



▲ New President David Wallace is congratulated by outgoing President Luis Gazzola

## NEW VGA PRESIDENT ELECTED AT AGM

A vegetable grower from Keilor, David Wallace, was elected as the new VGA President at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) held recently. In receiving congratulations from outgoing President Luis Gazzola, Mr Wallace acknowledged Mr Gazzola's outstanding contribution over the past seven years.

Mr Wallace has had many years experience as a vegetable grower and 20-years-ago served a term as President, recently holding the positions of Senior Vice President and Treasurer.

A special welcome was also extended to newly elected executive member Bill Bulmer from Lindenow.

The AGM and Dinner attracted 40 members and guests and featured excellent presentations from Industry Development Offices (IDOs) Helena Whitman and Slobodan Vujovic, covering the recent grower study tours to WA, the USA and Italy.

Several guest speakers provided thoughtful industry briefs on topics of interest to Victorian vegetable growers. Guest speaker David Fussell, Marketing Manager of the Melbourne Market Authority, presented an overview of the Melbourne Market Authority (MMA) Schools Program, which promotes the importance of fresh fruit and vegetables to primary school children.

## President's report



*I would just like to say hello to my fellow growers and readers of our newsletter.*

It's certainly an honour to be President again after 20 years and I'd like to thank everybody sincerely for their encouraging words.

During the time I've served on the VGA Executive Committee in Treasurer, Junior and Senior Vice President positions there have certainly been plenty of changes, both in the field and with politics and administration issues. These have caused our farms to be running at the intense speed of today.

I would like to thank and congratulate Luis Gazzola on the magnificent job he has done over the past seven years as President of this Association. He is to be highly commended for the time and dedication he has given to representing our growers on all issues affecting vegetable growing, not only within Victoria but Australia-wide. For this effort, thank you Luis and Gloria.

Our current Committee is energetic and supportive of the topics that are affecting growers today. The world climate will be a big

issue in the next 12 months and this will put pressure on all our businesses. Stay tuned!

I welcome our new Committee Member, Bill Bulmer from East Gippsland. Bill will keep us well-informed of what's going on in his area and further east. Thanks Bill for coming on-board.

We need to keep pace with the industry- new ideas mean new faces on our Committee. If anyone would like to join our exciting and innovative Committee representing vegetable growers, please let us know. We need a good blend of youth and mature growers to stay on top.

Whichever way you look at it, food production in Victoria forms the basis of physical, environmental, economic, social and cultural health that keeps this state vibrant in so many ways. How we preserve, manage and develop our horticultural resources, now and in the future, will certainly be a big challenge. Horticulture is a key component in Victoria's economic growth and that contributes to Melbourne being the most liveable city in the world.

Growing fresh vegetables is an important part in maintaining a healthy and vibrant lifestyle. Cooking with and eating fresh veggies, seated around the dinner table, brings families and the community together. This should be an integral part of family existence - our heritage that we all proudly want to maintain in every household around Australia. The more veggies consumed, the more we will need to grow, and this will better our chances of surviving through these hard economic times.

As President of this ever-growing competitive and changing industry, I congratulate all growers on producing the world's finest quality vegetables and providing them to consumers over 52 weeks of the year. The pride and professionalism that every grower puts into their business is to be commended.

But let's not get complacent about what we do. We need to keep improving and be more efficient, as we must remember that to survive we have to retain and even increase

our share of the consumer dollar. Most consumers are not concerned about where or how long it takes to produce good quality fresh veggies, as long as when they walk into the greengrocer or supermarket they are there for them on the shelf.

Hot off the press, as of last month, is that all members of the Advisory Committees of the Melbourne Market Authority (MMA) have been stood down and all positions declared vacant. Applications are being advertised for positions on all the Advisory Committees, together with nominations from the representative groups.

I'm dumbfounded as to why each committee member has been stood down. It would appear that our State Government has seen fit to outsmart us in suppressing our input and views regarding market relocation issues that don't fit in with their motives in going forward to Epping - Deja vu!

