

Victorian growers take out top awards

Victorians featured prominently in the winners circle at the recent AUSVEG National Awards for Excellence in Hobart in May.

A large contingent of Victorians attended the 2012 AUSVEG National Awards for Excellence. Attendees included a number of finalists for awards, with Victorian growers taking out the top two prizes of the night: the Women in Horticulture award sponsored by Steritech went to Tina Lamattina (pictured below - bottom left), while Frank Ruffo was awarded the prestigious Grower of the Year award sponsored by Syngenta (pictured below - top left). Congratulations to all the finalists and the winners on the night.



Grower of the Year Frank Ruffo



Starting with 15 acres in Bacchus Marsh in 1989, Tripod Farmers now consists of 800 acres in both Bacchus Marsh and Gippsland. Frank Ruffo is the third generation of his family to be involved in vegetable growing and his sons Joseph and Frank Jnr are following in his footsteps making up the fourth generation of vegetable growers. Even though Tripod has a large staff of over 250, Frank and wife Angela are very hands-on in the operation, driving hundreds of

kilometres each week between the farms. Frank says that love of the industry is what drives them to keep doing this.

When asked about winning the Grower of the Year Award, Frank said: "I am feeling proud, honoured, and humble that all of the family's commitment, dedication and hard work have been recognised by my peers. I am also proud of my sons Joe and Frank Jnr being finalists in their award categories and for their achievements."

Although many say there is no future in farming, Frank is optimistic. However, there are many challenges facing the industry in the near future including labour shortages, overproduction, changing technologies and poor returns.

For more coverage of the AUSVEG National Convention, including a Q&A with Women in Horticulture award winner Tina Lamattina, turn to page 4 & 5.

President's report



Well done to all the veggie growers of Victoria!

As President, with your VGA committee members, we appreciate all your hard work, knowledge, expertise and capital finance laid out in machinery, equipment, cool rooms and packing sheds that are involved in growing the best and cheapest veggies in the world!

Most politicians, bureaucrats and journalists are unaware that it is not the mining industry alone that is driving this country but also the horticulture industry and mainly the vegetable sector.

Vegetables are so cheap. You and I know but outside of the industry no-one seems to know or care. Why? Because we alone are giving the governments, both State and Federal, means of keeping inflation and the CPI down. That makes them look smart and competent but in reality it's us, the

growers. So again I congratulate all of you on producing the world's best and cheapest veggies! But can we last as growers or will the Carbon Tax be the last straw that breaks our enthusiasm and endeavour to thrive and survive? Time will tell!

2012 AUSVEG National Convention

I attended 2012 AUSVEG National Convention in May at Wrest Point Hotel in Hobart along with my wife, Robyn, and fellow VGA Members and other Victorian growers and families. VGA Secretary Tony Imeson, Executive Manager Helena Whitman, and our IDOs Rod Hall and John Runting represented VGA Vic at the event.

Everyone was there to listen, learn and have our say on this great industry in moving forward and to make sure we stay strong on the political front. We discussed issues confronting our industry like imported fresh vegetables, labelling of country of origin, biosecurity, foreign labour, working permits, and also the opportunities to network with politicians, industry people and our fellow growers across Australia.

It was a great convention, so congratulations to all at AUSVEG in running a successful event. Still, sadly we need more growers to attend these conventions and meetings because it's your chance to have your say as to where and how we should be going as an industry.

Highlights of the event - where do I start?

Firstly, congratulations on all the nominees nominated for national recognition at the Awards for Excellence. There are so many talented entrepreneurs in this exciting, innovative industry. It was inspiring just being in the room that night with all the vegetable industry people. I felt humbled to be President of the VGA when I heard what

the winners of each category had to say about this industry and the pride they had in their own family and fellow members of the industry, that makes each farming business special. Congratulations to all the winners, especially Tina Lamattina, Frank Ruffo, Aussie Farmers Direct and VISY - all from Victoria.

