

Subject: Growing Undercover - May 26

Date: Friday, 29 May 2026 at 3:15:47 pm Australian Central Standard Time

From: PCA

To: Jade Lewis



GROWING UNDERCOVER

MAY | 2026

UPDATES

IDO Update

Matt Plunkett

Welcome to the May edition of Growing Undercover.

It comes as no surprise how tough the current operating environment is across the whole supply chain. More specifically, in relation to labour challenges, energy security, fertiliser shortages and the importance of sovereign food security.

Given that labour is estimated to be at least 40% of the cost base on a grower's balance sheet and now reportedly over 50% in some instances, productivity and efficiency of your workforce has never been more important.

PCA, together with Planfarm and RMCG recently presented an online seminar on the "Level Up Horticulture" program results for the current financial year 2025-2026. This program is for vegetable levy payers and looks at individual businesses reviewing production costs and compares benchmarks between income per ha, costs per ha and operating profit in \$ per ha. It also looks at profit margins as a % of turnover and the return on assets managed as a %. The program compares both field and protected cropping vegetable businesses.

In general, one of the key differences profitable growers are doing that sets them apart from the average or unprofitable businesses is they are not necessarily cutting costs but driving productivity through directing spending into areas that improve productivity, profitability, and efficiency, primarily through innovation.

It was clear from the project results presented that labour in protected cropping is the major cost and higher than field grown crops, but overall protected cropping businesses have lower production costs. That said, individual cost lines such as fertiliser, packaging and freight are

higher in protected cropping businesses.

Overall, profitable growers know their costs per m² and constantly track costs across growing, postharvest, freight and logistics and use data to secure price rises for their products. They are using automation in their business to reduce these costs and have higher staff retention rates.

They also track the productivity of their staff to improve output and do not cut costs to cheaper inputs that can potentially lower crop yields and overall productivity. This combined with employing highly skilled staff in key roles and retaining them are important.

It is interesting to note that the more profitable growers were spending less time growing and more time in harvesting and post-harvest segments of their business. It would also be interesting to know how Artificial Intelligence is improving productivity in future analysis and what affect this will have on the labour force.

With the needs of our industry changing, training staff and paying above market rate for highly skilled people is crucial. It is crucial to invest in them through building a culture, so they want to stay and make coming to work rewarding and enjoyable. The cost to replace good staff is considerable and up to 37% of horticulture roles in our industry remain unfilled or hard to find skilled people.

The key from this presentation was to know your costs, maximise productivity and focus your efforts on the areas of your business development that are most profitable. If you're not measuring these things, how can you manage your business profitably?

To that end, PCA are running our June webinar on both unskilled and skilled labour options for our members. Stay tuned for more information on this webinar soon.

Have a great month and stay safe.

EVENTS

JUNE



National Agritech Week 2026 - Brisbane

[Learn More →](#)

JUNE



Dear Matt Plunkett,

Make your visit to GreenTech Amsterdam on 9-11 June even more valuable and be inspired by the knowledge programme, developed in collaboration with industry-leading speakers and partners. On the exhibition, the latest horticulture insights come to life. Explore a selection of topics taking place this year and [secure your ticket](#) to reserve your spot.

Tuesday 9 June 2026

12:00 AM – 12:45 AM | Climate-Resilient Greenhouses: Country-Specific Strategies for a Hotter, Drier, and Wilder World

In this follow-up to last year's highly attended session on climate change and extreme weather, we dive deeper with a comparative look at horticultural regions: The Netherlands, Spain, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. Featuring: Athanasios Sapounas (TNO).

02:00 PM - 02:45 PM | Substrates of the future

This session brings substrate innovators together to discuss how they are successfully moving away from traditional media, without compromising yield or increasing their operational risk.

Featuring: Kyle Freedman (Jiffy Group), Peter Melis (Proefcentrum Hoogstraten), and Hans Kristian Westrum (SoilSteam).

GreenTech Amsterdam - Secure Your Ticket

[Learn More →](#)

OCTOBER



Myplant & Garden Middle East has opened a new chapter for the global green industry. In Dubai, **business, innovation, sustainability, and international networking** came together to create a unique event for the worldwide floriculture and nursery market, as well as for the future of landscape and urban sustainability.