At that same meeting we asked a question about the cost of rental for the growers stands and the reply was: "We're working very hard but can't come up with a figure until the building is completed." It has taken eight to 10 years to find their calculator to work out a cost of rental per square metre; they can't find the answer because they can't find the total cost of this project as of yet. Deja vu! Stay tuned until next year when the new Grower Advisory Committees meet again. Who knows what will happen or how?

It's certainly been a challenging year for growing in many ways, affecting all areas differently with heavy rains, some floods, dry spells, windy periods and now a humid spring. But that challenge we take on day after day is what makes us the best at what we do.

This year has affected many of us emotionally and with sadness at the loss of family members and neighbouring growers who've long-standing character and distinction within the vegetable industry.

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**For Executive Officer's Corner**

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To all of those who passed away, they will never be forgotten. All of us in good health, let's share a thought for a moment for a couple of growers who are having a tough time at the moment with their health – Trevor Walker and Ken Walker – and let's hope things improve soon for both of them. So

remember to look after yourselves – fellow growers, do yourself a favour and go and see your local doctor for your annual check up. You are the most important asset to your business. Don't think about it, just do it!

On a happier note, the growers Regional Dinner Dance held in early November at the

Villa Adriana, South Dandenong, was a most enjoyable evening, with fellow growers and friends. Thanks go to the organisers, Luis and Gloria Gazzola and Tony Imeson. If you missed it, remember to be there next year!

A strong membership of our Vegetable Growers Association is essential so that we can move forward together, promoting our products through all current and future channels available to us. We must convince consumers that our products, which are still grown here in their backyard, are vital for them to remain healthy, smart, energetic and good looking. Veggies tick all the right boxes for a longer life to share with their families.

Communication is vital so don't forget to speak to our IDOs, Helena Whittman and Rod Hall, on any issues that you think need addressing around veggies.

Talk to you all in the next newsletter and have a very Merry Christmas and New Year. Eat and Enjoy Life.



Guests are seated at the VGA AGM

*David Wallace*



## Comment: past President Luis Gazzola

I would like to personally congratulate David Wallace on his appointment as President, and thank him for his loyal support and his outstanding devotion to the vegetable industry during my term as President. I am confident that the Executive Committee will provide their full support during David's term as President.

I must express my gratitude to the Executive Committee, who have supported me over the past seven years and especially our Executive Officer, Tony Imeson.

The vegetable industry continues to experience tough times and I can't see it getting any better in the near future. There is no shortage of supply but our biggest problem is that the consumer is spending less and this reflects back from the retailer to the markets, where this becomes our problem with over production.

On top of all the production and supply issues we now have, we can expect an extra burden of higher costs with the introduction of an unwanted carbon tax from 1 July 2012. Although the carbon tax has passed through Canberra we shouldn't accept this lying down, but take every opportunity to let federal opposition representatives know the cost burden being placed upon the vegetable industry.

Through VGA Vic we received the report from KPMG regarding the Horticultural Taskforce. Read it carefully because I believe it is scary information which I found totally confusing. Let your association, VGA Vic, know your thoughts and concerns and they

will be forwarded to AUSVEG.

The market relocation to Epping is now starting to stretch my patience and that of other market users. After seven years of meetings and negotiations with the previous State Government agencies, consultants, architects and construction groups, we are no closer to knowing what it will cost growers to carry on their businesses at Epping. The Liberal Government inherited the Epping major project last year and we are still waiting for information about the cost of leasing sections of the growers' trading floor. The Melbourne Market Authority is providing us with some information, but it is still impossible for growers currently trading at the current Melbourne Wholesale Market to budget for the future at Epping.

As a member of the VGA Vic Executive Committee I know that there are many issues to be resolved for our members, but I am confident that the team is strong and with your support will be successful.

Best wishes to all growers for Christmas and the New Year.

# Update on finding solutions to manual handling injuries

Outcomes from the manual handling project, being conducted by the Victorian Farm Safety Centre in conjunction with the Victorian vegetable industry, are starting to emerge according to Tony Imeson, Executive Officer of VGA Vic.

The Victorian Farm Safety Centre is continuing to gather information on solutions to hazardous manual handling associated with planting, picking and packing in the vegetable industry. Growers from Lindenow have been consulted along with those from the South Gippsland, Werribee and Bacchus Marsh districts. Recently, project manager Andrew Sullivan visited Lindenow growers with Tony Payne, the specialist ergonomist contracted to identify hazardous manual handling solutions.

