

APRIL 2021



Growing Undercover

PROTECTED CROPPING AUSTRALIA MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

A message from our Chair

Nicky Mann • PCA Chair

Welcome to all our members, corporate sponsors, allied trade and subscribers to our April Growing Undercover newsletter! Oh what a month we have had! Huge floods on the East Coast of Australia and a devastating cyclone on the West Coast of Australia. The PCA Board and team really reaches out to everyone affected and if we can support you in any way, please get in contact with us. We are here to help!

So in the past month, PCA-wise – we have been super busy kicking off the campaign for the 2021 National PCA Conference in Coffs Harbour 25 – 28th October this year. If you are interested in exhibiting, speaking, attending, sponsoring, etc – check out our website: www.pcaconference.net.au or contact [ASN Events](#).

We've also sent off letters to the Honourable Minister Littleproud and other ministers/shadow ministers asking for the National Building Code for Greenhouse Construction to be put back on the priority list as soon as possible. PCA has submitted an application for funding for our levy paying growers to be subsidized to attend our upcoming conference and lastly, the final touches are being done on the proposal/submission for the UNE Mapping Project – that will deliver HUGE benefit to our entire industry with the data produced. Our various committees are kicking goals, like the Webinar & Farm Tours series, the training and upskilling program and our investment strategy is being worked on. So definitely lots of work being done behind the scenes to take our industry forward. PCA is also committed to working together with other peak industry bodies to the common benefit of all our members. There is always lots to do but our Board are really working hard to try and make a difference.

At the end of March, we have said a sad good-bye to Jo Archer, who has helped PCA enormously over the past year especially our Marketing & Membership Committee, creating and setting up policies and strategies for the activities within this committee. Jo has also really grown our corporate membership superbly. We would like to thank her most sincerely for her brilliant contribution. Jo's role has been taken over by the very capable team at ASN.

Personally, in my work – it's been crazy running our autumn crops with the smallest team we have ever had due to extreme labour shortages and delays in incoming charter flights. We have somehow managed and we are so proud of our team. However, it has highlighted the disconnect between all departments across State and Federal government in getting the horticultural sector taken seriously and deemed a priority. I salute the various people who have championed our cause but the politicians don't seem to be pro-active enough and only when the crisis has taken grip any action is taken. It has been painstakingly slow and expensive but we need to learn from mistakes and be prepared for next time.

On behalf of the Board, we wish you a good next month with great climate, fair prices and adequate staff. Take care and look after each other!

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There's still time to submit to Soiless Australia!

Winter 2021 edition booking deadline - 3 May 2021



People love hearing about what their peers are up to - and we're always on the lookout for news about what's going on in the Protected Cropping industry. Our quarterly magazine, Soiless Australia, is a great place to catch up on these stories.

The winter edition is currently being created and rates and deadlines are available to [view here](#).

Please drop our editor, Jennifer Stackhouse a line at editor@protectedcropping.net.au

PCA Advocacy Update

Matthew Plunkett • M: 0434 147 988

• Deputy Chair, Protected Cropping Australia

Matthew.plunkett@protectedcropping.net.au

As I write this article, reports are still coming in about the impact the floods have had on our industry in NSW.

Flooding turns to Recovery Phase in NSW

Members have reported crop losses in south western Sydney and on the Mid North Coast of NSW. The PCA are liaising closely with Resilience NSW, the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Local Land Services to assist with the flood response.

Growers in the Sydney Markets are also reporting significant downturn in demand over the last 12 months. Supply chains have also been disrupted due to flooding, road closures and the inability to attract and retain seasonal labour.

If any members require assistance accessing a range of financial and other assistance measures, please contact Alyson Botha, PCA Secretariat, on +61 (0)3 8560 4391 or alyson.b@asnevents.net.au

Access to a range of support measures has been compiled by the NSW Department of Primary Industries and can be [accessed here](#).



