



Victoria to mark it's place on national agenda

alignment
future direction
strategy
local action

In a first for the Victorian Vegetable Industry, the Vegetable Growers Association (VGA) is partnering with the Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) to develop a Vegetable Industry Strategic Plan.

The VGA Executive has been considering the move for some time and, given that the release of the National VegVision 2020 Plan (see story page 4) took place in May of 2006, there has been growing support for the Victorian Industry to mark its place in the national agenda.

Why expend time and resources on a Strategic Plan for the Victorian vegetable industry?

“Put simply, without direction businesses gradually lose momentum and perish,” VGA President, Luis Gazzola said.

“A strategic planning process is simply employing good business principles to plan to achieve measurable goals in a specific time period. The Vegetable Industry faces huge challenges at both national and regional levels and, as such, to fail to plan is surely a plan to fail.”

The Victorian Vegetable Industry Strategic Plan will be developed through a process of targeted whole of supply chain industry consultation, data analysis and a review of any previous regional plans. This information will then be compared and, where appropriate, aligned with the National VegVision 2020 Plan in order to avoid unnecessary replication of the significant work carried out under the Australian Vegetable Industry Development Group's direction.

VegVision 2020 identified a broad vision for the National Vegetable Industry to “...double the 2006 value of fresh, processed and packaged vegetables in real terms by stimulating and meeting consumer preference for Australian products in domestic and global markets”. It then outlined five strategic imperatives (goals) which would assist in achieving the broad vision as follows:

- Delivering to changing consumer preferences and increasing demand.
- Market recognition for Australian quality, safety, reliable supply and innovation in products and services.
- Internationally competitive vegetable production and supply chains.
- Advanced industry data and information systems to meet future needs.
- Visionary leadership and change management.

“The adoption and ownership of these goals by industry at a state and regional level is ‘where the rubber meets the road’, and without local action, the National Plan will have limited effect,” Vic DPI Farm Services Victoria – Program Manager Horticulture, Euan Laird said.

The Victorian Vegetable Industry Strategic Plan will develop local actions which will enhance aspects of the National Plan as well as uniquely local initiatives to prepare industry for the challenging future ahead. ▼

[See 'VegVision 2020' Page 4 >](#)

president's report

New Year brings many changes

Happy New Year to all Victorian Vegetable Growers, members and industry associates of the Vegetable Growers Association (VGA) and vegetable industry supporters.

The recent bushfires and heat waves have devastated our state and left us in shock. May God bless those involved and give them the strength, courage and determination to rebuild their lives and our thoughts are with those families who have lost loved ones.

Heat records have been broken and growers have suffered severe crop damage and now we hope Mother Nature will supply good rains in the near future.

The year ahead...

I believe the global financial crisis has definitely affected our sales and the consumer is spending less on household commodities which will continue over the next few months, affecting all our businesses.

The good things that are happening in this New Year is the reduction in the pricing of diesel fuel and fertiliser, however water and electricity costs are increasing.

The cost to produce vegetables is always on the increase and market returns are not. If returns at the farm gate do not improve this year, then most growers will find it tough to continue their level of production.

Water is still a major issue in most areas and will be until a normal weather pattern returns with our allocation of rain.

In the market...

Trading at the Melbourne Markets has been vastly improved since the Market Authority granted early delivery times. This releases pre-ordered produce from the selling floor prior to the commencement of normal trading.

The market relocation progress remains unclear at the present time with lack of detailed information for market traders. Your Executive Committee are determined to obtain the best deal for vegetable growers at a new market location.

At the end of the day, market traders will make their own call on where they relocate their businesses.

AUSVEG revival

There has been good coverage in the media regarding the approval by AUSVEG of a new constitution and the election of a new board. I did not seek re-election as a director and we congratulate John Said from Werribee who was appointed to the AUSVEG board. Should you have any vegetable industry issues or concerns, please contact John or pass the message through the VGA Vic office.



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VGA Representatives

Our Victorian grower representative to the National Industry Production Committee is **Rick Butler** from Heatherton who regularly reports to your Executive Committee. He is available for contact, as is the Victorian Industry Development Officer (IDO), **Katie Fisher** based at the VGA Vic office, should you have any concerns regarding Research and Development projects.

We have a new Executive for 2009 which includes two new members **Vince Doria** and **Roger Turner**, both bring great experience and value to the committee. I would personally thank all the Executive Committee Members and our Executive Officer for their commitment to industry issues.

IDO's Update

2009 saw changes to our IDO position since the project with Horticulture Australia Ltd (HAL) was extended until the 30th June, 2009.