Epping Market

The relocation saga continues in relation to how, when and where. It seems nobody knows, not even the government. After eight years they are unable to speak to us or understand the market community needs, creating something that's not suited for the market community and going backwards in the world's best practice with a cost blowout three times the original sum. It's only nine weeks since we last met with the major projects department and not a sound out of them since then. Yet, a new facility worth over \$800 million plus is being built and we have little input into how it's built. If the department of major projects would just sit and talk with us they might actually save themselves some money and get things right for once in this project. They are still going round and round in circles. They have two to three years left so maybe I panic too much where as a growers' representative on the selling floor, business goes on as usual - day in, day out.

So the VGA is alive, busily representing fellow growers in all matters, through its committees and IDOs. Thanks again to all members, growers and industry people for your great support. We'll do our best. Until next time, enjoy what's around you!

David Wallace

President

For Executive Officer's corner

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AUSVEG

Fertiliser stabiliser trials

- John Runting, VGA IDO East



Growers at the field day in Boneo.



Over the past two years Dr Ian Porter and his team at the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) have been conducting trials in Werribee and Boneo to help improve yields by improving soil health. The research has been funded by DPI, with support from Incitec Pivot Fertilisers and DAFF (Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries) and is aimed at providing industry farming methods which increase yields and profits, and also benefit the climate and the environment.

Why is this applied research so important?

Yields: Increasing the yields from the same farmed area will return the producer more income and effectively make the product potentially cheaper to the consumer.

Soil Health: All soil types across Australia's prime vegetable growing regions are very old and fragile. These old soils need to be carefully managed to optimise their long-term health, which leads to better quality produce being delivered using more sustainable agricultural techniques.

Reduce Emissions: When fertilisers and manures are applied there is a large percentage of nitrogen that is lost to the atmosphere (volatilisation) in the form of nitrous oxide (N₂O) and through leaching of nitrate past the plant root systems and most likely into the ground water. This can lead to an increase in nitrate levels within drainage waters and adversely affect other organisms.

The scientific trials conducted on large farms in Victoria used the current 'best practice' methods for growing crops, but modified the ways fertilisers and manures were applied. Keeping the preparation methods as close to "normal" market gardening practices means that the results can be applied and easily transferred across many vegetable varieties throughout the prime vegetable growing areas.

Potential losses of nitrogen through leaching and denitrification (as mentioned above) can account for anywhere from 20-60% of applied nitrogen fertiliser depending on soil type and seasonal conditions. Therefore, any process that can help contain or reduce these nitrogen losses is a good thing. By minimising nitrogen losses, there is a more sustained nitrogen supply to the vegetable crops, resulting in yield and quality improvements. The flow on effect will be:

- Improved crop uptake and potentially higher yields.
- Improved access to ammonium nitrogen for better growth and greater phosphorus, copper and zinc uptake.
- Reduced nitrate flushes for more consistent, quality produce (reduced chance the plant will bolt to seed).
- A more continuous supply of nitrogen with potentially fewer applications for better workload efficiency on farms.

Stabilisers were applied to the chicken manure and the commercial NPK base fertiliser and this allowed a reduction in use of calcium nitrate. Different amounts of the various products were applied to a broccoli crop and the yields and emissions recorded.

By applying commercially available nitrogen stabiliser manures and fertilisers the results showed:

- Improved yields.
- Lowered emissions.
- Reduced fertiliser inputs.

Figure 1: Broccoli harvest, Lamattina

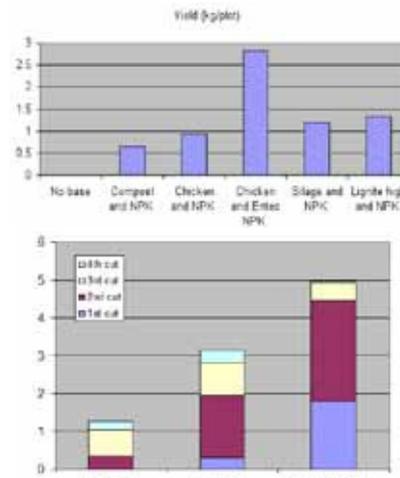


Figure 1 clearly shows that yields of broccoli were increased with the addition of the nitrogen stabiliser on the standard commercial NPK base.

What is the take home message to consider?