Photo Acknowledgement: Carol Azzi

National Farmers Federation Horticulture Council

The PCA are currently investigating how joining the National Farmers Federation (NFF) Horticulture Council will benefit our valued members. There is significant benefit in working with other horticultural peak industry bodies and the NFF to ensure the needs of the protected cropping industry are heard at all levels of government, particularly around labour shortages and other policies preventing the growth of the protected cropping sector.

Protected Cropping Mapping Project-

The PCA have partnered with the University of New England, Cooperative Research Centre for Future Food Systems and Local Land Services in applying for Hort Innovation Frontiers funding to develop a national map of protected cropping systems. This project has taken over 3 years of advocacy, and as discussed in previous articles will provide enormous benefit for our industry including assisting with responses to emergency management and biosecurity outbreaks.

Greenhouse Construction Code Advocacy-

The PCA together with the Hydroponic Farmers Federation (HFF) have written to the Federal Minister for Agriculture David Littleproud about prioritising the need for horticultural buildings to be included in the National Building Construction Code. Contact has also been made with the Australian Building Codes Board.

If you wish to also write a letter of support, the contact details for the Minister are as follows:

Hon David Littleproud MP, PO Box 6022, House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600 or david.littleproud.mp@aph.gov.au

The PCA encourages every member to raise this issue with your state and federal member of parliament to assist with addressing this important issue. Please drop Alyson a line if you require the contact details of relevant members of parliament and ministers across Australia.

Review of the Vegetable Industry Strategic Plan

Did you know that the vegetable industry has a Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) that provides the roadmap to guide Hort Innovation grower levies and government contributions? Hort Innovation are calling on all vegetable growers and industry personnel to develop a new refreshed plan for the vegetable industry that guides investment from 2022-2026.

The PCA have already provided input into the berry industry Strategic Investment Plan review and commencing discussions with the nursery and vegetable industries.

AUSVEG together with Hort Innovation are hosting a webinar on the 28 April (3-4pm AEST) and further details are provided in this newsletter.

If you would like to discuss protected cropping needs directly with a Hort Innovation staff member contact Mark Spees at Hort Innovation on 0439 574 173 or drop me a line and your issues and ideas can be included in the PCA response.

Many vegetable growers I speak to who currently grow in soil are looking at moving into some form of protection. There is a gap for growers seeking independent information on, but not limited to:

- Planning regulations and getting started
- Types of growing systems
- Capital costs of various growing systems
- Suitable crops and marketing information

Funding for an Industry Development Manager is critical to socialise these and many other research and development opportunities across many levied commodities including vegetables. The PCA will continue to advocate for this need given the development of the 10-year protected cropping research development and extension strategy that is currently being finalised in parallel with reviews of each individual levied commodity.

As always, happy growing and please reach out if you would like to have a chat.

Matthew Plunkett

PCA 2021 Conference

SUBMISSIONS ARE NOW OPEN

The Protected Cropping Australia 2021 Conference Committee are pleased to announce that **abstracts** for the **2021 Conference are now being accepted!**

We would like to invite you to submit your work and be part of the 2021 PCA program. This year's program will feature a range of stimulating presentations from keynote speakers and concurrent sessions, with opportunities for talks from submitted abstracts. Submissions are open until **Friday 28th May** through the online submission portal, accessible via the [conference website](#). Don't miss this opportunity to share your work with fellow colleagues and delegates.

We look forward to receiving your abstract submissions and seeing you in October!

**SUBMIT YOUR ABSTRACT
TODAY!**

Program Leader - Protected Cropping

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) promotes profitable agriculture, fisheries, and forestry industries for Queensland. The Agriculture group delivers innovative, practical solutions through smart science in collaboration with a range of industry and research partners.