Craig Murdoch completed his contract with us on 31st December, 2008 and has returned to the Victorian Department of Primary Industries to work on Emergency Plant Pests. **Katie Fisher** has accepted the position of Victorian IDO. We are pleased to welcome Katie to VGA Vic and extend our thanks to Craig for his input and experience over the past 18 months. Katie is not a stranger to our industry and, through her previous roles in the agricultural and horticultural industries as well as a media consultant, she will provide strong support to Victorian vegetable growers. Contact details for Katie remain the same as our previous IDO - Mob: 0429 990 553.

Thank you all for your continued industry support and God bless.

Luis Gazzola

See Page 8 for Executive Officer's Corner >

New resource to help manage limited water supply

Growers in the Werribee Irrigation District have received a helping hand in their struggle to irrigate more efficiently with the approval of a state government grant to provide an automated local weather service.

Thanks to a joint project between the Vegetable Growers Association (VGA) of Victoria and the Victorian Department of Primary Industries growers will be able to access the latest weather information to fine tune their irrigation requirements.

VGA Executive Officer, Tony Imeson said the weather station would be a major benefit for the region that has been plagued by water shortages.

"Given that water is limited under current drought conditions, with only limited access to recycled water, it is essential to tailor water application to crop needs to make the most efficient use of available water supplies," he said.



The Project involves establishing an automatic weather station and SMS service and helping growers make best use of the service.

Western Australian vegetable growers have enjoyed the benefits of a similar automated irrigation service for nearly two years.

Growers will receive daily information on crop water loss which will help them tailor their next irrigation to replace the water lost from the crop.

The information will be provided on a website 24/7 and by daily SMS text messages sent direct to the growers' mobile phones.

Mr Imeson said growers would be able to receive a text message on their mobile phones every day during the growing season. He said the message would show daily evaporation loss as well as rainfall, temperature and humidity.

He added that the Bureau of Meteorology weather stations were not located in the immediate production area and did not provide evaporation data.

"Also a local weather station would provide more relevant information," he said.

"For example, irrigation advice can be sent by SMS text message every morning during the growing season. The VGA and Victorian DPI will provide the necessary services to ensure growers are properly instructed on how to use the service." ▼



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VegVision 2020

- a gauge on our industry's progress

In September 2006, *VegVision 2020*, the Vegetable Industry Strategic Plan for guiding the Vegetable Industry towards a profitable and sustainable future was unveiled.

Based on the recommendations of the 'Taking Stock and Setting Directions' report (refer to timeline Page 5), *VegVision 2020* has a number of key outputs, which include:

1. Developing a long-term industry-wide Strategic Plan.
2. Improving growers' business skills.
3. Improving leadership and industry structures.
4. Developing an information and decision framework for industry.
5. Introducing rigorous industry benchmarking.
6. Assessing the international competitiveness of the Vegetable Industry.
7. Enhancing markets through points-of-difference and competitive advantages.

These outputs underpin Seven Foundation Projects that form the basis of *VegVision 2020*.

Between March 2006 and June 2008, *VegVision 2020* was under the guidance of the Australian Vegetable Industry Development Group (AVIDG), who oversaw the Seven Foundation Projects.

Following a report to industry in 2008, *VegVision 2020* has now been handed back to industry, and is now under the guidance of the National Industry Body, AUSVEG, and supported by Horticulture Australia Limited.

So what does *VegVision 2020* mean for industry looking forward?

Vegetables Victoria has looked at some of the outcomes of the Foundations Projects, and asked AUSVEG's Interim Chair, John Brent, how the Industry is progressing towards its *VegVision 2020* goal.

1. Vegetable Industry Strategic Plan

VegVision 2020, is the Australian Vegetable Industry's Strategic Plan, launched in September 2006. The Plan set

out a clear vision for the Industry to "... double the 2006 value of fresh, processed and packaged vegetables in real terms by stimulating and meeting consumer preferences for Australian products in domestic and global markets".

So, two years on, is this vision still relevant to industry? Definitely, according to Mr Brent.

"It is a living document, and it is important that it is continually revisited by industry to ensure that it continues to be relevant. However, while we can go through the process considering whether it is the right time to move forward in certain areas, the reality is that the Vegetable Industry is vibrant, and there are significant players who are always looking for new and innovative ways to ensure their long-term future," he said.