Reports on findings from these visits have been used to formulate documented solutions that are being reviewed by a reference group including representation from the VGA, the Victorian Farmers



Wide conveyors can result in workers leaning forward with excessive reach to the far side of the conveyor

Weigh scales not integrated into conveyor system and above level of gravity conveyor



Angled support stands at side of conveyor to reduce bending and reach



the problem. An example is the packing of vegetables into boxes, crates or cartons from production lines including, conveyors, tables and washing baths. Quality inspection, removal of part or whole vegetables and weighing are often undertaken with the packing process. This sort of work often involves awkward postures, repetitive reaching, bending, twisting and lifting resulting in some claims for shoulder, arm, neck and back injuries.

Suggested solutions for this task, other than total automation, include:

- Setting the production line below elbow height, for the majority of the population, about 950mm;
- Ensuring there is space for the operators feet under the production line;
- Erecting a frame just above the production line that enables cartons or crates to be placed in front of, and angled toward, the worker;
- Fitting height adjustable stands beside the production line to support crates or cartons at a height that minimises bending and reach;
- Incorporating weigh stations into the production line;
- Providing a foot rail under the production line to enable posture changes while standing;
- Alternating between standing and sitting where there is adequate leg and knee space beneath the production line; and
- Providing seating that has adjustable height and backrest with lumbar support, of swivel action, with rounded edges and broad foot support.

The production line speed can be controlled to ensure workers are able to maintain a comfortable pace of work. Rotating tables or other forms of temporarily storing work in progress could be used to allow workers time to perform their tasks. In addition, job rotation or increased numbers of workers can help reduce specific physical loads on workers.

The layout of production lines and workstations should aim for operators to be working directly in front of them, rather than to the side and layout should also discourage reaching across the body to perform the task.

This solution and others are to be reviewed by the Reference Group, who have been asked to consult widely with growers, as the solutions move towards being finalised.

Any grower wishing to know more about the project and provide input into the solutions should contact VGA IDOs or the VGA Vic Office.

Federation, and growers. The VGA Board and a cross-section of growers are also being asked to review solutions.

The project has a clear objective to identify the hazardous manual handling that contributes to the major claims in this area. Solutions developed are aimed at eliminating or reducing the risk of injuries that result in these claims.

Solutions currently under review relate to packing and unpacking bulk bins and large crates, stacking boxes of vegetables on pallets, working at production lines and lifting and moving boxes of vegetables in the packing shed. It is intended to develop solutions for the use of trolleys, working on and around planters, and providing guidance on manual harvesting practices.

The solutions will provide practical information on addressing

## Bill Bulmer joins VGA executive

Lindenow grower, Bill Bulmer, was elected as a member of the VGA Executive Committee at the recent VGA Annual General Meeting.

Mr Bulmer is a third generation Victorian vegetable farmer, running the family business 'Bulmer Farms Fresh Vegetables'. They mainly supply the processing industry in Bairnsdale, Melbourne and Sydney and the Fresh Markets in Melbourne and Sydney.

Mr Bulmer is an active member of the vegetable industry and the local community, being a past President and Life Member of the Lindenow Football and Netball clubs.

Mr Bulmer is also a current member of the Board of the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and the East Gippsland Food Cluster, bringing a range of skills and insights to the VGA Executive Committee.

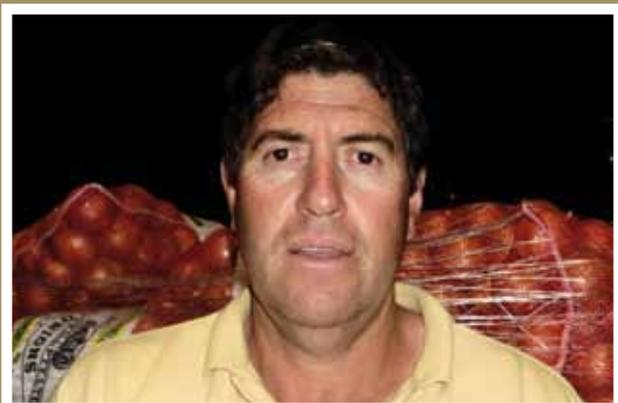
This year 'Bulmers Farm Fresh Vegetables' has been nominated as finalists in the East Gippsland Business Awards. On the farm 'Bulmers Farm Fresh Vegetables' have made substantial investments in water infrastructure, land holdings and upgrading their processing, packing and storage facilities.