At a critical time for driving innovation and developing partnerships in the evolving field of Protected Cropping, an important role as Program Leader has been created to advance the productivity and profitability of horticultural production through leadership of research, development, and extension (RD&E) projects in tropical and sub-tropical protected cropping. The Program Leader will initiate, develop, and lead national and international RD&E projects and teams. This will encompass working with industry to improve crop and structure performance, investigating opportunities for automation, and responding to market opportunities for high-value products, including exports.

We are seeking interest from senior scientists who are experienced in managing sizeable RD&E projects and passionate about developing protected cropping within Horticulture.

For confidential enquiries and to request a copy of the candidate information booklet, please contact **Kate Robinson** via +61 409 769 560 or krobinson@robinsonfitzgerald.com.au, or **Kerry Minon**, via +61 456 984 340 or kminon@robinsonfitzgerald.com.au at **Robinson Fitzgerald Executive Search** quoting the relevant reference number RF0104. **Applications will close on 17 May 2021.**

Paid advertisement



The PCA Board would like to extend our warmest welcome and good wishes to our new members.

Individual Member

- George Bobin, GSG Pty Ltd

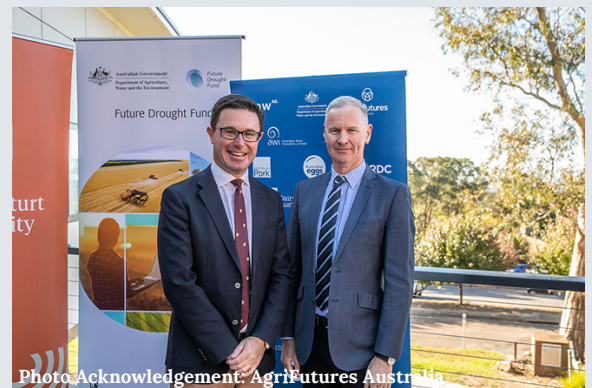
Student Member

- Craig Liebeck, Gardening Organically

We look forward to many successful years together!

growAG.com Launched

Farmers, researchers and businesses can now see levy funded research from all the Research and Development Corporations in one location.



A centralised platform that showcases Australia's agrifood innovation opportunities, success stories, and a comprehensive database of Australia's current agrifood research projects has been launched in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE) and all of Australia's 15 Research and Development Corporations (RDCs).

Acting as a gateway to the world, [growAG](#), showcases Australia's world leading agricultural research, unique technologies and commercialisation opportunities on the one, new publicly available platform, [growAG.com](#).

Farmers can now see their levy funded research projects from across the RDC network in one location using filters to search across the different commodities. All the information on the platform is free to access and allows farmers, investors, corporates, startups, researchers, industry, government and universities from Australia and around the world to locate information and opportunities to deliver innovation back to the farm and the food supply-chain.

Visit [growAG.com](#) to begin exploring Australia's agrifood innovation system.

Hort Innovation - Meet the Regional Extension Team



Jane Wightman



Adrian Englefield



Bronwyn Walsh



Jason Hingston



Jay Cummins



Olive Hood

Ensuring communication and extension activities truly support business decisions and enhance practices on farm

Horticulture is growing rapidly as an industry in Australia, with a 40 per cent rise in value over the five years to 2017/18 to \$13.2 billion. And that growth is expected to continue, with the sector's farm gate production having the potential to increase to between \$20 and \$30 billion by 2030. To support this growth, it's vital that the nation's horticulture Research and Development Corporation is constantly refining business practices to service levy payers and the industries they work in. In line with that approach, Hort Innovation has launched a new Extension initiative to ensure communication and extension activities truly support business decisions and enhance practices on farm.

What extension activities are currently offered through Hort Innovation?

Hort Innovation is currently working with its partners – such as industry groups, universities and government agencies – to deliver hundreds of projects for horticulture levy payers, of which 80-odd investments are dedicated to extension in the form of industry development and communication, and more than 80 investments also involve extension components.

What is the purpose of Hort Innovation's extension initiative?

The extension initiative enhances the coordination, communication and application of research and development outcomes, and includes a team of Regional Extension Managers, who work in the regions. These managers play a linking role and bring broad coalitions together to share skills and capacity, to solve identified regional problems. Service providers benefit from building their technical and extension skills and knowledge via across industry networks. Collaborative approaches to solving regional problems enable tangible outcomes for growers to use on farm.

Does this service replace other extension activities?

No. Extension activities offered through Hort Innovation are important to the industries they service. The Extension Framework complements and adds to other work to ensure growers have the best possible access to outcomes from their levy investments.

Where are Regional Extension Managers based and what will they do?

Regional Extension Managers operate in six horticulture regions that have been identified for targeted extension, capturing 94 per cent of horticultural activity in Australia by employment and production value.

How do I access extension services or get more information?

For more information, please call Hort Innovation on (02) 8295 2300.

Find the Regional Extension Manager in your region and their contact [details here](#).

Extension Team Strategy at a glance

[View the Extension Team Strategy in a easy to read two-page overview now.](#)

Maungatapere Berries Expands North In Partnership With Ngāpuhi



Whangārei's premium award-winning berry producer Maungatapere Berries is set to expand its operations into Kaikohe through a partnership with Ngāpuhi Asset Holding Company and Far North Holdings Ltd.

The 28 hectare development at the Ngawha Innovation and Enterprise Park is expected to help meet growing nationwide demand for locally grown healthy fresh fruit.

Co-founder and Director of Maungatapere Berries, Patrick Malley, said the vision for the project is to create a fully sustainable horticulture operation, providing permanent employment and horticultural training opportunities for Kaikohe locals, and using practices such as 'closed-loop' recycling systems, sustainable water usage, biological controls, and precision horticulture.

"However the greatest opportunity is going to be working alongside local iwi on a project of this scale, and providing employment in a region which can really benefit from it.

"Initially, 20 full time positions will be created, and over time we anticipate employing 80 fulltime staff and around 120 seasonal staff," he said. "Roles will range from picking, growing and packing right through to technical, irrigation, management and administration positions."

"Sustainability is a key ethos for our company, across both the environment and our community, and we are always looking at ways to ensure our environmental impact – both short term and long term – is as low as possible whilst also creating long-term career pathways for people in the horticulture industry."

To date, the company has invested heavily in sustainable business practices, including sustainable packaging, biological controls and growing practices as well as careful water management. The company packs its berries in recycled cardboard trays and 100% recycled plastic (RPET) punnets, both manufactured here in New Zealand.

Malley said the Kaikohe site offers an ideal growing climate, ready access to water and proximity to potential employees, making it an ideal location to expand operations.

The expansion in Kaikohe will enable Maungatapere Berries to re-focus its existing Whangārei-based operation on blueberry and kiwifruit production, which will continue to provide an estimated 50 permanent positions and 60 seasonal positions, across the year-long production period.

Development of the first ten hectares of the site is already underway, with the hydroponic growing systems completed during winter and the first production of Maungatapere Berries raspberries and blackberries due to start at the Kaikohe site in November this year. The first ten hectares will be initially grown for the New Zealand market, with the long term potential to develop export opportunities overseas.

For more information contact: **Patrick Malley** 021963363
patrick@onyxhorticulture.co.nz

Chemical Collection for Queensland Scheduled



Queensland agvet chemicals holders will have an opportunity to safely dispose of their unwanted or obsolete chemicals with a ChemClear collection scheduled for July and August this year. With the recent floods through much of the eastern parts of the country there may be chemicals that have become unidentifiable, making this is a timely service to remove these agvet chemicals from properties and businesses. Following Cyclone Yasi, and the floods that occurred during that event in 2011, over 52,000 litres of agvet chemicals were registered and collected with the assistance of the QLD Government.

Agvet chemical that are part of the drumMUSTER program are collected free of charge, with other chemicals (group 2) incurring a fee for service. Agsafe is working with the QLD Government in a bid to secure funding for the collection of group 2 chemicals to enable farmers and chemical holders to safely dispose of their unwanted agricultural chemicals with minimal cost.