2. Market Development Foundation Project

Under this Foundation Project, a Vegetable Industry Export Business Plan was also developed in consultation with key stakeholders. The Plan identified five key strategies for industry to compete with China in both domestic and third-party markets, as well as developing opportunities to export Australian produce into China.

Additionally, a Domestic Marketing Strategy and implementation framework were developed with the aim of increasing the value of Australian-grown produce purchased by Australian consumers. This has prompted a significant shift in the way industry perceives the role of the consumer, and new Research and Development initiatives are beginning to take a consumer-focused approach.

However, Mr Brent believes that the success of any industry marketing program would benefit from collaboration with industry stakeholders.

"We need to work strategically in order to gain the best advantages when it comes to marketing vegetables," he said. "There are a number of entities, as well as governments, who have a vested interest in the successful marketing of Australian vegetable products to consumers, and industry would do well to join these campaigns and gain as much momentum as possible to ensure their success."

3. Industry Information and Decision Support Foundation Project

A Market Information Audit, a Value Chain Analysis and a Survey of the Australian Vegetable Industry by ABARE revealed the gaps in the Industry's understanding of its potential markets, and identified areas where improvements could be gained.

Mr Brent believes that ongoing information gathering will be invaluable for growers in the long-term, and recognises the growing trend for industry partners to work together.

"Vertical integration is certainly playing a role. Like any industry, any information is relished by entrepreneurial vegetable producers, and the more detailed information growers can access, the more success we will witness in the longer term," Mr Brent said.

4. Global Comparative Analysis Foundation Project

An extensive investigation into potential trade in fresh and processed vegetables into China revealed few opportunities for Australian vegetable exporters. However, some niche opportunities exist providing that the Australian Industry adopts a multipronged approach to improving competitiveness and meeting consumer demand.

But how will the global economic crisis impact the Industry's ability to gain ground in this area? Mr Brent is cautiously optimistic, and applauds growers who have found innovative means of lessening the economic impact on their businesses.

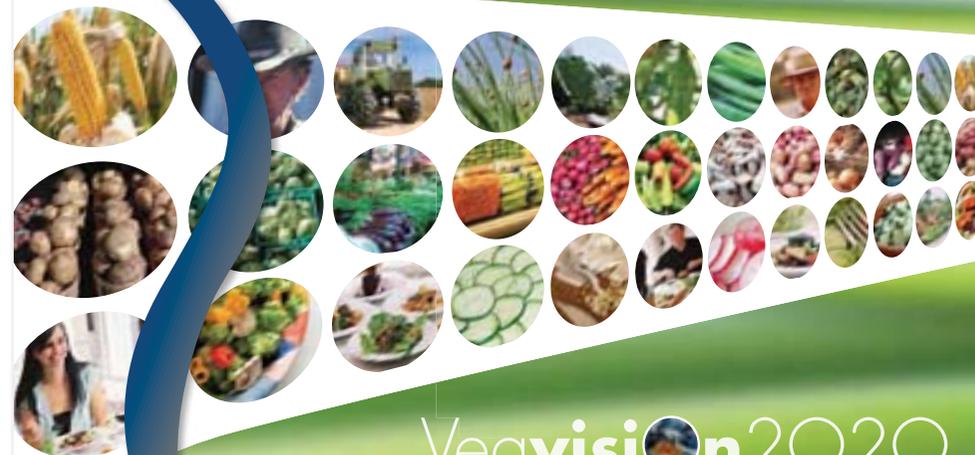
"The falling value of the Australian dollar has lessened the opportunity to import produce, so the Industry has been protected to a certain extent," he said. "Of course, the opportunities for export have been affected, but this reflects a relatively smaller part of the overall vegetable industry landscape."

5. Business Skills Development Project

Under the Business Skills Development Foundation Project, a People Development Investment Plan has been developed to increase the capacity of the Australian Vegetable Industry to access existing business skills, leadership programs and funding sources.

6. Leadership Industry Structures Foundation Project

The AVIDG identified a genuine desire for one voice through a national body for growers, and the need to engage effectively with value chain businesses and business



Vegvision2020

To double the 2006 value of fresh, processed and packaged vegetables in real terms by stimulating and meeting consumer preference for Australian products in domestic and global markets.



associations. Since mid-2008, the National Industry Body, AUSVEG, has experienced some highly publicised changes, including a change in constitution to allow direct membership of growers.

So, in the face of these changes, what does the future hold for the National Body, AUSVEG?

"The National Body obviously has been through a tough period, and to that extent leadership is always important. Inevitably, as a result of these changes, we will need to look at different ways of conducting our business, both as an advocate, and as a service provider," Mr Brent said.

