

Growing Leaders Program 2013



Growing Leaders: Carolyn Thomas, Calum Wilson, Noel Jansz, Craig Arnott, Sean Christensen, Geoffrey Foster, Luke Spittles, Jarryd Janke, Sarah Simpson, Sarah Limpus, Deana Said, Kees Verstag and Suzaane Maire.

Last year saw four Victorian participants take part in the Growing Leaders program. The program is a vegetable levy funded program that has been running for several years and seen many graduates from all states and aspects of vegetable production participate. Many grower businesses have realised the value of the program and enrolled staff in an effort to enhance their business skills, as well as their understanding of the industry.

The program is designed to increase confidence in dealings with all aspects of life and business. It improves participant skills in negotiations, conflict resolution, and assists in creating invaluable networks. The enthusiasm of past participants and their glowing reports make it difficult to understand why every vegetable business is not taking advantage of this opportunity. It is hard work but well worth the effort invested.

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT



Hello everybody,

It's been a long 10-week period with extreme dryness and heat. It certainly has been a challenge for growers to maintain the expected quality for buyers and consumers. I think we have delivered produce throughout this period that fulfils everyone's needs and expectations- that is, the best looking and nutritious vegies at affordable prices to encourage the consumer to keep coming back for more. So, well done to all growers!

Only the primary producer knows that behind the scenes there is a lot of sweat, hard work, worrying about financial issues, scheduling work, priorities, planting, harvesting, packing and watering, and long hours (up extra early and finishing extra late) to make and keep each business (whether large or small) a viable and sustainable

one. Sadly we are all asking ourselves the question: "Can and what do we need to do to stay viable?" Only you can answer the questions about what you want to achieve in the future. These are some very hard questions to work through but make sure you involve professional help and family.

If you are like me, you grew up on a farm being taught by your father (and sometimes uncles), with lectures on growing and farming issues, but more importantly on political issues, both State and Federal. I was repeatedly told that the government decisions at the time would influence what happens in the future and could be detrimental to the state of country and saying to myself: "Yes Dad, whatever." Then it hits you years later: "Dad was a pretty smart and wise father." Sadly, like most of us, we tend to appreciate them after they have passed on because we take everything for granted whilst they are still around us.

Through decisions made in the past when Victoria was once the manufacturing state of Australia, we are now losing skills and trades along the way. It is important for the government's future planning that it includes land suitable for vegetable growing, to be set aside along with affordable water. It has to be in consultation with the vegetable industry and not what 'planning people' want it to be, otherwise in the future there won't be a vegetable industry and food will have to be imported on a much larger scale, to the detriment of the consumer.

Epping Market relocation problems

regarding the trading floor are still an ongoing issue. The Growers Advisory Committee is pursuing the best outcome for all growers- big and small.

It is a very difficult task when the building is 3,500 sqm smaller than what is currently being used at Footscray Road. A one size stand does not fit everyone! Again, government departments and Ministers must listen to the tenants and growers because we have to change our business structure to fit into the Epping Market, not them! We are the ones who are going to use the facility and pay the rent.

It gives me no pleasure to announce that Tony Imeson, my Chief Executive Officer for the past 12 years, is stepping down in May as the Executive Officer of VGA Vic. Tony, you will be sadly missed, foremost by me as Chairman. It has been an honour and privilege to work with you. Your professionalism and journalistic skills are second to none. You have made VGA Vic a stronger and more viable Association over these past 12 years. So I wish you and Maureen all the best for whatever you have decided for the future.

Sincerely,

David Wallace

President

NEW TECHNOLOGY MANAGER APPOINTED BY PMA AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

Produce Marketing Association Australia - New Zealand (PMA A-NZ) has appointed Richard Bennett as its new Technology Manager, commencing on 1 March.

Currently with Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL), Richard's role will cover all areas of food safety, traceability and technology, strengthening

PMA A-NZ's initiatives to build member value in these areas.

In addition, Richard will be working closely with the University of Sydney's Faculty of Agriculture and Environment and industry stakeholders on the establishment of the Fresh Produce Safety Centre for Australia and New Zealand.

For Executive Officer's corner

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HORTICULTURE INDUSTRY NETWORKS ON THE PENINSULA

The Horticulture Industry Network (HIN) Program, of which VGA Vic is a member, met recently on the Mornington Peninsula. The agenda for the workshop included a presentation from Richard Bennett of Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) on emergency management. Richard's presentation highlighted issues industry's need to be aware of and provided information on the potential response to emergencies arising out of either food safety issues or threats to food production including bioterrorism.

Greg King from the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) presented the latest information about the Pest Free Place of Production status of the Yarra Valley and its potential to create market access for berry growers both interstate and overseas.

Stuart Holland, also from DEPI, gave an update on Property Identification Codes (PICs) and Tony Fay, DEPI Senior Policy Analyst, spoke about the policy making process for horticulture.

