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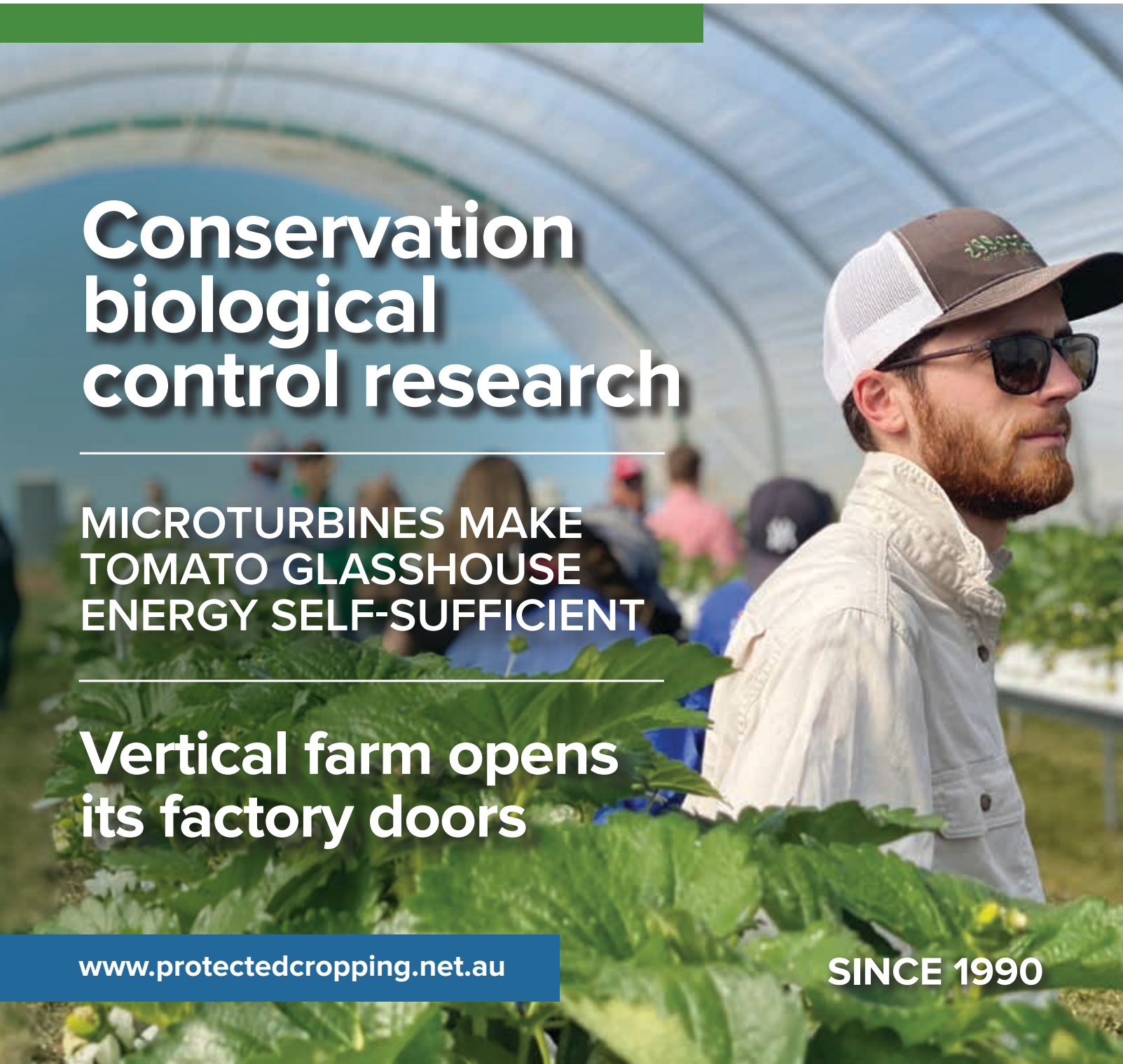

Conservation biological control research

MICROTURBINES MAKE TOMATO GLASSHOUSE ENERGY SELF-SUFFICIENT

Vertical farm opens its factory doors

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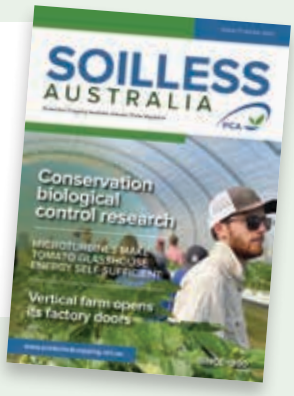
contents

FRONT COVER

Burlington Berries on show during the Cressy Field Day in Tasmania including its purpose-built strawberry tunnels. Read the full story on pages 14 and 30. Photo Jennifer Stackhouse.



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The field day included a visit to Burlington Berries for a discussion on IPM among the raspberry tunnels with manager Laurie Adams.

Berry growers field day at Cressy in Tasmania

Local and interstate growers gathered in late October in Cressy in Tasmania's picturesque northern Midlands to hear from researchers about the developments in IPM for the berry industry. Jennifer Stackhouse reports.

The berry day was organised by Fruit Growers Tasmania and co-ordinated by Berry Industry Development Officer, Mark Salter. The warm, sunny spring day and a packed program attracted more than 50 people including visitors from interstate. Talks and lunch were held at the historic Cressy Research Station followed by on farm visits to nearby Burlington Berries. As well as taking in lots of new information, the group was also treated panoramic views to the Western Tiers.

Understanding conservation biological control

The day started with a warm welcome from Kate Sutherland, Managing Director from Burlington Berries. Dr Jonathan Finch from the University of Tasmania (UTAS) was the first speaker. He outlined conservation biological control in rubus (raspberries and blackberries), which he described as a broad strategy that uses ecological principals to enhance the activities of predators in the crop.

"Conservation biological control is a cornerstone of an IPM approach and something we need to get cracking on," urged Dr Finch.

CBC is done by improving habitat, for example by planting flower strips to enhance the viability of predatory insects and reducing the use of broad-spectrum pesticides. Dr Finch urged growers to consider both the action threshold and choice of chemical when deciding to apply chemicals to control pests.

Researchers have been looking at the choice of flowers to include in flower strips (also known as nectaries or cover crops) and the location of these plantings. Including flowering plants near crops facilitates natural predators and helps make farms more sustainable and less reliable on chemical intervention.

The acronym SNAP is handy to remember when choosing flower plantings said Dr Finch. It stands for shelter, nectar, alternative prey and pollen which are critical to incorporate on farms for conservation biological control.

Shelter provides natural enemies with nesting, hunting and overwintering sites as well as protection in adverse weather. Nectar provides energy and keeps predators alive and in the area for longer meaning more pest control. It also aids reproduction so helps predator numbers increase.

Alternative prey is a little more complex idea, explained Dr Finch. "Basically, it is providing something for your predators to eat when you pests are not there.