"Once all board positions are in place, and we're able to get on with the business of being chief advocate for fresh vegetables, we will, I believe, become a powerful ally for growers."

7. Industry Benchmarking Foundation Project

The Industry Benchmarking Foundation Project investigated ways for growers to increase the performance of individual businesses and business alliances through continuous improvement and systematic review. A framework has been developed that vegetable businesses can now access to assess their business performance and is accompanied by an Implementation Plan that documents a proposed schedule of priority activities and programs.

As far as AUSVEG's role is concerned, Mr Brent believes that the best thing the National Body can do is to continue to make sure that the Industry's issues remain a part of the Federal Government's agenda.

"Looking forward, our priority is to continue to advocate strongly to government about our position, and to take every opportunity via our allies to place our issues in front of the decision makers," he said. ▼

VegVision 2020 - a timeline

- > In June 2005, in response to declining terms of trade and the threat of cheap vegetable imports into Australia, a crisis summit was held in an effort to raise awareness of the problems facing the Australian Vegetable Industry. In response to this, the Federal Government, through the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) committed \$200,000 to initiate an industry stocktake and a setting directions project under the 'Industry Partnerships Program'.
- > Between July and October 2005, consultants compiled a 'Taking Stock and Setting Directions' report, whereby 160 individuals and organisations from all parts of the Vegetable Industry were consulted. In August, the Federal Government committed a further \$3 million to implement the outcomes of the 'Taking Stock and Setting Directions' report. The broad outcomes sought were to improve the long term profitability, competitiveness and sustainability of the Australian Vegetable Industry.
- > Out of the 'Taking Stock and Setting Directions' report, it was recommended that industry investment in Seven Industry Foundation Projects, be guided by an independent group. In March 2006, the Australian Vegetable Industry Development Group (AVIDG) was formed, and the first project – development of a strategic plan – was commissioned.

Remember TWO key management strategies in the fight against white blister

Irrigation scheduling and growing resistant varieties are two ways of combating the destructive fungal disease white blister.

After a year into the project, which aims to investigate the Economics of Managing white blister, team leader, Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Plant Pathologist for Vegetables, Dr Elizabeth Minchinton found that the incidence of white blister on broccoli heads could be reduced by 50% if the crop was watered at dawn (4am) compared with evening (8pm).

Dr Minchinton said that watering at dawn ensured leaf wetness coincided with the dew period and consequently reduced leaf wetness.

"If growers irrigate at night – the heads stay wet and provide ideal conditions for white blister to occur," she said.

"White blister only needs three hours of leaf wetness to infect the plant and the irrigation scheduling is most critical during spring and autumn when climatic conditions are ideal for the disease."

She said, however, that specific irrigation scheduling had no effect on varieties that were currently resistant to white blister.

"White blister only needs three hours of leaf wetness to infect the plant and the irrigation scheduling is most critical during spring and autumn..."

Vic DPI Industries Plant Pathologist for Vegetables, Dr Elizabeth Minchinton.

The trial was located next to the Werribee Expo site with seedlings supplied courtesy of Boomaroo Nursery and an industry field day was held last November.

Meanwhile two broccoli varieties, Tyson and Booster, have been found to be resistant to white blister with little or no disease appearing on the plants when exposed to the spores.

During the trial at the Werribee site, Dr Minchinton said the two broccoli varieties also did not need fungicide sprays to control the disease, but the



trial may have had less water than a commercial crop.

However, the Tyson variety has a specific time slot for production – August to November – and the Booster has been developed to harvest most of the year.

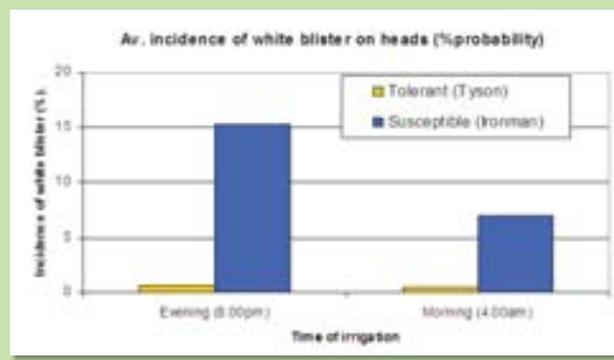
The project also assessed the effective use of fungicides with respect to application timing using the Brassica disease predictive model, developed by Dr Roy Kennedy at Horticultural Research International in the United Kingdom.