- Use of stabilisers on manures gave up to 20% increase in yields with at least 50% less N lost to the atmosphere.
- Up to \$3000-6000/ha extra profits.
- Use of stabilisers on fertilisers also reduced N₂O emissions by >50%, and potentially can reduce nitrate leaching and depending on the season can improve yields.
- Most importantly, results showed an increase in nitrogen use efficiency from less than 15% to above 50% meaning more nitrogen is used by the plant and not wasted.

The results from this research project undertaken by DPI deliver to the vegetable grower practical applied methods to improve the outcomes for all growers. As with any new farming practices or methods, the grower needs to carefully trial these new practices at each new site and fine-tune it to suit their particular soil type and climatic conditions for their region.

Through your VGA representative we can help direct you to the latest information that will make the use of these new practices easy to understand so you can potentially implement it on your farm.

AUSVEG National Convention & Trade Show 10-12 May 2012

The AUSVEG National Convention & Trade Show was held in Hobart during May with around 70 trade exhibitors displaying their goods and discussing new and innovative products and services for vegetable growers.

Over 800 delegates attended the AUSVEG National Convention in Hobart from 10-12 May and there was plenty to look at in the trade exhibition, plus many topics presented in the main auditorium covering some of the latest research results, industry policies, marketing methods and the odd 'pollie' thrown in for good measure.

A brief summary of the presentations is included below for our readers:

Cultivating Ideas and Answers:

Joerg Ellmanns - Senior Bayer Representative, Bayer Australia and New Zealand

- The rate of chemical development is dropping rapidly while resistance to chemicals is increasing. Chemical companies are moving more toward complementing IPM programs.
- Veggie growers are a business and need to use good sound science to help improve quality and reduce costs.
- The level of new participants entering or undertaking tertiary courses in agricultural sciences is falling with Sydney University having to cancel its agriculture course because of low student numbers.

Insights and Innovations:

Richard Macchiesi - General Manager, Insights and Innovation, VISY

- Everyone wants less packaging, however, some is necessary for transport and differentiation of product.
- VISY is putting a lot of effort into innovative product ranges including use of recycled material to ensure their product is recyclable.
- As Mr Macchiesi said: "Our lifestyle is faster and the consumer wants products in smaller more convenient packages."
- New labelling was shown that gives the customer an indication of the level of ripeness of the packaged product.
- We need to give the consumer more alternative and convenient packaged products that make it easier to use our vegetable products.

Keynote address:

Paul Howes - National Secretary, The Australian Workers' Union (AWU):

- The AWU presently has a membership of 140,000.
- Labelling of products needs to be addressed to make it clearer and easier for the consumer to purchase genuine Australian produce.

- The devalued Chinese currency and the high Australian dollar is a real concern making it very difficult to be on a "level playing field."
- Food security needs to be high on the Federal Government agenda.
- Supermarket power can't be addressed by the government; it must be consumer driven. Consumers need to be made aware of the downside of the discounting war in relation to food production. Government will only act under consumer pressure.

Welcome to the Global Collaboratory:

Scott Huf - Business Director, DuPont:

- As chemicals run out, stewardship of older chemicals and product availability for minor-use remains paramount for DuPont.
- DuPont is aiming to bring a new product onto the world market each year.
- DuPont is investing significantly in R&D to develop new products. This R&D is vital for veggie growers to keep producing the quality products that consumers demand.

The second day of presentations at the AUSVEG Convention opened with a captivating speech at breakfast by Prof. Geoffrey Blainey on the history of vegetables in Australia. The corporate presenters later that day took a global view of vegetable production and in particular the factors associated with 'managing the value chain', and with seed and chemical products they are well-placed to understand all aspects. The combination of better genetics in producing varieties to meet specific consumer needs, and the more targeted and strategic application of the 'chemistry' they have developed, was seen as the way of the future.

Ed Gannon, Editor of the Weekly Times, put aspects of the media under scrutiny - particularly the new media and where this left The Weekly Times.

E. coli has also entered the vegetable conversation in the last year and a panel representing DPI/DAFF, AUSVEG, retail, growers, politics and the media, were led through a "hypothetical" outbreak that contained many of the elements of the incident in Germany. The approaches differed depending on what benefited the commercial or regulatory interests of the panel member, with the main concern being for consumer well-being. The discussion did, however, highlight our preparedness for such an outbreak.