Mr Bulmer believes that: "If you make investment on the farm you have to make time to protect that investment."

He added: "It is very important that the vegetable industry is rightly represented and receives its fair share of recognition."

"It is equally important that the interests and views of the East Gippsland vegetable growing region are represented."

"I've become a VGA Executive Committee member to contribute to decisions and present a regional view in discussions," he said.



▲ Bill Bulmer has joined the VGA Executive Committee

## Food safety demystified

### Q. Why do I need to have a Quality Assurance or Food Safety program?

A. If you want to be able to sell your product to the retailers you will need to have a program in place. If you want your market agent to have a wide choice of buyers, you need to have a program in place.

QA or Food Safety programs should be treated like car insurance. You pay for the service each year and you may never need it, however, if you do have an accident at least you are covered. By having your Food Safety accreditation audit each year you are protecting yourself in case there ever is an incident. Your accreditation and records could save your business.

### Q. What program should I use?

A. The first question you need to consider is who do you supply?

- If you supply through a Market Agent then you can choose from Freshcare v.3, HACCP, SQF1000, SQF2000 or WQA, - it is really up to you.
- If you supply directly to Coles or pack into their containers, bags or use their labels, then you can have any of the above but need to meet additional Coles requirements which include revised Freshcare v.3 or HACCP training every three years.
- If you supply Woolworths directly or pack into their containers, bags or use their labels you will need WQA.
- If you supply to a packhouse or processor then they will determine which program they require, but in most instances all of the above are acceptable.

### Q. What is the cost of compliance?

A. The costs vary with each program and can include:

- Cost of initial training;
- The annual audit (depending on the program from \$600pa to \$1800pa);
- Membership of the program;
- Chemical residue testing, water testing, microbial testing (depends on program and customer);
- A consultant to manage your program.

### Q. Is there a lot of recording?

A. This again depends on the program you choose. Every program will require you to record your chemical use. The amount of recording increases with the complexity of the program.

### Q. What audit company should I use?

A. You need to make sure that the company you choose can audit your program. Ask them for the cost of the audit and any on-costs that may be involved (travel, accommodation, etc). Ask other growers who they use – they will soon tell you who not to use.



# VGA regional dinner

5th November - Villa Adriana Function Centre, South Dandenong



# Lettuce harvester study tour to California and Italy

Four lettuce growers undertook a lettuce harvester study tour to California and Italy recently. - Slobodan Vujovic

A lettuce harvester tour was organised and led by VAGO East, Slobodan Vujovic, and four lettuce growers participated. Participating growers contributed 50 per cent of the costs and 50 per cent was funded by the HAL project VG11702.

The objectives of the tour were to assess existing, new and emerging technologies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of lettuce harvesting, and understand how they may be integrated into existing systems in Australia. The tour was focused on the lettuce industry (head lettuce, Iceberg, Cos and salad mix) looking at lettuce harvesters, innovation in lettuce production, and trends in varieties, packaging and marketing of lettuce.

The tour started in San Francisco where the group rented a 'big truck' to look like the rest of the farming community in California and drove to San Juan Bautista. There the group visited the Enza Zaden research station. Enza Zaden is one of the largest developers, growers and marketers of vegetable seeds in the world. The host there was Jonathan Sinclair, senior Iceberg breeder. Mr Sinclair showed the tour group some of his latest breeding trials and had a discussion with the growers about current trends in lettuce breeding.

