial support.
4. Once completed, you can apply for financial support through the QRIDA website or speak with your local QRIDA Officer for further assistance.



Contact Growcom today

Growcom has employed three Resilience Officers who are available to help you complete your Farm Business Resilience Plan and access funding. Get in contact today to start your resilience journey:



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Custard apple grower gets ten-fold yield increase with ag-technology

Being involved in Growcom's Hort360 Great Barrier Reef (Hort360 GBR) program is paying dividends for one Central Queensland grower.

Keppel Orchard is a locally owned, family grown orchard specialising in custard apples. In April 2021, they attended a pest management workshop, featuring information on ag-tech monitoring innovation, use of beneficial insects and efficiencies in spray technology.

Entomologist, ag-tech innovator, CEO, and co-founder of ag-tech product RapidAIM, Dr Nancy Schellhorn, presented on how their product works as a surveillance grid for the earliest possible indication of Queensland fruit fly (Q-fly) activity in an orchard. Dr Schellhorn demonstrated how the RapidAIM technology was able to provide real-time Q-fly pressure data to a mobile device, enabling growers to make informed, timely decisions and adopt precision spray practices in their orchards.

RapidAIM uses a network of lured sensors that can detect the presence of male Q-fly to send an alert to any type of device, notifying the grower that Q-fly are active in a specific location. In addition to this, the software keeps a record of time, location, and number of every detection. This gives the grower real-time indications of Q-fly populations and their whereabouts within the orchard. In a nutshell, it not only takes the guesswork out of managing Q-fly but it drastically minimises grower inputs in managing Q-fly incursions, and assists them in planning their spray programs for the next season using property data and trend records.

The ability of RapidAIM technology to alert Q-fly in real-time was of particular interest to Keppel Orchards. At the time of the workshop, they were suffering devastating crop losses from Q-fly despite concerted, industry standard pest management practices which included orchard hygiene, manual traps, regular monitoring, and a site-specific spray program.

"I knew as soon as Nancy started talking that this was something we needed to get on-board with," said Ken Brown, part owner and operator of Keppel Orchards. "We just couldn't get the jump on them, and the presentation helped me to understand why."

Given the extent of the troubles they were having with Q-fly, Keppel Orchard chose to invest in ten RapidAIM sensors, which was sufficient to establish a network across their 15 hectares of custard apples. The results and consequential overhaul of their approach to dealing with Q-fly resulting in a ten-fold increase in custard apple yield still floors the family; it's practically changed their lives.



CEO and co-founder of RapidAIM, Dr Nancy Schellhorn

For example, before RapidAIM, they had been blanket spraying at night to reduce drift and ensure good coverage. Since using RapidAIM however, Ken's back to getting a full nights' rest because the sensors detected that the fruit flies were most active at 7.30am.

"Simply by modifying the time of spray application to early morning, say about 6am, within a month the number of fruit fly detections went from 92 down to 4." Ken said.

"It's reduced the amount of time spent setting and checking traps, it maximises time spent on the sprayer because our efforts are accurate and timely. It's reduced our costs for sure."

Since participating in the workshop and in-field scouting training with neighbours coordinated through Growcom's Hort360 GBR program, Keppel Orchard has become Reef Certified. The sensor data and electronic spray diaries which Ken creates using an app on his mobile, assisted them in their Reef Certification third-party audit.

"We are new to horticulture and haven't been through an audit process yet because we're still in a development phase, but we found the audit process really straightforward. Honestly, it was a breeze and I encourage other growers to give it a go," Ken said.

Reef Certification is an initiative of Hort360 GBR which is funded through the Queensland Government's Queensland Reef Water Quality Program and delivered by Growcom. Reef Certification is a certifiable, third-party audit pathway for commercial horticulture growers to demonstrate stewardship to improving reef water quality and the GBR. Reef Certified growers receive a trademarked marketing kit for use in marketing produce.