The various industry representatives gave updates on their industries,



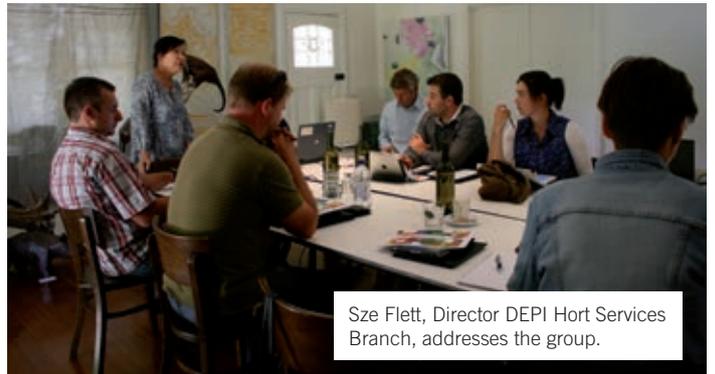
The Diggers Club Nursery has over 70,000 subscribers.

including crop evaluations and predictions. Most reported that there had been little impact from the recent heatwave. The uncharacteristic weather patterns had, however, affected the wine grape crop which was much smaller than usual.

The second day of the meeting involved visits to a winery in the region as well as The Diggers Club, which houses heritage fruits, vegetables and flowers, and then reproduces them for sale to the general public. The Diggers Club now has over 70,000 subscribers who regularly purchase plants and seeds for growing at home.



Richard Bennett, Helena Whitman and Jonathan Eccles – over 100 years' experience between them.



Sze Flett, Director DEPI Hort Services Branch, addresses the group.

SMARTER RESOURCES, SMARTER BUSINESS

The Victorian Government is committed to helping business reduce costs and environmental impact. Grants of up to \$15,000 are available to undertake an energy or materials efficiency assessment - the first step on the road to savings.

The Smarter Resources Smarter Business - Energy and Materials Program provides funding of up to \$15,000 for businesses to carry out an energy or materials efficiency assessment or to undertake additional scoping work to identify energy or materials cost saving opportunities. To qualify a business must have less than 200 employees.

An assessment is the first step in identifying where the greatest cost-saving opportunities are in your business and how to go about implementing them. An assessment will help you identify where the greatest cost saving opportunities are in your business and provide an action plan to help you get there.

Two types of assessment are offered:

- 1. Resource Assessment** (equivalent to a Level 2 Energy Audit or materials assessment). Provides an initial review and analysis of the energy or materials cost saving opportunities in your business.
- 2. Resource Assessment Pro** (formerly known as Planning for Implementation). If you've already completed an energy or materials assessment and require additional scoping work, Resource Assessment Pro will help inform your decision to invest in energy or materials efficiency. Activities under Resource Assessment Pro can include options investigation, business case development, feasibility studies or scoping work.

Application forms can be downloaded from the Sustainability Victoria website at: <http://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/services-and-advice>.

Applications for resource assessments can be submitted at any time until 4pm, Friday 2 May 2014. Applications will be assessed weekly.

GROWING LEADERS PROGRAM 2013



Geoff Foster (left) and Craig Arnott (right) discuss transport.

The Growing Leaders Program is not just about creating leaders for committees and boards—though this is one aspect—it is about creating leaders in business and industry.

Geoffrey Foster was enrolled in the course by his employer, Craig Arnott. Craig wanted to encourage Geoff to take on a management role in the business and felt that Geoff's management skills and confidence would be enhanced by the course. In a twist to this Craig decided that he too would do the course so that he was aware of what was involved.

Geoff comes from a farming background with his great grandfather a vegetable grower at Lang Lang. Until recently he worked with his father on their farm at Pearcedale. The family farm closed in 2010 so Geoff decided to take a break from vegetable growing and took up truck driving for 15 months. During this time he decided to sell the farm which he says, luckily for him, was bought by Arnott's. Craig offered him a job initially as a tractor driver and under Craig's guidance, the rest is history.

"My highlight of the course was probably the travel aspect as I hadn't really been anywhere prior to doing this course. I have gained so much confidence out of this experience and now feel that I can cope with running the farm while Craig is absent," Geoff said.

"This will take a lot of the burden off Craig and enable him to take extended leave from the farm. One notable thing resulting from both of us doing the course is that we communicate better and use each other as a sounding board. Previously we both would internalise whereas now we discuss and debate situations and I am not shy about putting my point across," he said.

"Another highlight for me was being able to assist my son in preparing a speech for school. I would never had had the confidence to do this in the past."

Craig has also gained a lot from the program and said: "I have been involved in Committees for many years, however, I now find that I approach issues in a different manner – I am able to think outside the square giving me a totally different perspective on the issue."