The next day the group moved to the Salinas Valley – "The Salad Bowl of the World" – which supplies 80 per cent of the nation's lettuces. The group began the working day with visits to Ramsay Highlander in Gonzales, a manufacturer of specialised harvesting aids for the vegetable industry. Located in the heart of the Salinas Valley, Ramsay Highlander is internationally known as the world's largest manufacturer of self-propelled harvesting aids. The day started with early morning visits to a Cos lettuce field near Gonzales, where the group observed Ramsay's newest product launch, a mechanical harvester which used a water jet cutting method to harvest Cos lettuce. Frank Maconachy, CEO of Ramsay Highlander, our host for the day, said that the harvester had been able to eliminate 30 labourers from the harvesting process. Mr Maconachy added that the harvesting method increased product shelf life by up to three days.

The group spent the rest of the day in the office and workshop of Ramsay Highlander, talking to engineers and production staff about current projects and their vision for the future.

Ramsay custom design machines to meet the exact requirements of each customer by utilising the latest computer-aided design software aided by their many years of experience. In their workshop one machine caught our eyes with its futuristic look – like something from a 'Star Wars' set – it was a prototype of a weeding/tinning machine. When the machine is operational it will have a photo/colour sensor with the capability to read 2000 colour green and then insert (spray) herbicide on unwanted plants.

On day three the group visited the Valley Fabrication Plant



in Salinas where our host was Engineering Manager, Peter de Groot. Valley Fabrication is a manufacturer of custom harvesting equipment for the fresh vegetable industry, specialising in salad mix harvesters and self-propelled harvesters for broccoli, cauliflower and Cos lettuce, as well as various harvesting aids and transfer systems. Valley Fabrication's design team work directly with customers to develop a complete new harvester or modify an existing design according to the customer's requirements. They use solid modelling software to generate an accurate computer model of a new harvester. This allows the customer to 'see' the harvester before it is built. Most changes are made before any drawings go to the shop floor for manufacturing. To show us some fine examples of their ingenuity, Mr de Groot took the group to Costa & Sons, where we saw cutting and washing operations being completed in the field by two self-propelled specially designed machines.

In the afternoon the group visited one of the D'Arrigo Bros Cos lettuce fields to see their harvesting operation in action. D'Arrigo Bros operates under the name Andy Boy and is one of the largest vegetable growing operations in Salinas Valley. They grow: Broccoli, rabe, cactus pear, cauliflower, fennel, Cos (Romaine) lettuce hearts, Iceberg lettuce, green and red leaf lettuce. In the field we observed the process of harvesting, packing into sealed bags and boxes and from there to the transport vehicle to be cooled. In less than 24 hours the product would be on supermarket shelves across the US. As part of the internal quality assurance processes, one box per load is field inspected and

recorded on a handheld device. Every box is also bar-coded for traceability; the block number is recorded, as is information about the harvesting crew, date, and time of the harvest.

The group visited Taylor Farms in Salinas where they were shown around by Andrew Fernandez, Vice President of Row Product. Taylor Farms is a processor of salads and fresh cut vegetables, with ten processing plants across North America, producing 120 million weekly servings. We had the opportunity to see their state-of-the-art processing facility and discuss market trends in ready-to-eat salads and vegetables in the US and Australia. Mr Fernandez said that the latest market research showed that the consumer spends 49 per cent of their food budget in restaurants and that 71 per cent of adults now say they try to eat healthier when dining out. He added that vegetables have the lowest cost per serve, highest plate coverage and best nutrition to weight ratio of any food.

Before the group ended our tour of the US, we returned to San Francisco where we visited a farmer's market at pier 32, before boarding the plane to Italy.

The next day the group spent on the plane in transit and some time was lost due to time differences. Its leg of the Italian tour started in Padova, an Italian region of Veneto. The group visited Hortech in Agna 20km south from Padova. Hortech is a manufacturer of harvesting machineries, transplanting and soil preparation implements. They produce self-propelled harvesters for head lettuce and salad mix, as well as tractor pulled machinery. Our host for the day and translator was Luca Casotto, Hortech Export Manager. After our tour of the Hortech workshop the group visited several farms in the local area to see how those implements performed in the field.

The next day the group visited Ortomec in Cona near Padova. Our host there was Emanuela Gallo, one of the co-owners of the company. Ortomec is a manufacturer of harvesting equipment. They produce self-propelled harvesters for head lettuce and salad mix as well as tractor pulled machinery.