Growers interested in receiving more information on Hort360 and Reef Certification are encouraged to contact a Hort360 Officer located in the GBR or go online www.hort360.com.au



Compost in Agriculture - Use of Recycled Organics

Growcom invites you to attend the upcoming Compost in Agriculture – Use of Recycled Organics workshop.

This workshop is part of a series taking places across regional Queensland and is sponsored by the Queensland Government through the Department of Environment and Science and delivered in partnership with the Australian Organics Recycling Association (AORA) and the Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF).

The workshops will help end users understand the benefits and effective use of compost and mulches produced from recycled organic inputs. This will help the Organics Recycling Industry better understand and respond to the needs of the current and emerging agriculturalists.

The workshops are being delivered by David Hall, a leading Agronomist who will explain the commercial and environmental benefits derived from the use of compost in the Queensland Agricultural Industry.



Workshop details

Bowen

DATE

Friday 25 March, 2022

TIME

9am – 2:30pm

LOCATION

Dept of Agriculture and Fisheries
Bowen Research Station ,
45 Warwick Rd,
Bowen Qld 4805

COST

Attendance is free and includes
morning tea and lunch

RSVP

www.trybooking.com/BXFTY

ENQUIRIES

Luke Hargreaves - Hort360 Facilitator
0422 567 371
lhargreaves@growcom.com.au

Atherton Tablelands

DATE

Monday 28 March, 2022

TIME

8:30am – 3:30pm

LOCATION

Walkamin Community club,
1-21 Kurrajong St,
Walkamin QLD 4872

COST

Attendance is free and includes
morning tea and lunch

RSVP

www.trybooking.com/BXFUC

ENQUIRIES

Phillip Laycock - Hort360 Facilitator
0439 252 828
phillaycock@growcom.com.au

This workshop is proudly sponsored by





Mushrooms could hold the key to solving nutrition problems

New Australian research has begun to uncover ways the humble Aussie mushroom could solve some of the nation's biggest nutrition problems.

With the Australian Food Industry representing around \$172 Billion, the industry has a profound influence on the nation's overall health. Research leaders, Nutrition Research Australia (NRAUS) aim to identify nutrition problems within the Australian Food Industry's Food Service Sector - and use mushrooms to solve them.

CEO of NRAUS, Dr Flavia Fayet-Moore explains that the humble Australian mushroom has unique nutritional and culinary properties, which make them valuable commodities in the nation's food supply.

"Mushrooms are neither a plant nor an animal, but actually a fungi, and have a very unique set of nutrients that are typically only found in grains, vegetables, or animals - like vitamin D. The science is clear, and the opportunity to increase mushroom consumption via the food supply may lead to several improvements in the health of Australians," Dr Fayet-Moore said.

The research aims to engage with a high quantum of influence organisations, such as hospitals, aged care, quick service restaurants and food manufacturers to identify opportunities for Australian mushrooms to be included in menus, to improve health outcomes.

"In this project, we will engage with and educate food industry professionals on the nutritional and health benefits of mushrooms

and encourage the food service sector to use fresh mushrooms (*Agaricus bisporus*) on menus to not only improve their nutritional profile, but most importantly, taste. This may be an easy and effective strategy to improve the health of Australians," Dr Fayet-Moore added.

One of the nutrition problems the team believe mushrooms can help solve is vitamin D deficiency, a nutrition problem for one in four Australians, particularly for those who spend the majority of their days indoors. Vitamin D deficiency can lead to significant health complications if left unaddressed.

"Research shows that many residents in aged care facilities have insufficient vitamin D. By simply including sun exposed mushrooms in aged care menus, it could boost their vitamin D intake and potentially solve a serious nutritional issue in aged care facilities," Dr Flavia Fayet-Moore said.

As consumer demand trends continue to lower their intake of animal foods, the team highlights the uniqueness of mushrooms as being a nutritious and tasty meat alternative that remains undiscovered by many consumers.

