AUTUMN 2007
ISSUE 29

VICTORIAN VEGETABLE GROWER

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT:

LUIS GAZZOLA
President

Greetings to all VGA members, associates and industry supporters.

The VGA Executive Committee acknowledged at last month's meeting the dedicated contribution from Paul Gazzola as our representative to AUSVEG in the role of director and treasurer over the past seven years. Paul did not stand for re-election and as your President I was nominated as the replacement director of the AUSVEG Board representing Victorian Vegetable Growers.

After attending the AGM and subsequent directors meetings, it became obvious that AUSVEG has many issues on the table that require urgent attention. The first positive decision taken is the formation of a task force comprising of State Organisation Executive Officers to recommend to the board operational changes to industry structure and highlight the key roles that AUSVEG as a National Vegetable and Potato Organisation should be undertaking for the future of the industry.

VFF and AUSVEG are working very hard to convince Federal Government that security sensitive fertiliser and chemical proposed legislation is not providing growers with a viable crop growing business. Gowers are very experienced and responsible certificated handlers of fertilisers and chemicals of the farm. We do not need government agencies and bureaucrats telling growers how to handle chemicals on the farm. In my opinion what is required is industry registration for all users of fertilisers and chemicals that provides a licence for registered growers to purchase, store and use on the farm. We are industry professionals and experienced handlers of fertilisers and chemicals do not allow this security issue to interfere and ruin our livelihood as vegetable growers.

Market users are becoming more frustrated with the State Governments attitude regarding relocation of the market. The Strategic Alliance Group of which the VGA provide strong representation through David Wallace and I have broken the ice in recent meetings with the new State Minister for Agriculture, Joe Helper, in stating that market users do not wish to be relocated and the Footscray Market is the central trading market for Victoria. Unfortunately Senior State Ministers are still directing the DPI Project Team to continue with the relocation planning. As a result of a recent meeting the Strategic Alliance Group have adopted a fresh approach to the relocation issue and will be making a presentation later this month to the State Government.

The mandatory horticultural code of conduct will take effect from the 14 May 2007. There are still legal opinions being sought by national growers and wholesaler organisations in order to make the terms of trade more "user friendly" to all parties. Grower information seminars are being held at various locations in Victoria and I would recommend that all growers make the effort to attend.

The self-assessment questionnaire for the Enviroveg programme is now being distributed to growers. The VGA recommend that you complete the details and return to Helena Whitman at AUSVEG. Remember this is your Enviroveg programme that was developed in Victoria for vegetable growers and your continued support is encouraged.

The weather in the past months has put pressure on growing quality vegetables and now we are faced with additional stress from hot winds and lack of rain that has resulted in dams being at the lowest ever level for many years. Re-cycled water has assisted those on the scheme, however the quality of water provided has caused some areas additional stress with the burning of salad crops. Whereas re-cycled water is an alternative when river, bore and dam water is unavailable, unfortunately the high salt content experienced in the Western areas is causing serious damage to all crops. Growers must unite and put a plan in to action to ensure that Government and water authorities urgently desalinate re-cycled water and provide a stable "A Class" standard that is reliable and piped to the grower at a viable cost.

May I extend best wishes for a happy Easter period and may the Easter Bunny provide larger eggs containing water we so desperately need for our vegetable crops to survive.

Luis Gazzola
President.

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE VICTORIAN VEGETABLE INDUSTRY? LOG ON TO WWW.VGAVIC.ORG.AU

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DISCLAIMER
The purpose of the Victorian Vegetable Grower and the Vegelink newsletter is to communicate to the Victorian vegetable industry a sample of the activities that are being carried out in the State in relation to the VGA and the national vegetable levy. The information provided should not be interpreted as an advice or recommendation of any kind. The VGA and its officers disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from your relying on any information in this publication.

Executive Officer's Corner POST

Tony Imeson, Executive Officer

The 2007 National Vegetable Expo will be held again at Werribee and the organising committee has allocated all the seed trial plots to seed companies. The Expo Committee has received confirmation that a water allocation will ensure that all seed trials will be completed successfully. Exhibitors display sites are available for industry suppliers and registration brochures can be obtained by contacting the VGA Office.
The Vegetable Expo will be held Thursday 3 and Friday 4 May 2007 at the Gordon Institute of TAFE Production Horticultural Campus, Dairy Road off Sneydes Road Werribee and all growers are encouraged to drop in and observe the latest vegetable seed trials and trade exhibits from our industry suppliers.