"It was hard work but as a business owner I am glad that I went through the course and even more pleased that I put Geoff through the course. I would recommend it to any vegetable business."



Geoff Foster and Craig Arnott checking the crop.



Deana Said (left) and Carolyn Thomas (right).

Deana Said and Carolyn Thomas were enrolled in Growing Leaders by their employer Fresh Select, who recognised that the course would benefit them and improve their skills in dealing with customers, suppliers and staff. Their experience has been similar to that of Craig and Geoffrey.

A big feature of the program has been the mentoring process, and despite initial invitations to mentors being unsuccessful, they have both found mentors that have been an invaluable source of information and support. Carolyn uses her external mentor as a sounding board for ideas and feedback for work related matters.

Carolyn openly admits that before she undertook the program she was very shy in approaching people. She now feels confident that she can deal with most people and situations. The program has opened many doors and built strong bonds and relationships with other participants. She will be using her network to enhance her business skills and knowledge.

Deana's enthusiasm for the program is obvious when she speaks

about her experience. "The program makes you challenge yourself," she said.

"It takes you out of your comfort zone and provides you with the tools to take on most things."

Deana said it was incredible to see the progress of participants over such a short period. Being out of university and not knowing a lot about the vegetable industry, she has learnt a lot from interaction with the other participants. "The variety of ages, experience and knowledge only served to bond everyone," she said. "And we all learnt from each other."

"Our business has seen so much value out of this program that we have enrolled another staff member in this year's course," Deana said. "I would encourage any business to do the same."



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WATER AVAILABILITY FOR VEGETABLE PRODUCTION

Concerned growers from the Clyde, Cranbourne and Devon Meadows areas held a meeting last month with Richard Anderson, Chair of the VFF Water Council.

The main discussion related to the provision of water to existing and future vegetable growing areas of South East Victoria.

It was discussed that the VFF Water Council had approached State Government and were advised that the strategy for an upgraded scheme in the South East of Melbourne was advancing but no operational costs were available.

Advice was provided that a scheme was being developed to take Koo Wee Rup and Lang Lang water but the water would be class C and not suitable for vegetable production.

The Bunyip Food Bowl is an excellent plan, however, most of the soils are not suitable in the area for intensive vegetable growing. It is therefore essential that growers determine the best soils in an area so that water can be provided to that selected area.

It was suggested that should growers invest in the Bunyip Food Bowl development then they would have control of the plan. Alternatively, should the State Government fund the Bunyip plan then Government would be keen to control the development.

There was also discussion relating to the increased capacity now

required from the Cranbourne area recycled water scheme. Attendees were reminded that the current Cranbourne area growers had committed for 15 years to receive and pay for the current supply of recycled water.

A small group of growers agreed to join with the Chair of the VFF Water Council and attend a meeting with State Government to further discuss the water issues.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Leafy Veg Demo Days 9 May 2014, Lindenow

The inaugural East Gippsland Demo days will be conducted on 9 May displaying a huge variety of leafy vegetables from 10 different seed companies. To follow the progress of the trial site simply login at the Facebook page. A Welcome Dinner will be held the night before the event. For more information and bookings please contact Andrew Bulmer on 0409 518 425 or Stuart Grigg on 0400 860 763.

PMA Fresh Connections go to New Zealand 24-26 June 2014, Auckland

All growers involved in marketing their fresh vegetables should head to the PMA Fresh Connections in Auckland, New Zealand from 24-26 June 2014.

PMA is the leading organisation for marketing fresh produce and after successful events in Australia, Fresh Connections will hold its annual event in New Zealand for the first time.

This will provide growers with the opportunity to meet with fresh produce buyers from around Australia and New Zealand plus worldwide representatives. For further information and to register, visit www.pmafreshconnections.com.au.

2014 Produce Innovation Seminar 19 June 2014, Cairns Queensland

To be held in the lead-up to the 2014 AUSVEG National Convention, the Produce Innovation Seminar will see international industry leaders present on innovative ways to enhance the value of Australian produce. Expressions of interest are now welcome, and with limited spaces for participants filling up, it is recommended that growers register now to avoid disappointment. Vegetable levy paying growers can apply to have their associated travel and accommodation costs covered. To express your interest in attending the seminar, contact AUSVEG on (03) 9882 0277 or e-mail info@ausveg.com.au.

AUSVEG 2014 National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence 19-21 June 2014, Cairns

For the opportunity to meet with fellow vegetable growers from around Australia we recommend that you consider attending the 2014 AUSVEG Convention to be held at the Cairns Convention Centre in Queensland from 19-21 June 2014.

A wide range of scientific, technology and production sessions involving both overseas and local presenters, together with a wide range of commercial industry displays, is planned.

For further information and to register, contact convention@ausveg.com.au or call (03) 9882 0277.

Then travel from Cairns to Auckland and enjoy!

