

JANUARY 2021



Growing Undercover

PROTECTED CROPPING AUSTRALIA MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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A message from our Chair

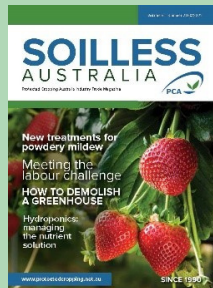
Nicky Mann • PCA Chair

Welcome to our first newsletter of 2021 - Happy New Year to all our Protected Cropping Australia (PCA) members, allied trade and subscribers. The Directors and our PCA Team wish you all a very happy & prosperous 2021! We trust you enjoyed your Christmas break and managed to spend precious time with family and close friends. We also hope you managed to squeeze in a couple of days off. For those like us at Family Fresh Farms - thank-you for keeping fresh produce in our stores over the festive period and carrying on working throughout the Christmas break.

Member News

PCA Members celebrating new management appointments, agency relationships, awards or exciting initiatives are invited to submit a 75 word precis and accompanying photo for the Autumn Movers and Shakers page to editor@protectedcropping.net.au by **Monday 1st February**. Suitability of news submitted for publication will be reviewed by the editor to ensure news is not of an advertising or commercial promotional basis.

Soilless Australia - advertising opportunities



Our research has shown advertisers receive excellent value from Soilless Australia advertising. Soilless Australia is distributed to over 1200 members and subscribers via Hard Copy and E-Copy and provides a great opportunity for advertisers to reach people in the protected cropping industry. Information relating to advertising opportunities is available via protectedcropping.net.au/publications/advertising. Booking deadline is **Monday 1st February 2021** for the Autumn Edition due to be distributed 2nd week in March.

Yes, we are all feeling a little shaken & apprehensive after last year but we must look forward and continue to focus on our goals and plans with positivity and determination. There will always be factors out of our control that will hinder & slow the path forwards but it is how we approach road-blocks or go around them that matter.

My new favourite quote is **“Being positive in a negative situation is not naïve. It’s leadership.”** I know many of you are farm and business owners, or managing teams of varying sizes or parents, etc - the world needs strong leaders and people in our community who are strong and positive, as this really anchors and assures the people around you that everything is going to be OK. It is human nature to depend on HOPE and I know we as farmers and associated trades live on hope..... “hope of a good season, hope of rain, hope of DA approval, hope of good weather, hope of good prices, hope of good yields, hope of good orders/sales, hope of no pest and disease pressure, hope of loan renewals, hope of expansion and hope that family will come back into the business”.....etc etc. *continued on the next page.

Chair Message cont.

My HOPE this year is to get our amazing seasonal workers home to their families in Vanuatu – some of them have been here since **2nd August 2019** when they only signed up for a 9 month visa to work in Australia. WOW! Look at the affect of COVID – however, we have tried to make sure they are well supported mentally and physically and we've tried to make this unfortunate turn of circumstances into a positive. It has been an opportunity of a lifetime for some of our teams – paying off land, houses, taxis, fishing boats and school fees – which will change and enhance their lives forever in the future. Some of our team are now qualified forklift drivers and fully accredited First Aiders – so this again is a positive.

My HOPE is that our local team (Australians) continue to develop into leaders in our industry and continue to be empathetic, passionate, determined and resilient farmers, quality officers, packhouse managers, glasshouse administrators, packers, harvesters, growers and IPM specialists. That they are dedicated to the production of quality food, fibre, medicine and plants/seedlings/flowers for our incredible nation.

In closing, I ask you PLEASE to be strong leaders for your teams, family and your community – because in uncertain times everyone needs re-assurance that everything is going to be ok and we have so much to be grateful for. Honestly, we are the luckiest country in the world our COVID numbers seem to be in control because of strong and sometimes tough leadership to protect the greater good.

BE THE STRONG LEADER FOR THE GREATER GOOD!

Happy 2021!



Labour shortages to persist



Pickers in a strawberry tunnel. Labour to harvest berry crops is hard to find this summer due to the pandemic. Photo Adobe Stock.

Speaking at a recent webinar, 'Labour in Horticulture Update and Outlook', Michael Rogers, CEO Australian Fresh Produce Alliance, and Brooke Lord, Head of Advocacy, RCSA looked the future of labour for harvests.

Against the background of a diminishing workforce as backpackers continue to head home and new labour struggles to enter the country, Michael Rogers said: "Normally 14,000 visas are granted each year but currently just 6400 workers remain in Australia with only small numbers coming in." Labour shortages won't diminish after this summer but will not be met through 2021 and potentially beyond due to restrictions on overseas travel he said.

"We need immediate solutions and solutions for the next 12 to 18 months as well," he explained. Brooke Lord added that hard borders have been a headache for labour in all industries and called for greater cohesion.

"The lack of unity means seven conversations not one," she said. "Government is aware of the challenge but there isn't a ready-made solution and policies including Jobkeeper and Jobseeker are keeping people close to the city so they are on hand if their old roles return."

"While there is increased interest from Australians in harvest work, the reality is that harvest opportunities are often a long way away from capital cities where unemployed people are," said Michael.

Situation Report

Tony Bundock • M: 0409 007 610

• *Treasurer & PCA Director, Genesis Horticultural Solution, Narre Warren South, Victoria*

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As we prepared to say farewell to 2020 in Victoria, the Covid issue couldn't resist one last hit at us with some new locally transmitted infections appearing and ending a 60 day run of nil Covid cases. This was always going to be on the cards but with this came border lockdowns again causing more chaos for many, including many Victorians who found themselves trapped on the wrong side of the border.

The lack of harvest staff has continued to be a source of frustration for many growers as the traditional backpacker labour source has dried up, but other growers have reported that they have been able to access local labour to assist. The Government 'Harvest Trail' website has enabled some growers to directly access labour resources as well.

The summer has been fairly cool and wet compared to last year which has seen a reduction in the number of wildfires. January 2020 saw major wildfires across the Gippsland region but the south of the state has only seen a couple of 30C+ days this year. The North of the state has experienced some much warmer weather with associated Total Fire Ban days.

So as we head into 2021 I am sure we are all hoping that the year won't be quite so tumultuous as 2020 and the introduction of a vaccine will enable us to return to what we see as a more 'normal' life.



Hort Innovation Horticulture Sustainability Framework Discussion Draft

Hort Innovation would like to know your thoughts on the sustainability indicators proposed in the draft [Australian-Grown Horticulture Sustainability Framework](#). The Framework is funded by Hort Innovation and delivered by Roth Rural.

To complete the survey please visit:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HortSustainFramework>

For further information please [click here](#).

Your feedback is requested by **5 February 2021**.

If you have any queries, please contact:

Ingrid Ruth

Horticulture Sustainability Project Lead

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Did you know that PCA offers a range of Membership options?

Become a Member to access discounts, networking, referrals and to support PCA's role in advocating on behalf of the protected cropping sector.

There are four key categories of Membership:

Individual Membership - \$275 + GST

are personal memberships offered for small and medium growers and allied trade organisations.

They provide a range of benefits for an individual.

Corporate Memberships - \$1000 + GST

are structured to maximise benefits for the medium to larger grower and allied trade organisations. They include five Individual Memberships within the corporate 'bundle' and offer increased discounts and opportunities for participation and hosting of tours, webinars and conferences.

Student Memberships - \$50 + GST

are personal memberships for students studying protected cropping at recognised tertiary institutions. Students are encouraged to engage in PCA activities to build networks and access learning opportunities.

Subscriber Memberships - FREE

enable individuals to access information relating to the protected cropping sector.

See all benefits of membership at:

<https://protectedcropping.net.au/become-a-member/>

For enquiries about new memberships or upgrading from Individual to Corporate please contact:

Jo Archer M: 0417 114 311 or at

business@protectedcropping.net.au

New research: powdery mildew in strawberries

In November 2019, in a pleasantly warm polytunnel of young strawberries at Costa Berries East Devonport farm in Tasmania, a cohort of student, research team and industry began a study of powdery mildew disease with direct benefit to the strawberry industry.

Michele Buntain, Anna Mackintosh, Associate Professor Katherine Evans documented the project in the Summer 2020-2021 issue of *Soilless Australia* magazine. Here are the key research findings on treatments for powdery mildew in strawberries.

- Crop protection needs to occur early, before symptoms become apparent, especially when environmental conditions of temperature and humidity favour powdery mildew.
- Amending the spray program with potassium silicate (SARSil) had a positive effect, providing added suppression of powdery mildew and improving fruit quality.
- Substituting the single mode of action fungicide Systhane (myclobutanil) with the multisite fungicide Ecocarb (potassium bicarbonate) reduced disease severity.
- Foliar application of the potassium silicate product SARSil to strawberries results in leaf uptake of silicon whereas application to the growing media was less effective.
- Structures resembling the overwintering spore bodies of powdery mildew (chasmothecia) were found on leaves of tunnel grown strawberries in Tasmania, but no spores were present. This requires further research.

Implications and future research

- The improvements seen in powdery mildew suppression with SARSil amendment or exclusive use of Ecocarb in the fungicide program is a positive result. This has benefits for both mildew management and preserving the limited chemistry available by including these options as part of a resistance management strategy. The use of sulfur in the early program is an alternative that could be assessed.
- Poly tunnels in their current form remain an environmental bliss point for powdery mildew. Designs that allow better humidity management combined with tunnel orientation and siting for air movement are ideals that could improve strawberry powdery mildew management.
- Further investigation of powdery mildew inoculum sources in the whole lifecycle of the strawberry, from propagation to winter hygiene, could help reduce disease pressure.
- New technologies such as UV-light treatments offer exciting possibilities when teamed with more multipurpose automated application technology via automated tractors.



Research student Anna Mackintosh in a polytunnel at Costa Berries in East Devonport

Acknowledgements: Anna Mackintosh is a University of Tasmania fourth-year Agricultural Science Honours student and recipient of the Costa Honours scholarship. The Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA) and Costa Berries supported Anna's study of this increasingly important strawberry disease. Thanks to the team at Costa Berries, East Devonport, particularly Kaylia Marshall and Alejandro Haro, for their invaluable mentoring and assistance with the research trial. Anna's TIA supervisory team included Associate Professor Katherine Evans, Associate Professor Karen Barry and Michele Buntain.



Share your story with us!

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, *Soilless Australia*, is a great place to catch up on these stories.

If you've got something you'd like to share, or there's an issue you'd like addressed, we're all ears. Give Alyson Botha a call on 0487 003 363, or email Jennifer Stackhouse at editor@protectedcropping.net.au

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