A request from growers regarding a review of the National Vegetable Levy has not fallen on deaf ears. A meeting was held at the Melbourne Markets Conference centre last month attended by AUSVEG CEO John Roach who listened to the varied discussions and questions raised by vegetable growers in attendance from Western and South Eastern areas. Your VGA Executive have followed through requesting further information of how effective is the levy after 10 years. From indications received, there is between 75% to 80% of collected levy funds has been allocated for vegetable R & D project work including the industrial development network, for both on and off the farm projects. Other projects would include communication and administration. The VGA Executive remain confident that there will be a review system circulated to all vegetable levy payers by AUSVEG.
In a report released from Horticulture Australia there is listed nine final reports involving projects within the vegetable industry and further details can be obtained by contacting our IDO Patrick Ulloa.

Production horticultural training is still a VGA project with student training facilities at the Gordon Institute Production Horticultural Campus in Dairy Road off Sneydes Road Werribee. In association with the VGA, the Gordon Institute of TAFE are the facilitators of student training, should you have an apprentice or trainee requiring vegetable growing education and training make contact with the Gordon Institute and register for the training course.
Contact Telephone : 03 9741 4508
Fax: 9741 7489
or David Milburn
Mobile : 0438 413 505.

This year's vegetable industry conference will be held at the Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre from 29 May to 1 June 2007. This will take the form of an exhibitors display area and an interesting industry programme for all vegetable growers. Registration details will be available later this month.
The Federal Minister for Agriculture Hon. Peter McGauran successfully launched the theme of the conference "Vegetables Claim Centre of the Plate" at the Victoria Markets in Melbourne in February including a vegetable meal preparation in front of a gathering of consumers, industry representatives and the media.

A forward vegetable industry event for September 2007 is the Vegetable Growers Gala Night to be held at the Crown Palladium Room on Saturday 8 September 2007. This gala event is held every second year for growers, their families, friends and industry colleagues. This is a special event to record in your diary.

Keep smiling
Tony Imeson.
VGA Executive Officer

VGA Forklift Storage Facility

There are two forklift storage bays available for rental in the VGA Melbourne Markets Storage Area in the North Eastern section of the Market.

The quarterly rental is **$330.00 inc GST** per forklift bay,

Please contact Tony Imeson at the VGA office (03) 9687 4707 or Mobile No: 0414 458 561.

Victorian
Vege•LINK
NEWSLETTER
YOUR LEVY AT WORK
Issue 29 • AUTUMN 2007

Test Your Knowledge of Farm Labour Management

Circle the correct answers (T = true; F = false)

1. Research shows that the best farm employee can be four to eight times better than the worst	T	F
2. How individuals are selected and managed makes no difference on their performance	T	F
3. Courteous and consistent treatment, job security, fair pay, and safe working conditions are important to employees	T	F
4. Technology may change the nature and number of jobs, but it is unlikely to diminish the importance of labour	T	F
5. A good attitude and a lack of bad habits are the most important ingredients in selecting farm personnel	T	F
6. A job title does not need to accurately reflect the duties of the job	T	F
7. Farm workers generally hate their jobs	T	F
8. Superior performance in one job does not always translate into equivalent success after promotion to a new position	T	F
9. Despite the practical advantages of paying everyone identical rates, more skilled workers may resent being paid the same as others	T	F
10. Generally, workers want to know how well they are performing	T	F

To check your answers, go to page 5

Healthy Soils for Sustainable Vegetable Farms

By now all Victorian vegetable farms should have received their free copy of the new healthy soils guide. This great guide includes information on soil requirement for vegetable crops, how to evaluate soil quality, threshold values for key soil properties, how to improve soil quality, damage prevention strategies, how to monitor changes, and how to bring all this together following a whole farm planning approach.

The guide comes with a number of images and diagrams which provide clarity to the subject of effective soil management.

If your business has not received your free copy, please contact the industry development officer – Patrick Ulloa 0429 990 553 or ido@vgavic.org.au, to organise immediate delivery.