Speaker sessions at the AUSVEG Convention were well-received. Pictured above, VGA President David Wallace with award winners Tina Lamattina and Frank Ruffo, and pictured above right, attendees at the Gala Dinner.

Women in Horticulture Tina Lamattina



The Lamattina Group is based in Boneo, south of Melbourne and also in Happy Valley, on the banks of the Murray River in northern Victoria. The Lamattina Group produces in excess of one million tonnes of vegetables annually from total property holdings of more than 3,500 hectares. The Group is operated and managed by Russell and Tina Lamattina and their six children, Angelo, Dominic, Josephine, Russell Jnr, Robert and Anthony.

VGA Victoria spoke with Tina following her award win.

Q: Have you yourself always been involved in vegetable growing?

A: Although traditionally back in Italy my family did have some agricultural background, we have not been involved in the vegetable growing industry here in Australia. I was awarded my apprenticeship with my wedding ring.

Q: What is your role in the business and how have you managed while raising a family?

A: My role in the business has been diverse over the years, but my title today is Chief Financial Officer. Essentially though, I oversee all of the administration, payroll, human resources, quality assurance, environmental compliance, occupational health and safety, banking and finance, accounting and statutory compliance, as well as the planning and operational aspects of the business on a day-to-day basis. Russell and I are very equal, both in business and in our family life, so we have

shared raising the family and running the business at the same time.

Q: What does winning this award mean to you and to your family?

A: I feel extremely privileged and honoured to win this award. The role women play in the industry is fundamental to its survival. Not just in the role of support, but in the field of research and development, innovation and product development. My family is very pleased with the recognition women receive by this award, as it encourages other women to become more actively involved in their chosen field in a traditionally male dominated industry.

Q: Did you have to encourage your children to be involved in the business or did they always want to be growers?

A: We have always given our children options from an early age. While we have never really encouraged them into it, they have found a natural affinity to it. Each one of our six children has found their respective role in the business, and we have nurtured them to their full potential. My nephew at Clyde was a finalist for "Young Grower of the Year" and we are very proud of him.

Q: How do you see the future of the Victorian industry?

A: Victoria has long been seen as the "food bowl" for the whole country. Our industry in this state is extremely important and we should ensure that it is equally valued here as it is interstate. The VGA helps support our cause at all levels.

Note: Other Victorian award winners were for the Productivity Partner Award, won by VISY, and the Innovative Marketing Award, won by Aussie Farmers Direct. It was exceedingly pleasing to see so many of our young growers nominated for either the Rising Star of the Year Award or for the Young Grower of the Year Award. Congratulations to all winners and nominees.

VIC Nominees for 2012 Industry Awards

Grower of the Year Award

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| Rodney Fraser | (VIC) |
| Frank Ruffo (Winner) | (VIC) |
| Joe Vizzari | (VIC) |
| Peter Covino | (VIC) |
| Marco Mason | (VIC) |

Rising Star of the Year Award

| | |
|-----------------|-------|
| Kain Richardson | (VIC) |
| Grayson White | (VIC) |
| Joe Ruffo | (VIC) |
| Emma Bogicevic | (VIC) |

Young Grower of the Year Award

| | |
|------------------|-------|
| Phillip Cochrane | (VIC) |
| Angelo Lamattina | (VIC) |
| Darren Schreurs | (VIC) |
| Frank Grossi | (VIC) |
| Frankie Ruffo | (VIC) |

Industry Recognition Award

| | |
|-----------------|-------|
| Rodney Fraser | (VIC) |
| David Beardsell | (VIC) |
| Paul Gazzola | (VIC) |
| Peter Cochrane | (VIC) |
| Tony Imeson | (VIC) |

Industry Impact Award

| | |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Dr David Beardsell | (VIC) |
| E.E Muir & Sons (Ian Muir) | (VIC) |

Productivity Partner Award

| | |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Paul Horne | (VIC) |
| Netafim | (VIC) |
| VISY (Winner) | (VIC) |

