

Maddie's

East Gippsland Vegetable Innovation Days



National Vegetable
Extension Network
VICTORIA - GIPPSLAND

More than 650 vegetable growers, researchers, industry service providers, government representatives, and other stakeholders attended the East Gippsland Vegetable Innovation Days on 3 and 4 May 2017 in Lindenow, Gippsland, Victoria. Opened by The Honourable Darren Chester MP and Mr Louis Gazzola, vegetable industry stalwart, an iceberg lettuce was ceremonially cut to signify the start of two days of field demonstrations in glorious Autumn weather. While most attendees came from all states of Australia, New Zealand and The Netherlands were also represented.

The East Gippsland Vegetable Innovation Days were held for the following purposes:

- To enable Australia's top ten seed companies to showcase their new, favourite and innovative varieties for growers and the industry at large
- To provide a learning opportunity for growers and industry representatives to view exhibits from a broad range of industry service providers and research initiatives
- To network, do business and celebrate being a vital part of the food chain in Australia and abroad

Background

The State of Victoria hosted the National Vegetable Expo at Werribee every two years from 1963. After fifty years the Vegetable Growers' Association of Victoria (VGA) took a decision to wind the event up with the final Expo taking place in 2013. Andrew Bulmer, Managing Director of Bulmer Farms, had been taking a busload of East Gippsland growers to the event for several years. Stuart Grigg, Agronomist at Stuart Grigg AgHort Consulting, was a guest speaker at the final Expo. Together they decided to ensure Victoria still staged an exposition every two years and agreed on a plan for the East Gippsland Leafy Vegetable Demonstration Day the following year, 2014.

About 400 vegetable growers and other members of



the industry made their way to Luby's Lane, Lindenow on Friday 9 May 2014 to visit the East Gippsland Leafy Vegetable Demonstration Day. A similar format to the Werribee events plus some additions gleaned from the Locker Valley Growers Horticultural Exposition held in Queensland, proved a winning combination and the feedback was resoundingly positive with calls for a follow up event.

Organising Committee

The East Gippsland Vegetable Innovation Days or EGVID, as they became known, took an organising committee of ten members ten months to design, develop and deliver. Andrew Bulmer and Stuart Grigg took the lead again and invited the East Gippsland Food Cluster to play a larger role than the one it had played in 2014. EGVID was to be a major event for the East Gippsland Food Cluster as part of the National Vegetable Extension Network, a program funded by Hort Innovation using the research and development National Vegetable Levy and funds from the Australian Government. The Industry Development Officer for Gippsland would be the event's project manager.

April 2019



East Gippsland Vegetable Innovation Days

The organising committee comprised:

Andrew Bulmer – Bulmer Farms
Stuart Grigg – Stuart Grigg AgHort Consulting
Shayne Hyman – East Gippsland Food Cluster & Horticulture Innovation Australia
Kate Grigg – Stuart Grigg AgHort Consulting
Noel Jansz – Elders Bairnsdale
Daniel Hammond – Bulmer Farms
Rob Phillip – Rijk Zwaan
Samantha Strano – Bayer
Lachlan Dumaresq – EE Muir & Sons

The Community

In order to involve the whole community of Lindenow, the demonstration site was moved to the heart of the town, on the main road and a plot known to the Bulmer family as “Maddie’s Paddock”. The Industry Networking Dinner was held at the historic Lindenow Hall and would be ticketed and self-funded. The hall was filled to capacity with 300 attending. Drinks were provided by the Lindenow sporting clubs. The food was specially designed for the event by a local signature café using fresh produce, local meats and seafood. The stand-up meal was served by a group of local job seekers looking for work in hospitality. Gifts were also sourced locally. And breakfast the following morning was cooked by the local Lions Club.

The educative purpose of the event was furthered by the use of vegetables grown on the site, primarily leafy salads, brassicas and herbs, in three ways:

1. A Paddock2Plate segment was added to the event to attract chefs, restaurateurs and the food service industry to help to build a bridge between the vegetables they procure from the industry, and, the growers who produce and process them. A local chef devised the menu based on the produce grown in the demonstration sites.
2. Expressions of interest were called from schools and other education providers to visit and explore the site, ask questions of a panel of agronomists and nursery stockists,



and try the vegetables in the raw. Students from the local primary school and learners from the local University of the Third Age availed themselves of the opportunity.

3. Second Bite were invited to harvest, under supervision, vegetables from the demonstration site to distribute to those experiencing food insecurity in the immediate area.

The local shire of East Gippsland provided a grant towards running the event.

The Event Schedule

Australia’s top ten seed companies grew a range of produce for demonstration, sampling and information with seeding commencing in some cases in the first week of January 2017, five months prior to the event. In addition, each company distinguished itself with providing other collateral to advise and supplement the growers’ understanding. Awards were made for in-field excellence according to key selection criteria.



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East Gippsland Vegetable Innovation Days

The RIPPA (VG12104 An intelligent farm robot for the vegetable industry) robot was in action and machinery and farm equipment were on display.

A masterclass on The Challenges of Growing Baby Spinach conducted by an international panel attracted a large audience. Cameo speaking events were staged throughout the days.

Inside a large marquee, industry service providers from insurers through packaging experts to private R&D organisations, mounted displays and provided guidance to registrants. One lucky attendee wearing an EGVID pin won a state-of-the-art ride-on lawn mower.

The Industry

The primary audience for the event was the vegetable grower and the industry, and government showed their support by contributing funds and/or attending with representatives from Horticulture Innovation Australia, AUSVEG, Produce Marketing Association ANZ, AUSVEG Vic, the Victorian Farmers Federation, Regional Development Australia, and Regional Development Victoria.

More than forty sponsors ensured sufficient funds and in-kind contributions to guarantee the event was first class.

Local, state, national, international and industry print and online media covered the event and the lead-up to it.

The East Gippsland Vegetable Innovation Days won the HortConnections National Award for Excellence in Community Stewardship in 2018.

The Future

Following consultation with the seed breeders it was decided to hold the event in a three-year cycle to enable the development of new varieties. In collaboration with the Lockyer Valley Growers Association, who hold their Expo bi-annually, both will now occur on a three-year basis. Unfortunately, due to the drought in Southern Queensland, the 2019 event has been cancelled.

The next East Gippsland Vegetable Innovation Days are

In The Field
News for Victorian Vegetable Growers

26 Apr 2013

Werribee EXPO 2013

**2nd and 3rd May
National Vegetable EXPO at Werribee**

With over 50 Trade Displays and 11 Seed Companies displaying the best of their new varieties, it is a great opportunity for growers to see what's new and catch up with other growers.

Werribee EXPO features spectacular displays of new vegetable varieties offered by seed companies – the major drawcard at Expo.

Werribee EXPO provides a valuable link between vegetable growers and those who provide new products and technologies.

Exhibits include machinery, chemicals, fertilisers, irrigation, filtration, packaging, computer software and material handling equipment.

Growers come from far and wide, including other States and New Zealand and this year hundreds are expected to attend once again.

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scheduled for May 2020 and will be held adjacent to the International Spinach Conference, being presented in Australia for the first time.

Seven of the top ten babyleaf growers have a farming footprint in Gippsland so salad lines will continue to be key to the event but "it's all about the grower" and so the organisers will be guided by them.