Others can purchase the guide ($15.00) by downloading and completing an order form (www.vgavic.org.au)

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Drought continues to affect vegetable growers

Sandy (left) and Vince are very concerned about the lack of irrigation water

Sandy Freni and Vince Doria have been growing vegetables under the Freni & Doria partnership for more than twenty years. During that time they have seen the normal ups and downs of business and are well acquainted with the challenges of vegetable growing. However, this last drought is putting a level of pressure on their business they have not experienced before. This level of pressure is even affecting the next generation in the family who wonders if it is really worth it to grow vegetables under this type of conditions.

One of the aspects that annoys Vince is that he and Sandy were some of the first growers to show interest in the recycled water scheme, but due to lack of interest by other farmers in the area it was uneconomical to extend the water pipe to their farm. Due to the drought, some of the farmers are more interested in recycled water, but it would now take years to extend the pipe to their farms. The demand for recycled water has significantly increased in the area. Even those growers that have are currently receiving this water are concerned they may not receive full allocation this year.

Despite the lack of water and its impact on production, prices for vegetables have not gone up. Freni & Doria is currently working at 70% of its capacity and Sandy and Vince review the water situation on a daily basis. Unless there is significant rain soon, production will be severely affected. The few rain events this summer have not generated any run-off for storage. At the moment, Sandy and Vince can only wait and see if there will be enough water to maintain their current level of production.

Werribee grower tries drip irrigation

Anthony Mason, a grower from Werribee, had already tested drip irrigation on his farm. This year, however, he is extending the production area under drip irrigation. There is no much water available and he did not have any choice but to use what water is available in the most efficient way possible.

According to a specialist, the cost of drip irrigation is around 30c per carton of lettuce. That cost is supposed to be compensated partly by the reduced cost of water and fertilisers. Regardless of the savings on water and fertilisers, Anthony felt there was no other option for him if he wanted to continue to grow enough produce to maintain a reasonable scale of production. An unexpected benefit has been the reduced weed population and also he has noticed less disease incidence since leaves are kept dry most of the time.

Despite the benefits, Anthony explained that changing to drip irrigation is not easy. It requires close monitoring and modified crop management. It is a real learning curve. Much more work is needed to set up the system and to remove the used tapes at the end of the crop. But, as long as the water problems continue, Anthony will keep using drip irrigation. Even if things improve a little, he will still consider using drip irrigation due to its impact on crop quality.

Anthony Mason (right) has found that using drip irrigation requires careful management

New research and training will help Lettuce growers maximise profitability.

Over the next 6 months Mike Titley, Gordon Rogers, Brad Giggins and Jenny Jobling from Applied Horticultural Research will conduct training across the main lettuce growing regions in Australia. The training will focus on how growers can manage their inputs to maximise both yield and quality of head lettuce for processing or fresh market. The sessions will be a blend of research findings from a project partly funded by the national vegetable levy with some supporting science.

The research project heightened the understanding of the effect that environmental conditions and inputs can have on the yield and quality of lettuce. The optimum conditions for growing high quality lettuce is a maximum day temperature of 21 -24oC with night temperatures between 7 and 12oC as well as adequate nutrition, water and sunlight hours.

Lettuce growing regions across Australia often experience conditions outside these optimum conditions. The recent research has led to the development of several strategies which growers can use to minimise the impact of sub optimal growing conditions.

These strategies will be covered in the training under the following headings:
Postharvest handling, Variety selection, Crop Scheduling, Crop nutrition, Irrigation Management, Plant Density.

Proposed Dates for Lettuce Training Days

District	Day	Date	Proposed venue
• Cowra, NSW	Thursday	24th May	Ex Serviceman's Club
• Gippsland, Vic	Wednesday	20th June	Bairnsdale Motor Inn
• Melbourne, Vic	Thursday	21st June	Knoxfield Research Institute
• Perth, WA	Wednesday	4th July	Kingsway Soccer Club Wanneroo
• Virginia, SA	Friday	6th July	Virginia Horticulture Centre
• Stanthorpe, Qld	Wednesday	29th August	Stanthorpe Research Station
• Sydney, NSW	Friday	31st August	TBA
• Devonport, Tas	Wednesday	5th September	Forthside Research Station

To register for the training days, please contact AHR on 02 9527 0826, Mike Titley on 0417 697 628, Jenny Jobling on 02 9351 3498 or Gordon Rogers on 0418 51 7777.

