



Know-how for Horticulture™

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Media Release

Sixth generation Victorian vegetable farmer Rick Butler has been named a 2009 Young Leader at the HAL Awards held in Sydney on 18 November.

At just 31, Rick is the managing director of his family business which employs 70 staff in Heatherton, on the outskirts of Melbourne. The farm supplies Coles and Safeway supermarkets and has done for 40 years and demand for Butler's products continues to grow.

In 2007 Rick attracted investment funding from Victoria's Smart Water Fund to design and build a vegetable washing system that saves water.

"Washing and cooling vegetables is a water intensive process that typically uses potable water in a 'once through' process. Vegetables need to be washed and cooled immediately after picking to ensure that they can be packed, transported and sold in peak condition," Rick says.

"The soft vegetable washer I designed saves up to 80,000 litres of potable drinking water each day by recycling what we use. We have become a more sustainable business by reducing our environmental impact and our production costs."

"We're now recycling the water, using a produce safe biocide to eliminate bacteria."

The vegetable washing system is available to any other farmer in Australia to purchase from manufacturer Tripax Engineering.

Rick is passionate about educating young people about horticulture, and has experienced first-hand the impact that mentoring can have. A young growers' tour, funded by HAL, which Rick participated in several years ago was a seminal moment for him.

"I gained a lot of confidence in myself during the tour and from there developed as a businessman," he says.

Following through with this philosophy, he actively identifies potential leaders among his staff and over the past four years has trained his 20-year-old operations manager to "do everything I can do".

Each year Rick offers three summer positions to graduates from his alma mater Mentone Grammar School. The students learn about the vegetable industry and how fresh food is grown and supplied.

"Through this scheme I'm trying to introduce more people to my industry," Rick says.

"These students are straight out of high school and about to go into degree courses in marketing or engineering for example. This gives them an opportunity to see that from the seed to the consumer's mouth, horticulture involves many aspects of business."

In addition to working in his own business, Rick also contributes his energy to the vegetable industry as a whole, participating on the vegetable industry production Industry Advisory Committee.

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For more information contact:

Karen Hellwig

General Manager Corporate Communications, HAL, 0407 332 447