The team will also work alongside culinary educators, such as Tafes, to provide mushroom nutrition education to curriculums to help educate the food service industry at the grassroots level.

This three-year research project is managed by the Australian Mushroom Growers Association and funded by Hort Innovation using the mushroom research and development levy funds from the Australian Government.



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pest management

Manager, Biosecurity, Pest Management and Chemical Access
Janine Clark



New agvet chemical legislation

The Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals Legislation Amendment (Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority Board and Other Improvements) Bill 2019 (Improvements Bill) passed through Parliament on 1 December 2021.

The Improvements Bill includes measures to:

- establish a governance board for the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA)
- allow for prescribed approvals and registrations for chemicals of low regulatory concern
- provide for extensions to limitation periods and protection periods as an incentive for chemical companies to register certain new uses of chemical products
- allow for computerised decision-making by the APVMA
- simplify industry reporting requirements for annual returns.

The ideas put forward in the Improvements Bill predated the call by then Minister for Agriculture Senator Bridget McKenzie, for an Independent Review of the Agvet Chemicals Regulatory System and were echoed in the recommendations made by the review panel.

The above measures are minor but important and have been long awaited by many in the farming sector. However, Growcom would echo CropLife's view on the implementation of a governance board for APVMA. The government's decision to just fund the board for its first two years does not go far enough. Whilst it is appreciated that industry suggestions regarding the makeup and structure of the board have been factored into the government's considerations for its implementation, we are opposed to the imposition of added costs to the horticulture sector that funding this governance board will bring.

We question why the APVMA should be the only federal regulator with a governance board that is not fully funded by the government. Growcom would not see our members unfairly penalised along with other Australian farmers who will have the cost of this arrangement passed on through regulatory fees. We join with those who call upon the government for a commitment to ongoing full funding arrangements for the APVMA board so that it is in line with other government regulators and our farmers are not unfairly penalised by this move.

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FUMIGATION PARTNERSHIPS INNOVATION



NFFC WILL CONTINUE TO PREVENT FRUIT FLY IN AUSTRALIA

The National Fruit Fly Council (NFFC) has secured funding from Hort Innovation for phase 4 of the project that will strategically coordinate fruit fly management in Australia over the next five years (2021 – 2026).

Fruit fly is one of the biggest trade barriers for horticulture products and many species of fruit fly pose a threat to Australia's horticultural industries, both endemic and exotic. In 2016 the cost of fruit fly in Australia was estimated to be \$300 million due to control measures and international trade restrictions.

The project is a joint initiative between Plant Health Australia (PHA) and Hort Innovation, with co-investment from State

Governments and horticultural industries. The Council will continue to work with growers and fruit fly management community groups across all states and territories to control the pest on a national scale.

As a strategic advisory body, the NFFC brings fruit fly affected stakeholders and subject matter experts together to formulate strategies and recommendations to strengthen the national fruit fly system.

The new project will provide a national strategic direction to manage fruit fly in Australia, including managing the risk of exotic species to support a robust national system for trade and production. It will prioritise research and development activities to meet fruit fly management needs. The project will also facilitate communication and cooperation between governments, industries, researchers, and communities to progress strategically important national fruit fly issues.

"Phase 4 will continue to build on a considerable body of work in recent years, which has increased national engagement and identified priorities to strengthen the national fruit fly system and Australia's trade position," Stuart Burgess, NFFC Manager said.

Major achievements of Phase 3 (2018-2021) of the project include the production and launch of the National Fruit Fly Strategy 2020-2025 and annual implementation plans, and delivery of the 2021 National Fruit Fly Symposium which brought together fruit fly stakeholders across Australia. The key strength of the council during Phase 3 was in providing a neutral platform for stakeholders to collectively examine fruit fly issues.

LA NINA HERALDS MORE THAN FLOODING RAIN

Soil health dramatically decreases after a flooding rain event due to waterlogging and introduced pests and diseases from other land areas. The most effective solution is to fumigate the soil to control these pathogens and rebalance the native beneficial soil microbe population, conditioning it ready for planting.