Opportunity Awaiting Young Rural Leaders

The Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is seeking motivated young business managers for the inaugural Enhancing Entrepreneurial Skills Course. The four day residential training course will be held in Melbourne in May 2007.

For further information on eligibility and allowances offered, log on to www.yarn.gov.au

Responses to Farm Labour Management Quiz (from page 3)

(1-T) ; (2-F) ; (3-T) ; (4-T) ; (5-F) ; (6-F) ; (7-F) ; (8-T) ; (9-T) ; (10-T)

The questions and responses for this farm labour management quiz were taken from the book "Labor Management in Agriculture" by Gregorio Billikopf. His book is available to download free of charge on his website www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/

Gregorio Billikopf is an international expert with many years of experience in the field of labour management. He has assisted agricultural managers in the USA, South America, Russia, and Africa. He will visit Australia in July 2007.
For more information on seminars to be held, log on to www.agrico.com.au/events.htm

Project will determine cost effectiveness of compost use

It is well known that compost can help improve the chemical, physical and biological aspects of soil. Quality compost can be used to i) improve and maintain soil quality; ii) reduce use of water, fertiliser and pesticides; iii) increase productivity, and iv) reduce nutrient run-off and soil erosion.

According to information provided by DPI Vic, Australian soils generally have low natural fertility, low organic matter levels and are fragile to intensive agricultural practices. Research has shown that compost can improve organic matter levels and other aspects of soil quality including cation exchange capacity, moisture holding capacity, bulk density, pH and reduced erosion. Marketable yields for a wide range of crops have been improved, especially after repeat application of good quality compost.

Unfortunately, in the past, projects have not determined the cost effectiveness of using compost to improve soil fertility and structure. Trials have not always taken into consideration the working system followed by growers. It has been a case of "put the compost in the soil and see what happens." Now, Kevin Wilkinson, and Fiona Barker-Read – DPI Vic scientists are working on a project funded by Sustainability Victoria to determine how cost effective is to use compost under normal growing conditions.

A trial has been set up in Somerville to asses the impact on quality uniformity and cost of production by comparing areas using compost versus areas using green manure, and chicken manure. Kevin and Fiona will be looking at changes in the soil as well as impacts on the soil chemical, physical, and biological processes.

As part of this work, quick soil testing and sap analysis will be conducted to decide if further fertilisation is required. This project is taking a whole system approach which is likely to produce important information to vegetable growers.

For further information contact Kevin Wilkinson Email: kevin.wilkinson@dpi.vic.gov.au

A series of fact sheets titled 'Compost for Vegetable Growers' can be downloaded from the VGA's website (www.vgavic.org.au) in the 'Downloads' section

Parsley root rot research set to continue

Researchers are testing a biocontrol that may reduce the impact of parsley root rot

Scientists from the Queensland Department of Primary Industries & Fisheries and Department of Primary Industries Victoria are collaborating on an extension to a levy funded project to further investigate the causes and establish controls for parsley root rot.

Parsley growers in both Queensland and Victoria report crop losses of up to 100%. In Victoria root rot is most prevalent during winter and associated with water mould fungi, such as Pythium and Phytophthora, whilst in Queensland the disease is most common in the wet season, but the cause is yet to be identified.

This new project will trial a biological control agent found naturally in parsley crops, it will conduct trials to identify varieties with resistance to root rot and it will further refine fungicide controls in both Queensland and Victoria.

A group of parsley growers met with Dr Liz Minchinton, project leader, and Des Auer, project scientist (DPIVic), to review this research project which was approved by the vegetable industry. Heidi Martin of GrowCom, the project collaborator, recently met with Queensland growers to organise field trials in that state.

For further information contact Liz Minchinton (03) 9210 9222 or Heidi Martin (07) 3896 9590.

Australian Vegetables Reclaim the Centre Plate

Dimitros Trandos – new Ausveg board member (centre), tries some of the vegetables prepared by celebrity chef Georgina Damm and the minister for Agriculture – Hon Peter McGauran MP.