Our last working stop in Italy was at the head office of Turatti, located in Cavarzere near Padova. Turatti specialise in manufacturing production of processing lines for the vegetable industry (like trimming, cutting, washing, drying, peeling, brushing and blanching). Turatti has been operating for many generations and our host Alessandro Turatti was the fifth generation owner of the family business. Today, Turatti operates from two bases in Europe and the US, with a worldwide customer base and it has an export rate equal to 80 per cent of its sales volume.

Mr Turatti showed us around the company's workshop where the group saw a new off-the-shelf demonstration of a fully enclosed lettuce washing and drying line. Mr Turatti added that the production range was very wide and is the result of an intense research and planning activity that has given birth to a large number of international patents. The needs of the customer are the key to the work of a professional team that operates by applying the strictest international regulations with regards to hygiene, safety and maintenance. From research to after-sales service, each phase of the operating cycle is included, guaranteeing full customer service.

Andrew Bulmer, a vegetable grower from Lindenow and tour participant said, "This is the best way to assess what is out there, to see what there is and how it works and under what conditions."

"It is then much easier to make an informed decision. I recommend all veggie growers get involved in similar tours as it's one of the best ways to learn and bring home new knowledge. For me personally, seeing the Salinas Valley and the scale of the operations over there has been an eye opener," he said.





## Mildura growers meet about precision ag, gross margins and alternatives to dimethoate - Helena Whitman

September saw a collaborative meeting organised by VGA & NSWFA Industry Development Officers and NSW & VIC DPI which involved vegetable growers from the Mildura and Dareton region, covering several topics important to the industry.

Nic Gowans, from VIC DPI, gave a comprehensive presentation on precision horticulture, outlining the increased use and access by growers of GPS, sensors, imagery and information tools. Mr Gowans said that these were being used to assess and manage in-field variability and detection of low production areas, to adjust irrigation and fertiliser application and generally improve management of inputs. The technology also provided growers with a historical record of farm practices and results. Many growers were reporting that ultimately, investing in the technology not only improved productivity, but also saved them considerable amounts of money on inputs.



Gerard Kelly from NSW DPI demonstrated a new gross margin tool (calculator) that has been developed to enable growers to decide what to grow based on potential income and likely operating costs. It allows growers to enter estimated yields, prices and input costs to arrive at gross margins for the crop they are considering. It uses the ten most common input cost categories: seed and plants, fertiliser, fuel, chemicals, water, labour, energy (electricity, gas etc), packaging, freight and other operating costs. This tool is available for download from the AUSVEG website [www.ausveg.com.au](http://www.ausveg.com.au) by searching for 'Gross Margin Tool'.

Apiarist, Trevor Monson, gave a presentation on the benefits of pollination to some vegetable crops and the implications for the bee industry of exotic diseases and pests.

Eryn Knobel, NSW DPI, explained protocols for moving vegetables from NSW to Victoria (even though it was just across the river) and also outlined the alternatives available and implications of the suspension of dimethoate.



## Veg power in groups – Rocky Lamattina

Rocky Lamattina is 54-years-old and farms at Clyde. He grows bunching lines, namely spring onions, radish and parsley and is in his fifth year as an active member of the Executive Committee of the Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria.

The Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria held its Annual General Meeting in mid-October, as is the case with most agricultural committees across the country.

The VGA is having difficulty in holding on to existing members and finding it virtually impossible to attract new ones.

Declining membership has become such a concern that we recently employed someone solely to try and reverse the trend.

As children we all wanted to be part of the mob. If we were excluded from group activities, it would create a great deal of angst.

As adults, this is still partly true, but a lot of people prefer to do their own thing. Everyone acknowledges that there is strength in numbers and will generally rally together under a common cause. Unfortunately, this solidarity soon dissipates once that issue is perceived to be resolved.

In the south east of the state where our farm is located, we have an informal group called 'the south-east growers'. We don't have any regular meetings and only get together if there is an issue affecting our local area. It has been around for quite a while but has no formal structure, and therefore no need for membership fees. A few years ago the local growers were approached by a private firm looking to set up a pipeline to distribute class recycled water to the area.