The newly conditioned soil provides healthier plants as they are able to maximize their water and nutrient use. Fumigation has been proven to suppress soil borne-diseases below economic damage thresholds levels, increase fruit yield and increase individual fruit weights.

At TriCal Australia, we have access to DNA Testing Technology. Soil tests are taken before and after fumigation to determine individual species of nematodes and fungal pathogens present. The before tests allow the fumigants to be prescriptively applied with the correct type and amount to the soil. The after tests provide proof of kill rates on nematodes and fungal pathogens to provide soil health information prior to planting.

For more information, check out our website at trical.com.au or contact one of our soil specialists on (08) 8347 3838.





NEW BIOSECURITY COLLABORATION TO PROTECT AUSTRALIAN CITRUS INDUSTRY

Australia's \$900 million citrus industry could face serious production and market access risks if the industry is not adequately prepared to manage future biosecurity threats.

A new five-year national biosecurity program, CitrusWatch, is a collaborative effort that is designed to protect the citrus industry from harmful exotic pests and diseases such as Asian citrus psyllid (*Diaphorina citri*) and huánglóngbīng (HLB).

CitrusWatch is funded by Hort Innovation, using the citrus research and development levy, the Plant Health Australia (PHA) biosecurity levy and contributions from the Australian Government. The Northern Territory Government's Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade (the department) and research group, Cesar Australia, will provide surveillance, communication and research support.

Led by PHA, with activities coordinated by Citrus Australia, the program aims to expand surveillance, conduct industry training, lead risk assessment and modelling, and improve governance and collaboration.

"CitrusWatch is designed to bolster surveillance mechanisms and increase expertise to quickly detect, identify, and address incursions of high priority pests," Dr Sharyn Taylor, National Manager Surveillance and Diagnostics at PHA said.

Early detection of an exotic pest means taking early containment or eradication action during an incursion. A strong collaboration of industry, government and the community set a new standard in successfully eradicating citrus canker from the Northern Territory and north-west Western Australia. Australia was declared citrus canker free within three years of first detecting the disease.

"CitrusWatch will further build and protect this partnership approach," said Dr Taylor.

The Northern Territory Government's Chief Plant Health Officer, Dr Anne Walters, said the department is looking forward to utilising existing relationships across northern Australia to deliver the five-year project.

"Building on our learnings from the recent citrus canker eradication and odour detection programs will enable us to develop more effective and robust approaches to identify and target high priority pests. We are particularly excited about the opportunity to engage with industry and the community to extend our surveillance network and improve awareness of biosecurity more broadly," Dr Walters said.

The Australian citrus industry is a large and vibrant horticultural industry, with over 28,000 hectares of citrus planted by around 1400 growers. Oranges, mandarins, lemons, limes, grapefruit and tangelos are grown in most states and territories.

"Australian citrus is a mature export industry with access to most major markets around the world," Citrus Australia CEO Nathan Hancock said.

"An exotic pest or disease incursion could shut the industry down overnight. We have a strong focus on staying disease and pest free to maintain access to world markets and support our growers," he said.

CitrusWatch's holistic surveillance approach will not only include commercial production areas, but also, high-density, high-risk, urban and peri-urban regions throughout Australia, to support both an industry and community early detection network.

As part of the program, the Biosecurity Plan for the Citrus Industry (Version 3, PHA 2015), will be reviewed and updated. Modelling the Asian citrus psyllid risk of entry, spread and establishment based on available biological and climatic data, will also be an important program activity.



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AUSSIE POTATOES MASHING PREVIOUS RECORDS

The annual Hort Innovation Horticulture Statistics Handbook was released in February and includes the latest available data on 75 different categories across fruit, vegetable, nut, nursery and cut flowers.

The Horticulture Statistics Handbook captures the previous financial year's data in one user-friendly guide and includes figures on retail and food service use, exports and imports, share of production by State and Territory, wholesale value, and volume.