2014 THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF FAMILY FARMING

Tasmanian colleague Jan Davis provided us with a great reminder and I quote from that article: "The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2014 to be the International Year of Family Farming. It is intended to stimulate policies that promote the sustainable development of agricultural systems based on farm families, communal units, indigenous groups, cooperatives and fishing families. Across Australia, 120,000 farmers manage 59 per cent of Australia's land. From that, they generate \$38 billion in export income and they produce 93 per cent of our daily domestic food supply. It is the best and healthiest food money can buy and we grow it, we produce it."

What does this mean to our Victorian vegetable growers, Victorian state and national government politicians? It would appear absolutely nothing to Victorian vegetable growers as they have received little or no support for enterprises that provide opportunities to involve intergenerational farming. The reduced funding to the Victorian Department of Primary Industries this year for research and services to the vegetable industry has been a further indicator of the lack of recognition by our State Government of the importance of succession planning.

According to statistics the Victorian vegetable industry produces annually over \$600 million (gross value) of vegetables. The best and healthiest vegetables money can buy are grown in Victoria. Victorian farmers endeavour to operate family farms successfully and utilise the many technologies that have become available over the past years, yet they need the guidance of experts to develop new skills to maintain viable businesses in this ever changing environment.

The uncompetitive nature and decline of Australia's manufacturing industries provides politicians and media with unlimited front page exposure. There is a similar situation developing in the vegetable industry when fresh imports will arrive and create the decline of the local vegetable grower. Where is the Government's offer to protect the Australian grower from fresh imports that can be grown and transported into Australia more cheaply than local production costs?



Australian grown vegetables are produced locally to meet the high Australian standards of food safety which should provide confidence in the best quality being available to the consumer. So, are we still the 'Lucky Country' or the 'Slowly Dying Country'?

In an aging vegetable industry population we look to the younger generation to stand up and take a firm grip of the reins in order that modern technology methods of growing vegetables will significantly reduce production costs without affecting quality. There are numerous training programs available, not only for production but also for leadership, management and technology in a vegetable growing business enterprise. Yet there appears to be a reluctance to participate and a decline in numbers enrolling in either tertiary organisations or 'on the farm' training.

It is time the vegetable industry moved forward and left behind the traits of old traditions and realised that 2014 is in a new era for all methods of production and marketing in Australia. We must take responsibility for the future of vegetables in Victoria by attracting, supporting and retaining young farmers and ensuring it is their 'industry of choice'.

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EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S CORNER



The Right to Farm

It is interesting to listen to the many operational complaints levelled at growers from residential dwellers as suburban housing developments and an increased population move steadily into new areas.

When is the vegetable grower provided with the opportunity to move to new land away from sprawling suburbs that has the provision of good soil and water in order to

successfully grow fresh vegetables? One prime example is the Bunyip Food Bowl project which has all the qualities of a sound development for growers to obtain land acreage in the Eastern area of Victoria, but the provision of water appears to be a grower's responsibility to provide funding for the project and not local Council or State Government.

Vegetable Industry Training

It is disappointing to see so few of our younger growers taking up the opportunity of programs such as Growing Leaders – a program that helps participants gain confidence in their dealings with others, especially those that they view as their superiors. It helps in developing supportive networks and relationships with other likeminded people in the industry. Speaking with the Victorian participants from 2013, they all agree that the experience was invaluable and not just about working on committees and becoming President.

Most of our young growers are so involved in setting themselves up on their own or their parent's farms and learning about the business of growing that they miss these valuable opportunities to expand their knowledge and build links with others in the industry.

Vegetable Growers' Golf Day

There was a decision following last year's event at Lang Lang that VGA Vic would not continue with a Growers' Golf Day each year at the Lang Lang Golf Club.

Consideration will be given to holding a bi-annual day at Lang Lang. The initial purpose was to provide an event that would give the

opportunity for growers to be together in a social setting.

Although we have experienced very successful days at Lang Lang where the event has attracted over 80 golfers, the majority in the past two years have been industry associates and Lang Lang Club members.

E.E. Muir & Sons hold a successful bi-annual growers' golf day in May at the Werribee Golf Club and this will take place this year on Friday 2 May 2014.

VGA Vic will have an industry presence at the Werribee Golf Day with the Executive Officer and Executive Manager attending.

Protecting your Property

Vegetable Growers Association (VGA Vic) has held a long and proud alliance with Wesfarmers Insurance (WFI) and has been working together to serve the Victorian vegetable industry. It is through this relationship that WFI offers VGA Vic members competitive and flexible quotes on their insurance. In return VGA Vic receives a commission through client referrals which benefits the organisation without impacting on a member's premium. When discussing insurance requirements with your WFI representative please mention that you support VGA Vic.

Keep Smiling,

Tony Imeson

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

Should you require more information about vegetable industry services available to you, please contact Executive Manager, Helena Whitman.

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