Water was a hot topic at the time so this was generally well-received by the local community. This is where the south-east growers group came into its own because it was able to meet regularly with the consultants, negotiating all the details as a group as opposed to individuals. In the

end, the deal we struck up was a win-win situation for both the users and suppliers of this water.

This informal setup may be the answer to some of the issues facing associations, but the problem is that these groups have very little clout when it comes to dealing with issues involving government departments.

Bureaucrats actually prefer these situations because they can go into an area and divide and conquer, pitting one individual against another to achieve whatever outcome they are looking for. Having a structured organisation is also beneficial from a media exposure perspective because there is usually a go-to person they can contact when seeking comment on particular issues. This has been highlighted by our peak industry body, AUSVEG, of which VGA Vic is a State Member.

AUSVEG currently has the right people in place to work constructively for the vegetable industry to achieve positive outcomes for a lot of issues affecting the industry. The media is a powerful tool when dealing with governments because most of them are terrified of negative publicity. So when people are tossing up whether to renew their memberships or join a particular organisation they should look at all the relevant issues involving that decision. Membership fees are certainly an issue during the current economic climate, but a few hundred dollars is a small price to pay to have a voice in influencing where your industry will head into the foreseeable future. Try to remember how it felt to belong to a peer group when growing up and the decision should be an easy one.

# Vegetable training and apprenticeships



▲ Primary Skills Victoria is conducting an online survey to gauge attitudes and barriers to industry training

The search is on for guidance from vegetable employers on the types of training and accreditation to be offered to employees.

Recently Tony Imeson (VGA Executive Officer) & Rod Hall (VGA Membership Services) attended a Public Hearing of the Education & Training Committee of the Parliament of Victoria.

VGA is committed to participating in this process - particularly when industry training providers and regulators are urging participation and submissions from VGA on the training needs of vegetable growing businesses.

## Help make a difference

Another opportunity for input comes from the Primary Skills Victoria

survey which seeks information about training facilities, courses, and most importantly, training preferences for the future.

Government support for your local TAFE or the development of private training organisations, is one of the important issues undergoing change. VGA Members are encouraged to take the opportunity to declare their preferences at this crucial time.

Formal training and accreditation will raise the performance and formally acknowledges the competency of your staff and the contribution they make to your business.

You can participate in the survey at: <http://www.psv.com.au/node/78>  
The survey will take less than 15 minutes and will provide valuable insight into the training needs of vegetable businesses.

# Green snail ....what the?

**National and state biosecurity processes are being implemented for green snail detection near Cobram in Northern Victoria. - Rod Hall**

The green snail could arrive on your property or in your district soon - in a floral tribute, a gift of produce or in a delivery of first cut new season lucerne hay from the quarantine area - if all of the control procedures are not effectively implemented.

The outbreak serves to demonstrate how these procedures are implemented. The initial detection has to undergo scientific analysis and identification and then specially constituted committees determine the type and extent of the response that best safeguards the interests of all stakeholders.

How has 'the system' dealt with the outbreak? Victorian DPI has supplied the following information:

## Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) response to green snail incursion September 2011

Green snail (*Cantareus apertus*) is a declared exotic pest in Victoria under the *Plant Health and Plant Products Act 1995*.

Because of this, DPI's response to the detection of green snail in Victoria has been guided by the National Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan for agricultural industries - known as PLANTPLAN.

PLANTPLAN describes the procedures and management system for handling emergency plant pest (EPP) incursions at the national, state/

territory and district levels. It is intended for use by all jurisdictions for all EPP incursions and it enables a more rapid, coordinated and consistent response.

Details of PLANTPLAN can be found on the Plant Health Australia website.

In practice, the steps in a response may vary from the PLANTPLAN guidelines, depending on the type and scale of emergency and the available resources.

Decisions about the required response to an EPP detection are made by the national Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests, which must be notified within 24 hours of such a detection. The Committee then investigates the feasibility of eradicating the EPP incursion, taking into account factors such as the severity and distribution of the infestation, the threat posed to industry and the likelihood of further spread.

As of mid-November 2011, surveys around the green snail detection site were being conducted to determine the extent of the incursion and inform the decision about eradication.