The success of the first edition — the only exhibition in the Middle East dedicated to landscape and ornamental greenery — was made possible thanks to the active participation, strong interest, and high-quality dialogue.

Myplant & Garden Middle East

[Learn More →](#)

INFORMATION

NATIONAL

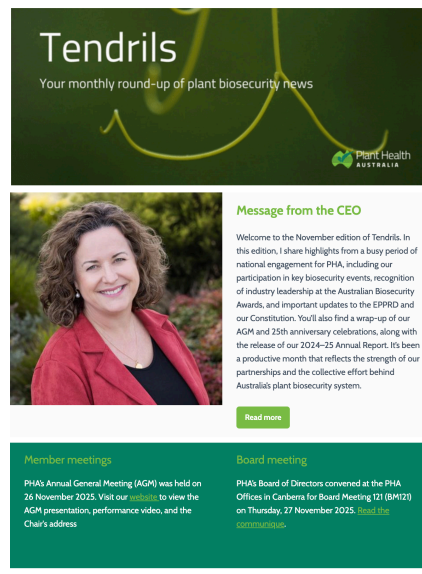
NEWS



Berries Australia - The Burst May 2026

[Learn More →](#)

NEWS



PHA - Tendrils Newsletter April 2026

[Learn More →](#)

NEWS



13 May 2026

Federal Budget Signals Stronger Focus on Fuel, Fertiliser and Supply Chain

Last night's Federal Budget included several significant announcements relevant to the protected cropping sector, including a new fertiliser security package and a suite of tax reforms. For the protected cropping sector, the focus is on supporting controlled environment agriculture as part of Australia's long-term food security strategy.

National Fuel Security Plan - \$11.9 Billion

Federal Budget 26-2027 - What Does It Mean For PC?

[Learn More →](#)

NEWS



Biosecurity Response - Red Imported Fire Ants

[Learn More →](#)

NEWS



Hi Melinda,

The NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) is offering growers the opportunity to receive a free, tailored drainage water management plan for their farm.

Substrate production systems can generate nutrient-rich drainage water. This program will help you better understand and manage drainage, supporting both farm performance and environmental outcomes.

What's included:

- Drainage volume measurement and nutrient load assessment
- Bioreactor or wetland sizing calculations
- A concept layout tailored to your farm
- Construction guidance and indicative cost ranges

What's involved:

- Allow drainage monitoring and water sampling
- Provide basic irrigation and fertigation information
- Participate in a site visit

Who can apply:

- NSW substrate berry growers
- Both Blueberry and/or Rubus (raspberries/blackberries) growers

Key dates:

- Applications open: **16 April 2026**
- Applications close: **29 May 2026**

Free Water Management Plans For NSW Growers

[Learn More →](#)

NEWS



VicVID 2026 Delivers Field Day for Vegetable Industry

[Learn More →](#)

RESOURCE



With the continued rise in the cost of living and volatile energy market, Choice Energy is offering free home energy bill checks for all staff.

Send your latest bill to **Sudha Kandarpa**: sudha.kandarpa@choiceenergy.com.au to see if there are any savings available.

Statistics show that **currently 50% of Aussies are concerned about their energy bills**, Choice Energy knows that many households are feeling the pressure.


It's a small step that could make a real difference to your household expenses and put money back into your pockets.

Who is Choice Energy?	How does it work?
<p>Choice Energy is an Australian-owned and operated energy firm based in VIC and QLD. With over 13,000 business customers across Australia, we helped businesses collectively save \$70 million in 2025.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find a copy of your most recent energy bill and send it to us. One of our energy experts will contact you within 48 hours to let you know how you can save on your energy bill.
<p>CHOICE ENERGY Sudha Kandarpa, Partnerships Specialist 890, St Kilda Road, Melbourne, Victoria</p> <p>Get in Touch ☎ 0483 910 840 ✉ sudha.kandarpa@choiceenergy.com.au choiceenergy.com.au</p>	

Choice Energy - Free Energy Bill Assessment

[Learn More →](#)

RESOURCE

Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development 

Ref:

GROUP BIOSECURITY PERMIT

NSW Biosecurity Act 2015

I,

in accordance with section 356 cancel group permit OUT25/16437, and in accordance with section 333 and 336 of the Biosecurity Act 2015 (the Act), hereby grant a group permit to the following persons:

This group permit authorises the following conduct that, but for the group permit, would or might contravene a requirement imposed by or under the Act (subject to stated conditions of this group permit):

This group permit is subject to the following conditions:

A person may move TPP host plant material into the TPP Control Zone if:

- The host plant material has been:
 - treated with an insecticide that is effective against all life stages of tomato potato psyllid (TPP) in accordance with APVMA approved label directions and permit conditions; and
 - all consignments have been inspected for the presence of TPP, and found free of TPP; and
 - immediately after inspection, the host plant material is packed in a manner that will prevent infestation with TPP; and
 - the consignment is accompanied by a Plant Health Certificate or Plant Health Assurance Certificate issued in accordance with the Victorian certification scheme procedures PS-57 Treatment and Inspection of Nursery Stock or PS-58 Treatment and Inspection of Host Produce certifying that conditions 1a, b and c have been met.
- The host plant material has been:
 - treated with ionizing irradiation at a minimum dose of 400 Gray; and
 - immediately after treatment, the host plant material is packed in a manner that will prevent infestation with TPP; and
 - the consignment is accompanied by a Plant Health Certificate or Plant Health Assurance Certificate issued in accordance with ICA-55 Irradiation Treatment certifying that conditions 2 a and b have been met.

Group Biosecurity Permits for Tomato Potato Psyllid

[Learn More →](#)

OPORTUNITY

Hort Innovation puts out call for two new directors

Hort Innovation, the grower-owned, not-for-profit research and development corporation for Australian horticulture, is seeking applications for two Non-Executive Director vacancies on its Board for a four-year term.

In line with the company's constitution, two of the nine sitting Directors must retire at the end of their term, with both being eligible to reapply.

The Hort Innovation Board is a skills-based Board. After having reviewed the skills and experience of the existing Board against the Board Skills Matrix, the skills being sought this year are experience in finance, accounting and audit, and public policy and administration.

When the application period closes, applications will be provided to the Hort Innovation Director Nomination Committee (DNC).

The four-person committee (established under the Hort Innovation Constitution) is made up of a representative from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests (DAFF); a levy payer representative chosen by DAFF; an independent eminent member selected by the Hort Innovation Board; and is chaired by the Chair of the Hort Innovation Board.

The DNC will meet to determine the shortlist of candidates from the application pool, for interviewing during September.

The DNC will then nominate candidates to stand for election at the 2026 AGM to be held in November.

Applicants have until 5.00 pm on Monday 6 July to apply. Interested applicants should

Hort Innovation Puts Out Call For Two New Directors

[Learn More →](#)

MEMBER ADVERTISEMENTS

AIPH - FLORACULTURE INTERNATIONAL

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AIPH

WWW.FLORACULTUREINTERNATIONAL.COM

MAY 2028

WORKFORCE PRESSURE
**Why horticulture
must compete harder
for talent**

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
**When transparency
becomes
responsibility for
workers**

TECHNOLOGY AND PEOPLE
**How automation and
AI are changing the
work people do**

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PLANTS

How labour, skills, leadership and technology are
reshaping ornamental horticulture

**GSC SUBSIDISED COURSES - WERRIBEE APPLICATIONS NOW
OPEN**



Greenhouse Technical Management Course – a Masterclass in Protected Cropping

Delivered By Graeme Smith Consulting

SUBSIDISED COURSES AVAILABLE

Eligibility considerations per applicant:

- Offered to one student per location per year (max 4 locations)
- Must be a current resident of Australia
- Must be < 35-year-old
- Must be actively involved in the Australian protected cropping industry
- Can demonstrate challenges from a background of some disadvantage
- Must agree to write a brief report of training experience for PCA (Protected Cropping Australia)
- Is able to meet the \$500 rebated training fee, plus any extra personal expenses (travel, accommodation, etc)

Location	Date	Training Partner	Applications Open	Applications Close
Werribee, South VIC	6 th - 10 th July 2026		29 May 2026	12 June 2026
Virginia, SA	3 rd - 7 th August 2026		29 th June 2026	6 th July 2026
Gatton Smart Farm, QLD	7 th - 11 th September 2026		31 st July 2026	7 th August 2026
Hawkesbury Campus, NSW	5 th - 9 th October 2026		31 st August 2026	7 th September 2026



[Unsubscribe](#)

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