Researcher of the Year Award

| | |
|---------------------|-------|
| Ian Porter | (VIC) |
| Liz Minchinton | (VIC) |
| Brendan Rodoni | (VIC) |
| Dr. Fiona Constable | (VIC) |

Innovative Marketing Award

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| Simplot | (VIC) |
| Bayer | (VIC) |
| Aussie Farmers Direct (Winner) | (VIC) |

Women in Horticulture Award

| | |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Tina Lamattina (Winner) | (VIC) |
|--------------------------------|--------------|

Environmental Award

| | |
|----------------|-------|
| Peter Schreurs | (VIC) |
|----------------|-------|

VFF Conference - Horticulture Policy Council

In April, President David Wallace and Executive Manager Helena Whitman attended the Horticulture Policy Council Meeting at the VFF Conference. A range of issues were discussed in various breakout groups including:

Development of a Cost of Production Template - looking at the development of a cost of production template that can be used at an individual business level - this will be developed and piloted with growers.

Biosecurity - This group came up with eight priorities including:

- Primary producers being recognised as stakeholders in the biosecurity policy development at government level.
- That VFF lobby for government funding to implement Industry Biosecurity Plans at an individual business level.
- That VFF supported the mandatory requirement for abandoned orchards and vineyards to be cleaned up.

Red Tape/Right to Farm - policy priorities were developed around a number of issues including:

- That VFF lobby for a review of duplicated and contradictory regulations in local and state government affecting growers.
- That VFF lobby local government to have an internal open appeals process for farming decisions before they reach VCAT. This could be done through a regional Small Business Commission structure.

Responding to Food Safety Proposal P1015 on Primary Production & Processing Standard for Horticulture - VFF would draft a submission around option 2 - other measures that can be considered, including

developing educational materials or guidelines for industry, as well as self-regulatory approaches.

Other resolutions of interest from the Conference included:

- The threshold trigger for assessment (by the Foreign Investment Review Board) of a purchase of agricultural land or water by foreign persons or enterprises should be reduced to \$5m. There should also be a comprehensive registry developed of all agricultural land and water assets owned by foreign persons or enterprises.

- That the VFF lobby the Federal and State Government to support young people into farm ownership with:

- Low interest loans.
- Stamp duty exemption.
- Support them with educational opportunities in up-to-date research and technology.

Neil Lowe, Chairman of the Melbourne Market Authority, discussed market relocation at the meeting and outlined the obstacles that had to be overcome. Mr Lowe reported that the market relocation was still on track for 2014-15. Rental proposals had not been finalised and sales through the market were slow for all commodities but were starting to pick up.

The conference also endorsed the request for a Parliamentary Inquiry into agricultural education with a vigorous publicity campaign to restore the proven practical diploma level course which successfully served the state of Victoria for over 100 years.

VGA lodges submission on Epping market

The VGA Growers Advisory Committee has lodged a submission regarding the "Allocation of Fruit and Vegetable Stands in the Epping Wholesale Market."

Based on discussions the Committee has had with current business owners and operators in the trading stands area of the fruit and vegetable market, the following advice was offered in the submission by VGA, for the consideration of the Minister for Major Projects:

1. Stand numbers and sizing

• The Committee wishes to express its disappointment at the decision taken back in 2004 to reduce the size of the trading stands area of the new market. While the Committee notes that the proposed increased stand sizes are appropriate, it believes the new stands area is compromised by its overall reduced space. Consequently, the number of stands available is significantly reduced (216 stands available).

• The Committee remains concerned that demand for stands may exceed the available supply and notes that if all first rights stand holders wish to preserve the approximate same amount of space at the new market, then 394 stands are required for each of Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and 344 for each Tuesday and Thursday.

• The Committee is concerned that there may not be sufficient stands for occasional users, for example, fruit growers.

• The Committee supports stand holders being able to retain the same number of stands they presently have for the new market.

• In the event that demand does exceed supply, the Committee reluctantly agrees that the size of stands would have to be reduced.

• Store holders with stands should not be able to have both at Epping. The Committee notes that approximately 30 store holders between them account for around 80 stands.

2. Rents

The Committee recommends that rents for stand holders reflect the cost of construction of the trading stands area compared with the stores area.

3. Allocation process

- The Committee requests that an Expression of Interest (Eoi) be

called for stands following the release of rents. The Eoi should require traders to indicate how many stands they require (based on current holdings), nominate the months of the year required and the days of the week.

• The Committee expressed the view that grower-based stand holders who occupy stands for 12 months of the year should be balloted first ahead of occasional stand holders.

• The Committee supports consideration being given to balloting groups of traders followed by a trading period to enable traders to make adjustments to their locations.

• The Committee supports a change in the system of rental payment so that stand holders only pay for the months they occupy stands rather than for an entire year.

• The Committee accepts that a "bond" system may be effective in discouraging non-genuine traders from expressing interest in taking a stand at Epping.

• The Committee expressed some interest in an upfront payment of three months rental as a form of bond.

4. Operating rules for stands (by-laws)

• The Committee requests that trucks be permitted to load/unload on the trading stands floor and requests that door heights and widths be increased to permit entry of trucks. The Committee notes the advice from DBI that the building has not been designed to accommodate trucks.

• The Committee would like to provide input into the development of an operating plan for the trading stands floor being developed by the MMA to address access to semi-trailer and truck parking and storage cages.

5. Adequacy of trading floor premises

The Committee visited the new market on 2 March and expresses its disappointment that the trading stands area:

- Does not have a ventilation system to deal with truck exhaust.
- Does not have cool room facilities.
- Lacks immediate adjacent warehousing.

Leafy Veg Field Day & Variety Trials

A weather report setting the scene for these April leafy vegetable trials is relevant - put simply, after three weeks of glorious autumn weather, the south-westerly arrived with squally rain overnight prior to day two.



Being the alternate year to the National Vegetable Expo (held in early May), April this year saw a comprehensive display of salad leaf varieties by four seed companies at several locations across Victoria. The regular field day conducted by Bejo showcasing their full range of vegetable varieties in this April timeslot also took place. Interstate visitors from major salad leaf growing and processing companies attended, along with all significant participants in the Victorian industry.

Bejo continued to work to its strengths with an extensive range of Brassicas, onions, and root vegetables on display at its Head Office trial grounds at Cranbourne. The breeders have been at work in most lines, introducing disease resistance - to both leaf and root diseases where applicable. Other notable offerings were early red onions, cauliflowers with good wrap, varieties with "mini" harvest options, and some novelty lines for colour and leaf appearance. Check with your representative or go to www.bejo.com.au for more details.

At Peter Lowe's farm in Glasssocks Road, Lyndhurst, several companies staged trials (pictured above right). Seminis' trials focused on their efforts in the eternal battle to stay ahead of new strains of downy mildew, with some clear success in new lines - as usual, it's a matter of the other agronomic features suiting the grower's requirements - contact your representative or go to www.seminis.com.au for more information.

Lefroy Valley had on show an extensive range of colours, leaf shapes and growth forms in lettuce, rocket, kale, mizuna, asian greens,

beetroots and chards, offering numerous possibilities to the salad mix grower. As well as the form of these varieties, the breeders have been at work with disease resistance being incorporated, to meet the challenge of new strains of the mildews as, or before, they appear in Australian cropping. Comprehensive descriptive literature was provided, including a 'Spinach Diseases' brochure. Contact your representative or go to www.lefroyvalley.com.

Fairbanks Seeds' display was equally as varied and colourful, with a strong emphasis on beets and chards, Asian greens and rocket. The lettuce range was presented for assessment for baby leaf production, with an up-to-date range of options for downy mildew resistance available. See your representative for trial material or go to www.fairbanks.com.au.

In Clyde, on Frank Lamattina's property, Westranell Horticultural Solutions (WHS) conducted its trials of baby leaf varieties. WHS had on display a number of new imported baby leaf varieties, which exhibited a more glossy leaf. The WHS representatives pointed out some of the trial plots that definitely did not suit Australian conditions but it was very interesting to see these next to the more mainstream varieties. A lot of overseas growers use seed that is more suitable for direct sowing while in Australia the majority of growers would use seedlings. Contact your representative or go to www.whseds.com for more information.