Once it has decided if the snail is eradicable or not, the Consultative Committee will rank the green snail incursion in terms of establishment, spread and economic impact. This is then used to determine cost sharing arrangements under the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed.

Each state/territory decides on their own quarantine restrictions to be applied immediately after an EPP detection.

Since this is the first detection of green snail in this state, little is known of its likely behaviour under Victorian conditions. The protocols used in DPI's response to-date are therefore based on those applied in Western Australia, where green snail became established in the 1980s.

## Further information :

[www.dpi.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds)  
[www.planthealthaustralia.com.au](http://www.planthealthaustralia.com.au)

*Note: As a VGA Member you will have been regularly forwarded the Plant Health Australia newsletter "Tendrils" (Refer to No 18 on 5 Nov 2011), and this provides current information on the implementation of response protocols as well as links to the PHA website.*

## Executive Officer's corner



The 2011 AGM held in October completed another year of active industry involvement in the representation of vegetable growers in Victoria. After seven years as President, Luis Gazzola handed over the reins to David Wallace.

There is still plenty of unfinished business for the new Executive Committee to address such as chemical access and usage, food safety, pest management, storm water harvesting, climate change, country of origin labelling, registration of vegetable growers, industry training, water policy and relocation

of the Melbourne Wholesale Market to Epping.

Newly appointed Executive Member, Bill Bulmer, from Lindenow, will provide a valuable contribution from Gippsland.

Over the past year, VGA Vic has been very supportive of the Manual Handling project conducted by Andrew Sullivan from Ballarat University. Growers have been most co-operative during farm visits organised by our IDOs.

A new Food Alliance project is being conducted by Deakin University and VGA is providing input and representation at forums.

A recent technology forum, conducted through the Vic DPI Horticultural Industry Network (HIN) program, was attended by VGA Vic representatives. The content of the forum will be reviewed in our efforts to improve our communication skills. Rod Hall has been discussing with our younger growers the latest forms of technology to ensure that response to industry issues is improved.

Industry training in horticulture is on the decline and VGA Vic recently provided a submission to the State Government and had representation at a public hearing to emphasise our concerns. Many courses in horticultural training are of a high standard but for the vegetable industry there is insufficient specialisation and therefore they lack relevance for the production of vegetables. Key benefits in education and training are that young farmers are familiar with current research findings and practices that result in positive outcomes for producers and customers. Issues surrounding education and training relate to the courses not being consistent with vegetable industry practices and not satisfying the training that employers are requiring for their employees. The general opinion is that the courses currently available through TAFE do not meet the requirements of the vegetable industry.

VGA Vic is the State Member of AUSVEG, our national vegetable and potato organisation which provides excellent communication to

all growers Australia-wide. Political lobbying is a major activity at the Federal level in Canberra and CEO Richard Mulcahy, on our behalf, undertakes advocacy covering a wide range of national industry concerns.

I would recommend that you consider taking a break next May to attend the AUSVEG National Convention in Hobart, Tasmania. Over the last three years this convention has proved to be an excellent gathering of growers and industry representatives. Delegate registration brochures are now being distributed. Contact me if you have not received a brochure.

Remember VGA Vic is YOUR voice of the Victorian vegetable industry and needs your support.

Please note that effective from 30 November 2011, Slobodan Vujovic has resigned as VGA Vic IDO East and has taken up a full-time position with another organisation.

Should you need to know more about the services available to you, please contact one of the listed officers.

Helena Whitman (IDO): Mobile 0407 772 299

Rod Hall (Grower Membership Services): Mobile 0403 215 935

Both will be happy to speak to you on issues that affect you as a vegetable grower.

Our VGA Vic web site promotes the critical and often undervalued role of vegetable growers in their daily struggle to reliably produce the healthy food we all enjoy at our dinner tables.

The site regularly attracts over 3000 visitors each month. Searchable content has expanded to almost 2000 pages of interesting articles, over 300 R&D report summaries, as well as topical news and events. Go to [www.vegetablesvictoria.com.au](http://www.vegetablesvictoria.com.au) or [www.vgavic.org.au](http://www.vgavic.org.au).

Keep Smiling,

*Tony Imeson*

### For more information please contact:

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## VGA Vic. proudly recognises our industry supporters:

