



vegetables victoria



The Journal of the Vegetable Growers' Association of Victoria (Inc.)

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▲ Helena Whitman is congratulated by David Wallace



▲ Helena Whitman with Rod Hall

VGA Vic moving forward

We are pleased to announce the appointment of Helena Whitman to the part-time position of Executive Manager of VGA Vic, effective from 1 March 2012.

Helena will assume responsibility for the IDO team, all the vegetable industry issues and representing VGA Vic at industry meetings.

Helena has a great depth of experience with industry association management and food safety knowledge through positions in WA, SA and VIC.

As IDO West, Helena has represented VGA Victoria on the State Governments HIN program as well as the VIDP/CIO program funded by Horticulture Australia. These programs continue to provide Victorian vegetable growers with high value information relevant to their businesses through informative communications and practical workshops.

In continuing the development of VGA Vic services to vegetable growers, Rod Hall will take over the responsibilities of IDO West, and with John Runting covering IDO East, will provide a very experienced and knowledgeable IDO team for Victoria.

President David Wallace said the changes were a positive development for the Vegetable Growers' Association and will assist in the implementation of the VGA Vic Strategic Plan, which is to be reviewed this year.

Long-serving Executive Officer Tony Imeson will continue to be responsible for administration, the duties of Company Secretary and Public Officer, the Executive Committee and financial affairs, and will provide valuable assistance to Helena when required on industry matters.



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Horticulture Australia



Horticulture Industry Network

President's report



Hi everyone,

What a great start to the 2012 year. Fantastic weather - just the right mix of heat, rain and sun to grow the best veggies in the world.

On the growing side of things it has been the best start in years. You come into the office, however, sit down at your desk, change hats to become the financial officer of your business and see the size of bills mounting up. You start to shake your head and worry that there isn't going to be much left for you at the end of this financial year. Is it worth all the hard work and worry for so little? We're always being optimistic and in order to survive two, three and four generations of vegetable growing it's the only way to look ahead.

Sometimes as growers we're our own worst enemies. We're so good at what we do; so efficient in the field, always having

the latest machines to make things easy and productive. The cost of over-production, however, is now really kicking us in the guts financially. Will we survive this time or it is just going to get harder, and will we lose the incentive and enthusiasm to continue? These are the tough questions we're all facing. The answers are there! It's just a matter of time, but when is the right time to make any decision? Only you as the grower know when that time is right. These decisions will certainly change our lives as family businesses.

My job as President of the Vegetable Growers' Association has so far involved hearing from other growers about what is affecting their vegetable production. There are on-farm issues like labour problems via agencies, visa permits for overseas workers, OH&S, tractor and machinery safety on slow-moving tractors, mobile phones in the workplace and biosecurity, as well as other issues like the Melbourne Market relocation to Epping, the supermarket price war, DPI concern on research projects regarding our veggie levy - just to name a few!

These, and more, are things that the VGA, through me as President, is tackling each week with the State Government and other authorities. We're certainly putting the growers' concerns across loud and clear and seeking to solve each problem as it comes up.

Relocation of the market to the Epping site is 'big' and one of the longest running road shows that now stretches over eight years. It would clean up all the Hollywood Oscars! A famous actress once quoted the series Days of Our Lives: "TRUST ME". I'll leave you to ponder on the meaning of that quote.

The supermarket price war that started in mid-February is certainly a major threat to our industry. Sure, nothing is new about periods of over-production and cheap wholesale prices, but the thing that has changed is our operating costs. No grower, big or small, can survive if these cheap prices continue. We will also lose large to small independent retailers through low wholesale prices.

We have to point out to our buyers what we

need just to recover our cost of production let alone make a return on our investments.

It's important that the vegetable grower survives. Without growers there will be no healthy, fresh, nutritious veggies for consumers. No agents and no retailers, and supermarkets will survive only on imported food. We all need to exist, but in a sustainable way. So let's keep cool heads and find out what the consumer needs in order that we survive. This is a great industry - let's not forget that. But what makes it even better are the people in it. YOU!

Fellow growers, just stop for a moment and give yourselves and your staff a pat on the back for the quality and continuity of fresh veggies this year. The consumers are certainly the big winners because of what's on offer in retail outlets at the moment.

On a lighter note, the Vic Fresh Gala Night on 18 February held at the Crown Palladium Room was a great night. Well done to the MMA and its Social Committee for organising the venue, meal, prizes and entertainment, and congratulations to the two winners on the night, MECCA Brothers and Emerald Fresh. It was a lovely time to just relax and enjoy with your peers and families within our wonderful industry.

I've got to mention and thank the people behind the scenes: our Executive Officer, Tony Imeson, our IDOs Helena Whitman, Rod Hall, and our new IDO for the east, John Runting. They all do a fantastic job and I would urge all growers to utilise their services.

Thanks from me to all the industry people who support me as President and the VGA Committee in its effort to make this industry the smartest, healthiest and most viable sector in primary production.

As the old Chinese proverb says: 'You ring we sing'.

Eat fresh and enjoy life!

David Wallace

President

For Executive Officer's corner

See page 8 ▶

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Horticulture Industry Network meeting in Mildura

The December Horticulture Industry Network (HIN) meeting held in Mildura featured an 'awards night dinner where VGA Vic was awarded a prize for the most visited website of the industries participating in the HIN network. Growers who have never taken the opportunity to visit the site are encouraged to do so, as there is a tremendous amount of information available.

Following the HIN meeting in Mildura, Helena Whitman (Vegetable Industry IDO) and Rod Hall (Membership Coordinator) took the opportunity to visit growers in the Mildura area. Since the floods and with the abundant water in the area, many growers have gone all out and planted out large blocks of pumpkin and melons, however, this has caused some over-supply and depressed prices in the market.

The major vegetable crops in Mildura are still eggplant, pumpkin and capsicum, but there are growers diversifying or experimenting with other crops. One such grower, Robert, produces capsicum and eggplant as his main crop, however, he feels that in order to gain some market advantage he has to do something different. Robert is also growing capsicum under netting.

Working closely with Brenton Frahm (Landmark), Robert experimented with netting colour, density and configuration. As information about growing capsicum under shade cloth was limited, the design and structure is based on that used in the fruit industry. He has also converted his old glass houses to shade cloth and hopes eventually

to transform these to a larger structure.

Another grower doing something different is Joe Camera. Joe and his father Joseph are the only growers of baby broccoli in the Mildura region. The northern location allows them to have produce in the market well before it is available from southern areas, though they are still experimenting with suitable varieties.

As the only growers of broccoli in the area they have had to learn things the hard way - through trial and error. The Cameras have now built a good business around supplying product all year round by growing different varieties throughout the year. All product is hand-picked and hand-packed on the family farm under strict QA conditions. The small business employs up to 20 people during the peak of the season.

As many growers live and pack produce on the Mildura side of the river but farm their produce on the NSW side, the fruit fly outbreaks in the Riverland have caused an additional hurdle in that they have to disinfect produce to bring it into Mildura to be packed.

Grower profile



Wayne Van Soest manages the Wemen operations of Coolibah Herbs. He has been involved in the vegetable industry all his life, being a fourth generation farmer with a market gardening background. His grandfather was one of the first vegetable growers to establish himself in Devon Meadows.

From the ages of 12 to 15, Wayne and his brother spent their school holidays working for

Peter Cochrane, weeding and thinning vegetables. Upon leaving school Wayne worked for his uncles and later for Taero Schreurs, where he learnt about growing bunching vegetables and basic tractor work. From there he spent three years at Gazzola Farms where he furthered his experience and training and learnt many of the 'tricks of the trade'.

When initially deciding to take up the option of managing the vegetable growing operation at Wemen, it was to be on a trial basis for eight months. Wayne took on the challenge and now 10 years later he is the Operations Manager for the whole Wemen operation, which includes fancy salad mix, grapes and avocados.

The Wemen operation has enabled Wayne to put all his previous experience and confidence into trialling other initiatives.

"I learnt a lot at Gazzola Farms and it has all helped me in developing this property into what it is," Wayne said.

Now, 10 years on, he is raising his family in the area and has bought his own small farming property which he works in his spare time.

Carbon and Nitrogen: how they can be managed to increase profits and sustainability on farm

A recent field day held at Harry Velisha's farm in Werribee saw a number of growers attend a very successful demonstration of the outcomes of a project led by Dr Ian Porter to trial the use of inhibitors on lettuce and broccoli crops as a means of reducing climate change gasses, while still increasing profit.

Various fertilisers and inhibitors were trialled and growers were shown graphic and physical evidence of the effectiveness of the inhibitors. They were also shown how nitrogen emissions were collected and measured from fertilisers and manures and the consequences for their management and use.

Results of the trials have shown that small amounts of inhibitors can be added to fertiliser and organic products and consequently reduce input costs and greenhouse gases by over 50 per cent. The products have also shown greater nutrient use efficiency, giving greater yields and increased profits of up to \$3000/ha.



Stabilised fertilisers are likely to revolutionise crop practices around the world over the next decade, and these trials provide an opportunity for the national vegetable industry to gain an advantage through use of this new technology.

Funding for this phase of the project finishes in May, however, Dr Porter said that there is an opportunity to expand the project in the future to identify the best inhibitors for different crops and when they need to be applied for maximum benefit. This will, however, depend on the availability of funding partners.

The project is a joint initiative of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), the Department of Primary Industries in Victoria and Incitec Pivot - a major funding contributor without whom the project would not have been possible.

EnviroVeg

Vegetable growers caring for the environment

The EnviroVeg Program, which first began in Victoria in 2000 and is now a national program managed by AUSVEG, is still one of the most informative environmental programs that vegetable growers can use to make sure that their practices have the least impact on the environment.

Working through the Program's Manual, growers can easily identify which farming practices affect the environment. The

Program provides growers with the option of 'do-it-yourself' information which they can then measure through self-assessment reporting to AUSVEG. Growers can also use it as a tool to go further and gain accreditation through a third party auditable program such as Freshcare Environmental or ISO14001.

EnviroVeg membership has proven invaluable to some growers when facing concerns from developers or local councils about the impact they will have on neighbours. Growers have been able to demonstrate that, through their EnviroVeg Environmental Action Plans, they have adopted environmental practices and are aware of their responsibilities. Other growers proudly display EnviroVeg gate signage and get positive comments back from the public.

Membership is free and available to all vegetable growers. Why not sign up and if nothing else get the EnviroVeg Manual which will guide you through practices that are not only environmentally sound but also may save you money in the long run?

For information about EnviroVeg, get in touch with the AUSVEG Environment Coordinator on (03) 9822 0388 or by email at info@ausveg.com.au.

National Vegetable Expo - Expectations 2013

It's the first week of May and the calendar this year seems empty somehow. This time last year you would have been planning to fit in a visit to the Expo site at Werribee on either the Thursday or Friday.

At the Expo what were you planning to do? What were your expectations? Did you hope to have a social day out and catch-up with some of your neighbours, customers, suppliers, old colleagues, or just get off the farm for a day? Most importantly what did you actually do and what still stays with you as a result of what you saw, or who you met there? Do you still have a 'show bag' of pamphlets and seed company information jammed down beside the filing cabinet?

In the first week of May 2013 it will be Expo again. The seed companies really excel at this venue and showcase their wares - do you have a particular timeslot that you need a better variety for, or one that better meets your customers' requirements? As well as coaxing the seed companies to give you samples and conduct trials on your farm in the interim, why not really plan your seed trials visit next May to ensure you see all the contenders that may meet your requirements. The Expo is your next chance to see a full set of late summer/early winter varieties in a truly comparative setting.

Over the years there have been demonstrations of various items of equipment - particularly transplanters, and usually state-of-the-art models that display the latest in controlling the placement of seedlings - often linked with automatic tray handling features. Such demonstrations serve to not only highlight the merits of the 'new' but put a spotlight on the 'old' - are there advantages in upgrading?



While discussing machinery demonstrations, there many other items on display. Spray units, cultivating equipment, weeders, drip irrigation laying/lifting, harvest aids etc - what would you appreciate viewing?

Along with all the feedback and suggestions at this early stage, those about items of interest to you are the ones most likely to be addressed in the planning phase and allocated space. Send your suggestions through to the VGA via email or talk to an Executive Committee member.

The hardworking staff and committee of the Expo deserve your support and input at this early stage to make Expo 2013 the best display of innovation in horticulture. This will ensure the most relevant exhibitors attend and that the vegetable industry continues to meet the demands of the retail sector and consumers.



Register for the AUSVEG Convention...

The highly-anticipated 2012 AUSVEG National Convention, Trade Show and Awards for Excellence is now two months away, with delegates registering in high numbers.

Victorian growers are encouraged to register early to ensure they benefit from the early bird discounts on Convention passes.

If you are interested in attending the Convention you can get a copy the delegate information and registration packs at www.ausveg.com.au/convention, or by phoning (03) 9822 0388 and requesting a copy.

The 2012 Convention promises to be AUSVEG's most successful to-date. With the number of delegates continuing to grow, the event has become the premier event on the Australian horticulture calendar.

In the latest developments, Deputy Leader of the Australian Greens, Senator Christine Milne will be attending this year's Convention. Senator Milne will be addressing the Women in Horticulture event on the afternoon of Saturday 12 May. As an advocate of the Australian vegetable industry, Senator Milne's participation is poised to be one of the highlights of the Convention.

VGA Vic is encouraged that industry continues to show strong support for the Convention. Approximately 70 per cent of the exhibition booths for the Trade Show have been sold to-date. It is exciting for Victorian growers to have access to a truly national event to complement Victorian events like the Werribee Expo, where our members can see what growers in other states are doing.

In an exciting line-up of exhibitors, Convention attendees will be treated to a large farm equipment display, as well as a diverse range of industry booths featuring all aspects of the supply chain. The Trade Show will also showcase the latest technology in the industry, offering growers and industry participants opportunities to explore new farming methods and talk to representatives from leading industry suppliers.

VGA Vic looks forward to seeing a strong contingent of Victorian growers at the upcoming AUSVEG Convention at Wrest Point Hotel Casino from 10-12 May.

For more information on the event, visit the AUSVEG website www.ausveg.com.au/convention.



Manual handling solutions workshops Werribee and Cranbourne

Vegetable growers from the Werribee and Cranbourne areas attended workshops in February for a presentation of the final ten practical solutions that had been identified during the past 12 months under a project by the Victorian Farm Safety Centre at Ballarat University.

Project Manager Andrew Sullivan had formed a reference group which included representatives from VGA Vic and visited several vegetable farms with VGA Vic IDOs.

The presentation outlined the recorded injuries occurring from simple tasks on the farm, which can lead to a large increase in work cover insurance premiums.

It was recommended that all vegetable growers read through the ten

solutions provided and include them in their farm induction and OH&S manual. Reference to the manual handling solutions can be viewed on the VGA Vic website: www.vgavic.org.au or www.vegetablesvictoria.com.au.

Following the presentation there was a short informative discussion covering the latest developments with fertilisers by Campbell's.

The workshops were hosted by EE Muir & Sons at their branch outlets at Werribee and Cranbourne and we extend our thanks to Tony Schultz and the Muir's team.

Future workshops are being scheduled for Lindenow and Mildura.

Melbourne Food & Wine Festival

VGA Vic and grower members were very prominent at Cranbourne Racecourse on Friday for the world's longest lunch as part of the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival celebrations. In excess of 150 people were present in the betting shed under very windy conditions enjoying a six-course menu with beverages.

Jack Walker, VGA Vic Life Member, had created an excellent vegetable display on an early model truck supplied by Heatherton vegetable grower Ken Savage. There was also a vintage tractor mounted on a truck tray and surrounded by a wide range of local vegetables. Other prominent vegetable growers were also in attendance including Peter Cochrane, Silvio Favero, Luis Gazzola and Tom Schreurs. Gendore Tractors and Machinery also displayed a range of equipment.



Upcoming chemical user and refresher courses

Agricultural and veterinary chemicals are important inputs to Victorian agricultural sectors, enabling production of sustainable, high-quality produce and livestock for a growing marketplace.

While providing many benefits, chemicals must be used responsibly to manage weeds, pests and disease and minimise adverse effects associated with their use.

The Ag-Vet chemical courses offered by Chisholm Institute of TAFE are designed to train industry people about their responsibilities with regard to chemical use and making primary industries more sustainable. Consumers are concerned about the produce they purchase, whether this is food or fibre, and hence, should buy with confidence that people are trained and have the knowledge and skills to achieve this. The courses are designed to make the participants aware of Federal (APVMA) and State Government (DPI) changes to chemical use such as labels and registration.

Chisholm Institute is offering the following indicative dates for chemical user and refresher courses in 2012. The contact person is **Alister Harrison on 5990 7162** who will supply enrolment forms etc.

August	29th , 30th & 31st	Ag-Vet Users course
September	14th	Refresher in Ag-Vet Chemicals
October	24th, 25th & 26th	Ag-Vet Users course
November	14th, 15th & 16th	Ag-Vet Users course
November	30th	Refresher in Ag-Vet Chemicals
December	5th, 6th & 7th	Ag-Vet Users course

Any person handling chemicals MUST have the appropriate chemical user qualifications.



Internet News & Views

Bookmarked any good web pages lately?

Here are a few of interest.

New Industry Development Body

New Rural Industries Australia - an offshoot of the Rural Industries Research and Development Commission.
<http://nria.org.au>

Top mobile apps for agriculture

A US list, but interesting.
<http://www.croplife.com/article/23035/20-best-mobile-apps-for-agriculture>

Safety in horticulture

The title says it all.
<http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au> then search for horticulture.

Cooking with the best

A cook who is passionate about fresh produce. OK, it's about NZ but the message is what counts.
<http://www.annabel-langbein.com>

Executive Officer's corner



Congratulations to Helena Whitman, our newly appointed Executive Manager. Helena will be managing vegetable industry issues on behalf of VGA Vic in conjunction with the IDO team and Executive Committee. Rod Hall takes over the responsibilities of IDO West.

We also extend a very warm welcome to John Runting who joined the IDO team in January to cover the eastern area of Victoria. John provides a strong background in horticulture production, occupational health and safety and management to VGA Vic.

Located on the Mornington Peninsula John is readily available to attend to the needs of vegetable growers.

Vic Fresh 2012, the Melbourne Market Authority premium annual gala event held in the Palladium Room at the Crown Entertainment Complex, was a very successful evening. The event was attended by 800 guests consisting of growers, wholesalers and retailers.

Victorian Minister for Agriculture, the Hon Peter Walsh, provided the opening speech then announced the winners of the Suburban and Country Retailers of the Year awards. This was followed by the presentation of 40-year-service certificates to the market community which included our President David Wallace. Door prizes were a feature of the night with VGA Vic providing support. A very comfortable and entertaining evening was experienced in excellent surroundings.

The Manual Handling project conducted by Andrew Sullivan from Ballarat University is now completed and there are 10 simple but practical solutions that will reduce workplace injuries and increase efficiency and productivity on the farm. VGA Vic has been very supportive of the project and its involvement with the industry reference group. Two workshops at Werribee and Cranbourne provided the final solutions and VGA Vic thanks EE Muir & Sons for providing the venues. Workshops for Lindenow and Mildura are currently being planned.

Food Alliance conducted by Deakin University is continuing and VGA Vic is supportive with input and representation. The aim of the 2012 project is to provide consumers with greater understanding of the issues that Victorian growers face in producing fresh produce and to generate a common 'vision' of a way forward for Victoria's food system. There are numerous opportunities for the younger generation to

participate in leadership and business development programs including 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 and I would encourage you to make the time available to participate and develop not only additional skills, but build networks with other young growers across Australia.

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 the listed officers:

- IDO West Helena Whitman: mobile 0407 772 299.
- IDO East John Runting: mobile 0417 356 364.
- Grower Membership Services Rod Hall: mobile 0403 215 935

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.

Keep Smiling,

Tony Imeson

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