What have our IDOs been doing?

The limited resources of VGA Vic have been considerably boosted over the past three years by DPI Victoria's funding, which concludes at the end of June this year, of two part-time Industry Development Officers through its Horticulture Industry Network (HIN) Program.

So what have the IDOs achieved? I have been doing a quick summary of the IDO activities over this time. The IDOs have been able to visit between them close to 200 growers individually, from Mildura and Myrtleford in the north to Lindenow in the east. They have forged a strong network with researchers, suppliers and other industry representatives.

They have participated in 60 workshops, 90 meetings and three

AUSVEG Conventions. This does not include VGA Executive meetings or HIN meetings. Most workshops have been reported as articles in the VGA Newsletter or In-The-Field notes, which are emailed or faxed to growers at least weekly. If you don't get In-The-Field you are not on our email list. The IDOs attendance at these meetings and workshops has enabled time-poor growers to be kept informed of issues that may affect them and to advise them of upcoming meetings.

The IDOs have accompanied individual and group tours of growing areas and organised visits to growers for many visitors, industry representatives and researchers. They have assisted with research projects and reported on them, organised workshops, distributed posters, booklets, DVDs and other information on behalf of the DPI, AUSVEG, HAL, researchers and the Vegetable Industry Development Program. The IDOs have also assisted growers with contacts and enquiries.

Last year the IDOs applied for and received funding for two grower study tours - a Young Grower Tour to Western Australia and a tour with a group of growers investigating lettuce harvesters in the US and Italy. Reports on these tours are available at www.vgavic.org.au.

So what have they been doing? Nothing much really!

Executive Officer's corner



It was most rewarding to meet up with a group of Victorian vegetable growers who attended the 2012 AUSVEG National Convention in Hobart during May. The highlight for me was the National Awards for Excellence Gala Dinner where Frank Ruffo (Grower of the Year) and Tina Lamattina (Women in Horticulture) received the top awards for the year. It was most pleasing to record that the five major national awards presented contained 16 finalists from Victoria. Well done Victoria!!! I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who

nominated me as a finalist for the Industry Recognition Award.

There is a level of disappointment within the Victorian vegetable industry regarding a decision by the Victorian Department of Primary Industries not to continue funding research and development (R&D) for vegetables in Victoria. Unfortunately, growers with diseases that affect the production and harvesting of their vegetables will now have to rely entirely upon other states or commercial organisations to carry out R&D and provide solutions.

Relocation to a new Melbourne Market site at Epping is still frustrating vegetable growers who continue to trade in the growers' building at Footscray Road. After nine years of consultation plus a change of State Government there are still no costs declared for growers to plan their future business budgets in order to continue selling vegetables at Epping. Construction of buildings continues at the new site, with a reported blowout of almost three times the original development costs, and yet it is reported that the building provided for growers has not improved in its design for the cold chain over the past 50 years.

Vegetable growers are in no doubt that the Federal Government has no empathy for the horticultural industry in Australia. Fresh produce is an important industry to the health and employment of all Australians and yet there is no protection provided for the man working the land. Why is it necessary to support car manufacturing in Australia controlled by overseas operations with massive handouts of tax payers' contributions, when local fresh food businesses are struggling to compete in a supply and demand market?

Growing Leaders 2012 is the National Vegetable Industry Leadership Program. Maureen and I were delighted to be invited to the Industry Dinner to meet the participants at the second residential session

held in Hobart. Once again we were impressed by the presentations and informal discussions with the participants. There are numerous opportunities for the younger generation to participate in leadership and business development programs such as this and also grower tours both interstate and overseas. Some of the programs are funded through your National Vegetable Levy with no cost or a minimal cost to participants. There appears to be reluctance by Victorians to participate. I would encourage you to investigate forthcoming programs and make the time available for yourself or members of your staff to participate and develop not only additional skills but build networks with other young growers across Australia.

Our VGA Vic website 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 or www.vgavic.org.au.

Remember VGA Vic is YOUR voice of the Victorian vegetable industry and needs your support. Should you require more information about the services available to you, please contact one of our staff members.

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Keep Smiling,

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