This year the humble spud has become a vegetable superstar with data showing 87 per cent of Aussie households purchased potatoes buying on average 1.7kg per shopping trip. For the year ending June 2021 the value of potatoes climbed by \$90.5 million, and the tonnes produced rose by 5 per cent.

Hort Innovation Head of Data and Insights Adam Briggs said the data in the latest Handbook reflected the obvious challenges growers faced given global circumstances in the period captured but there were also many positives including a foodservice recovery.

"Something encouraging is that foodservice is returning from the lows we saw in 2019/20," he said.

"For example, fruit food service volume and value has rebounded, and the value is now exceeding pre-Covid levels."

More data and insights from the 2020/21 Handbook include:

- The value of fruit was stronger than the previous year after a rise in olive production (\$99 million), avocados (\$56 million), cherries (\$47 million) and apples (\$41 million).
- Table grapes were the most valuable fruit (\$631.8 million). Apples took number two spot in value (\$619.9 million) and overtook bananas (\$596.8 million).
- More berries are available to Australians than ever before. Over an eight-year period, the volume of raspberries and blackberries has increased more than four-fold, while blueberry volumes have almost tripled.
- Oranges have seen an eighth year of consecutive growth in production value to reach a new high of \$437.6 million, despite a -7 per cent fall in production volume. Oranges have experienced an average 9.80 per cent compound annual growth rate in value since 2012/13.
- Despite export disruptions, Victoria remains the largest driver with 46 per cent of total export value. Queensland was second with 16 per cent of export value - up from 12 per cent the previous year when it was the fourth highest behind, Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia.
- The macadamia industry recorded a significant increase in the production value (12.8 per cent) and volume (38.4 per cent) compared to 2019/20.



Your go-to-guide for Australian horticulture industry data is out now.

The 2020/21 edition of the Australian Horticulture Statistics Handbook provides the most up-to-date production, international trade, processing volumes and fresh-market distribution insights available to help you plan for the future.

View it now at www.horticulture.com.au/hort-stats

**Hort
Innovation**



Meet Joe Mirarchi, Lychee Farmer

Lychees originated in the Fujian and Guangdong provinces of South China but are also cultivated in the tropical and sub-tropical regions of America, India, Southeast Asia and Australia today. Lychees are commonly eaten fresh but can also be pitted and used to add sweetness to any dish such as fruit salads, curries, and sweet and sour cuisines. They also make a great accompaniment for duck and pork. Lychees have a limited growing season and are usually available fresh in Australia from November to February.

Lychees are part of the fruit group, one of the five core food groups recommended for everyday consumption in the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. Fruits provide vitamins, minerals, dietary fibre and many hundreds of phytonutrients. We should be aiming for two serves of fruit every day! Lychees are rich in vitamin C and antioxidants.

As part of the QCWA Country Kitchens Meet a Farmer initiative, the team met with Joe Mirarchi, a lychee farmer out of Mareeba, Queensland. Joe's memories of the QCWA extend back to his childhood.

"I remember the street stalls that they [QCWA] used to set up with the scones, jams and chutneys and we would always get something. Communities need QCWA and it would be great to see younger women getting involved."

Joe has strong generational ties to farming, primarily working with mangoes prior to lychees.

"We stumbled across them [lychees] in the early 80's when we were looking to diversify as they did not need a lot of infrastructure or capital to grow or grade. We started dabbling with them and realised they were more viable for us than mangoes which is what we were doing at the time"

"Farming isn't glamorous, it isn't all flash four-wheel drives, there is a lot of work behind the scenes. But I love being my own boss and not being tied down to the same hours day in and day out."

"Trees will take between five and eight years to get really good production. As the fruit ripens you cut the bunch off and then you individually pluck each piece of fruit off that bunch and sort and grade according to size. They are then packed in a five-kilogram box and sent to market. Once you have picked the fruit off, you

prune the tree and clean it. We have some trees still from the early 80s that are great producers, but you have to care for them and prune and clean them properly to get the most out of them."

Joe would love to see our QCWA members passing on cooking skills to the younger generation through the Country Kitchens program, and like us, believes the QCWA is a great organisation to get communities eating more fruit and veggies.

"QCWA could play a part in supporting farmers and community by promoting local fruit and veg that are in season and by promoting cooking fruit and veggies from scratch. I think that educating people that not all fruit looks perfect on the outside is also important. Our fruit [in Australia] has such strict appearance standards, so much perfectly good fruit gets wasted because it may have a small mark on it"

Finally, the best way to eat a lychee? "Fresh off the tree! A lychee straight off the tree tastes much different than lychees out of a cold room."

To learn more about the QCWA Country Kitchens program, or the Meet a Farmer initiative, head to our website (qcwacountrykitchens.com.au) or contact us at countrykitchens@qcwa.org.au.

The QCWA Country Kitchens program is proudly funded by Health and Wellbeing Queensland



COOK THE RECIPE TODAY

A refreshing treat perfect for the summer months – why not give this Lychee Sorbet a go! With hardly any added sugar, this healthy but delicious treat is sure to be a crowd favourite.

qcwacountrykitchens.com.au/recipe/lychee-sorbet/





New Australian research could end global banana threat

Aussie scientists are working towards the development of banana plants that are resistant to a deadly disease that is threatening global production.

Panama Tropical Race 4 (TR4) is a soil-borne fungus that has impacted plantations in most banana-growing regions including North Queensland; Asia including the Philippines, China and Indonesia; the Middle East; Africa and most recently, South America. Currently, the disease, which cannot be eradicated, survives in the soil for decades.

Nearly all banana varieties can be impacted, including Cavendish, which accounts for an estimated 50 per cent of the bananas grown worldwide and about 95 per cent of the bananas grown commercially in Australia.

To combat the threat, the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and Hort Innovation have launched a \$9.8M research project that aims to develop two new varieties that are resistant to Panama TR4. The work will be delivered by the QUT Centre for Agriculture and the Bioeconomy.

QUT project lead, Professor James Dale, said his team aims to develop Cavendish and Goldfinger varieties using gene-editing techniques through the five-year project. The aim, he said, is to support food security in Australia and worldwide.

"The original Cavendish varieties emerged probably more than 1000 years ago," he said. "It is an excellent banana but it is susceptible to some devastating diseases including Panama Disease TR4.

"There is also concern that the banana industry worldwide is too dependent on a single variety and that greater variety diversity is highly desirable."

Prof Dale said the Goldfinger banana is resistant to many diseases including TR4 and researchers aim to use recent advancements in gene editing to improve this variety to appeal to the Australian palate.

"We are now in a position to make very small changes in a banana genome that can have dramatic effects on the phenotype of the banana whether it is disease resistance, fruit quality or fruit taste and texture," he said.

Hort Innovation Hort Frontiers Business Development Manager Alok Kumar said the research, which is being conducted in consultation with Australian banana growers, will meet the industry's priority to develop new TR4 disease-resistant varieties that meet consumer quality expectations.

"TR4 is widely considered the most lethal banana disease in the world," he said. "This new project will arm Australian growers with the tools they need to sustainably and effectively produce Australia's number one selling grocery item for years to come."

Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) Chief Executive Officer Jim Pekin said TR4 has been the predominant issue for the industry since it was discovered in Australia's major growing area six years ago. He said access to a variety that is resistant to TR4 and continues to be market acceptable would give banana growers certainty about the future.

"TR4 presents challenges for Australia's banana growers. If it is successful, this research to develop, gene-edited, TR4-resistant varieties would change that."

This research is being delivered as part of the Hort Innovation Hort Frontiers Strategic Partnership Initiative, which is better equipping Australian horticulture for the future ahead.

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