Registrations are open until 13 June.

For more information visit www.chemclear.org.au or call 1800 008 182, or call QLD Regional Consultant **Colin Hoey** on 0428 964 576.



You're Invited! Webinar: More than a SIP

Collaboration key for future industry investment opportunities

Wednesday 28 April 2021

3:00pm - 4:00pm (AEST)

REGISTER NOW!

Hort Innovation and AUSVEG are hosting a webinar to provide an overview of what the SIP renewal process will look like for the vegetable industry and how you can provide input.

Speakers:

- **Matt Brand**, Chief Executive Officer, Hort Innovation
- **James Whiteside**, Chief Executive Officer, AUSVEG
- **Mark Spees**, Industry Strategic Partner, Hort Innovation
- **Adam Briggs**, Head of Data & Insights, Hort Innovation
- **Brian Ramsay**, Managing Director, Inovact Consulting

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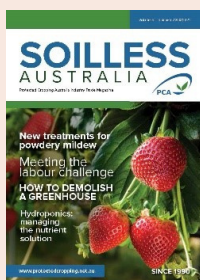
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Australian consumers soon to enjoy big flavoursome blueberries



Photo Acknowledgement: T&G Global

T&G Global is set to take a big bite out of the Australian blueberry market with the first commercial crop of new super-sized, superior tasting blueberries to be launched in retail stores this December.

The global fresh produce company has secured 16 of the latest and best genetics from breeders Plant & Food Research in New Zealand and USA-based Fall Creek Farm and Nursery, and over the last two years has successfully conducted trials of the premium blueberries with selected growers in five Australian states.

Danny Nightingale, T&G's Global Variety Commercialisation Manager says what's exciting about this suite of unique blueberry varieties is their ability to produce fruit all year-round.

"We know Australian's love blueberries, with more than 17,000 tonnes sold each year. With these unique premium varieties we'll be able to grow blueberries all year-round, compared to them currently being available for only approximately eight months," says Danny.

"We're incredibly pleased with the results of our trials, with the blueberries being bigger in size and tasting superior to what's currently available.

"Our commitment to securing the best genetics saw us scour the world to find unique plant varieties which meet consumers' needs, which is what we found in these varieties from Plant & Food Research and Fall Creek Farm and Nursery. Over the past two years we've worked alongside a team of passionate growers in Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, New South Wales and Western Australia to trial them, so it's great to see it coming together, with consumers able to experience them at the end of 2021."

The trials have included a mixture of the new varieties including Cargo, Last Call and Blue Ribbon. It is the first time these varieties have been grown in Australia, for the Australian market.

With 30 hectares already in the ground and producing high quality results, and another 30 hectares soon to be planted, T&G expects volumes to steadily increase in 2021. The blueberries will be sold under T&G's popular premium brand, Orchard Rd.

"This is a game changer for the local berry sector because now we can grow in Australia, for Australian consumers, year round, without the need to import from other countries."

Danny says the new varieties are strong performers and growers are impressed.

"They're easier to pick and the yield is significantly higher than other berry varieties, which is great news for growers because they'll get more berries per hectare," he says.

Parties interested in becoming a licensed grower of these varieties can contact **Danny Nightingale** at T&G Global danny.nightingale@tandg.global

World of Fresh Ideas Event

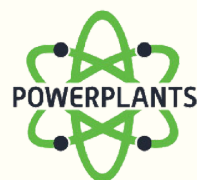
World of Fresh Ideas takes place online on 26 - 27 May 2021.

The event is free for all fresh produce industry professionals. You'll have the chance to learn and meet leading industry players on an interactive online platform. Content will be available to view on demand also.

[View the full event program here](#)

REGISTER HERE!

THANK YOU TO OUR CORPORATE MEMBERS FOR YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT



Knowledge grows

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