Minister for Agriculture – Hon Peter McGauran MP, demonstrates that vegetables make you strong

It is not every day you see a minister and a celebrity chef working together to promote vegetables. That is exactly what happened in February 2007 at the Queen Victoria Market. The Federal Agriculture Minister, Hon Peter McGauran MP, and celebrity chef, Georgina Damm (Damm Fine Foods), joined forces with Ausveg to launch the new campaign to 'Reclaim the Centre Plate.'

According to AUSVEG Chairman, Michael Badcock, vegetables are sick of being a side dish, so Australian vegetable growers have thrown down the gauntlet by challenging the meat industry to share the plate.

Statistics show that most people do not eat enough vegetables. In 2004-5, more than 80% of Australians over 12 years ate less than the recommended amount of vegetables a day, and in the last 15 years the number of overweight and obese males and females continued to increase across all age groups.

Considering those statistics, it was a real treat to see the Agriculture Minister and Georgina to select Australian grown fresh vegetables to prepare a tasty meal. The Agriculture Minister gave a top performance promoting the benefits of vegetables. We would certainly like to see more of that.

Tony Imeson (left) and Lou Gazzola represented the Vegetable Growers Association (VGA) during the launch of this new vegetable promotion campaign

Easy access to training

Jude Nettleingham (left) and Helena Whitman are working together to improve access to training for vegetable growers

One of the reasons growers do not undertake more training is the difficulty in finding the courses that exactly meet their needs. It takes a long time to find the right course available, in particular if one is not aware of the training system.

Helena Whitman (Ausveg) and Jude Nettleingham (Motomoda) are working together to develop an easy-to-access source of information about training courses relevant to growers. The project is funded by FarmBis Victoria. It is expected that the project will encourage more growers to undertake training or skills recognition (RPL).

The project will identify those training programs and supporting learning materials that cover relevant units of competency and skill sets. Especial attention will be given to skill sets included in the RTE03 Rural Production Training Package. The final output of the project will be a web based database that will be available to growers so they can easily search the courses they need.

Part of the project will include a survey to determine the specific needs of growers regarding training. The Industry Development Officer (IDO) will send this survey on behalf of the project team. Please make an effort to respond to the survey as soon as you receive it on the mail.

For further information contact Helena Whitman (03-5429 5220; Email: helena.whitman@ausveg.com.au) or Jude Nettleingham (02-6238 1587; Email: motomoda1@optusnet.com.au)

THOUGHTS ON WORK

When you work, work hard.
When you play, play hard.
The perfect career is when you can find a way to make hard work seem like play
Just don't make play hard work
I don't know anyone who has got to the top without hard work.
That is the recipe.

Full EC assistance for South-West Victoria

The Government has extended full Exceptional Circumstances (EC) drought assistance to farmers in South-West Victoria until 31 March 2009.
For more information contact the Drought Assistance Hotline on 13 23 16 or log on to www.daff.gov.au/droughtassist

Growers meet to discuss R&D levy review

For some time, a number of Victorian growers had been trying to organise a meeting to discuss a review of the R&D levy. When the levy was established several years ago, there was an understanding that after five years, the national vegetable levy would be reviewed to determine its effectiveness and value. That agreement was not in writing, and that was one of the reasons no initiative had been taken to honour that commitment.

The Vegetable Growers Association of Vic (VGA) had received a petition from a number of growers to initiate a review process of the national vegetable levy. After discussing this request with the national industry body (Ausveg), it was decided to have a meeting with local growers to determine how to move forward with the review.

John Roach – Ausveg's executive officer – addressed the meeting and gave a summary of the levy's history. It was confirmed that there was no written commitment for a review, but at the same time, it was clear that there had been a verbal agreement to conduct a review.

After some animated discussion, it was decided that a task force organised by Ausveg would continue to work on a process to carry out the review requested by growers. There were two concerns that were highlighted by growers during the discussion. The first related to the proportion of R&D funds used for projects not directly related to on-farm research. The second issue related to the perceived value of the R&D program. Unfortunately, a common definition of value for money has not been established, and while some people felt the R&D program represents value for the industry, others argued the program did not represent any value at all. Hopefully, the levy review will include the identification of a method to measure the value of individual R&D projects so a more objective assessment can be carried out.

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