Dr Minchinton said, some fine tuning was still required, but last year's trial data suggested an application of a systemic fungicide at button formation may have a significant effect on the control of white blister on broccoli heads. This theory will be tested in forthcoming trials.

She added that as young tissues were very susceptible to white blister, for example side shoots and buttons of broccoli, growers should avoid growing varieties with side shoots and protect young tissues with a registered fungicide.

The project is being funded by Horticulture Australia Limited and is also being run as a collaboration between researchers at Horticulture Research Institute Warwick in the United Kingdom, the South Australian Research and Development Institute, the University of Queensland, Peracto and the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries.

For more information contact Dr Elizabeth Minchinton at Vic DPI on (03) 9210 9224 or the VEGA IDO, Katie Fisher on 0429 990 553. ▼



National Vegetable Expo "a must"



Paul Heseltine from Bejo Seeds tells Vegetables Victoria why they are going to be at this year's National Vegetable Expo from May 7-8.

Of course we're going to the Werribee Expo! Why wouldn't we be? It's the best opportunity for us to show off our product, and for a captive audience to come along and compare.

Captive?

With Expo, we generally only get people involved with the industry – growers, processors, agents, people like that. And that's great because you're not talking to people who only want a thimbleful of seed.

OK, but compared to what?

Virtually all seed companies have a GROWING display there, side by side. So you really can compare lettuce with lettuce, cauliflower with cauliflower... whatever.

And there's an extra bonus this year: AUSVEG is having its own little show at The Convention Centre next to Jeff's Shed in the early part of the week from May 4-6. So you've got theory and practice all wrapped up in one week.

When and where?

The National Vegetable Expo is at the old VCAH site on Sneydes Road in Werribee.

Hang on. What about water?

Actually, the Committee's been able to come to an arrangement with Southern Rural Water. It's expensive, but the display is definitely on. And there are other things you need to be there for: a very good Exhibitors' Dinner on Thursday night; and also it's David Milburn's and Les Giroud's last hurrah. We won't miss THIS Werribee Expo for quids! ▼

May 7-8, Sneydes Road, Werribee.



executive officer's corner

National Vegetable Expo

The National Vegetable Expo held at Werribee on May 7-8, 2009 has received good support from seed companies who are now planting trial plots on site. The Prospectus is now available and industry suppliers are securing display areas for their products and services. We extend a special thanks to Les Giroud and David Milburn for their commitment to the site development and maintenance for this key industry event.



The Expo is being organised in conjunction with the AUSVEG National Vegetable Conference held at the Melbourne Convention Centre from May 4-6, 2009.

Delegates to the conference will have the opportunity to visit the Expo site at Werribee on Thursday May 7. The Vegetable Growers Association (VGA) of Victoria will have an information booth in operation at the Conference as well as at the Expo.

Urban sprawl

VGA Vic has prepared a general submission to the State Government Enquiry into Outer Suburban Development and the Green Wedge. Vegetable growers are facing many problems with farming in green wedge areas with residential spread to the boundaries of vegetable growing areas seriously affecting continued business operations. Growers have been encouraged to provide a brief summary of their specific issues as individual submissions will greatly influence the decisions of the inquiry panel.

First-rate website

The re-design of the VGA Vic web site during 2008 has attracted over three times the number of visitors, from not only Victoria but interstate and overseas. Industry issues, vegetable research and e-news articles have proved very popular.

Our website is a re-focus for the Victorian Vegetable Industry and has become the forefront for our changes. The VGAs goal is to maintain regular communication with vegetable growers and the introduction in December of Regular Notes has been well received in keeping growers updated with industry issues, outcomes and events and compliments the quarterly Vegetable Grower publication - so check out the website www.vgavic.org.au

Mark these dates in your diary

- 4 to 6 May 2009 National Vegetable Industry Conference to be held at the Melbourne Convention Centre. More details T: 03 9544 8098.
- 7 and 8 May 2009 National Vegetable Industry Expo to be held at Dairy Road off Sneydes Road Werribee. More details T: 0427 335 518.
- 1 August 2009 Vegetable Growers Gala Night at the Crown Palladium Room Melbourne. More details T: 03 9687 4707.
- 7 August 2009 Vegetable Growers Annual Golf Day at Lang Lang Golf Club South Gippsland Highway, Nyora. More details T: 03 9687 4707.
- 9 October 2009. VGA Vic. Annual General Meeting Crowne Plaza Spencer Street Melbourne. 4pm.

Keep smiling,

Tony Imeson



Want to know more about the Victorian vegetable industry?

Log on to www.vgavic.org.au

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