

FEBRUARY 2021



Growing Undercover

PROTECTED CROPPING AUSTRALIA MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

A message from our Chair

Nicky Mann • PCA Chair

A big cheery welcome to our February "Undercover" e-newsletter. I trust the New Year is treating you well and you are managing to keep up with our weird and ever-changing world. I really sympathise with people especially growers and our allied trade members when they are caught up in "snap lock-downs" and all the planning in the world couldn't predict the situation we find ourselves in around the globe. I have taken a lot of comfort from the fact that producing food and being a part of the food chain deems us essential services so we can keep operating. This has been a real blessing but although we can keep operating our consumers and the market is definitely affected which in turn affects us and what we produce – so it is a catch-22!

We just have to take each day as it comes and try to plan for unforeseen circumstances as best we can. The Board of Directors PCA are here to help and listen to your concerns so please reach out to us for support and we will do our best to assist you.

In the past month, I have written a bunch of letters to local members, state members, agricultural ministers, shadow ministers plus spoken at length to various representative organisations at all levels including our own NSW DPI – trying desperately to lobby to get the NSW State Government to re-start the seasonal worker program. Every other State/Territory are receiving plane loads of Pacific Island workers to assist with the summer harvest. Yet, in NSW we are stuck with teams of people who have been in the country since August 2019 – they are homesick, tired and cashed up – however, feel guilty to leave on repatriation flights as they know the company and people they leave behind will not cope a normal summer harvest without them or without fresh incoming teams.

I have tried in vain to recruit locally but there seems to be a million reasons why people can't do the tasks required on a consistent basis. Luckily, we have finally had success with the NSW Government and they have agreed to allow the seasonal worker program to re-start, however, it will take another couple of weeks before anything actually activates and the process begins. However, persistence and determination has paid off and hopefully, relief is on it's way.

However, there is a feeling of trepidation as the new teams have no certainty of a return date due to the ever-changing landscape caused by COVID. Again, we have to take one day at a time and try to do the best we can. I am sure you are all feeling exactly the same way – constantly dealing with a lot of uncertainty. So I wish you strength and wisdom and I hope you make the best decisions for your family, your community, your business, your farm, your clients and your consumers! Good luck and keep on keeping on!

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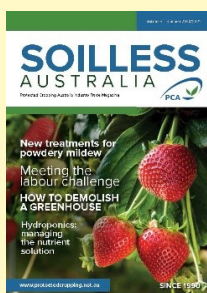
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What is PCA undertaking for our members in the Advocacy Area?

Matthew Plunkett • M: 0434 147 988

• Deputy Chair, Protected Cropping Australia

Matthew.plunkett@protectedcropping.net.au

One of the core functions of the PCA is to represent our members and ensure your voices are being heard on a range of issues affecting the protected cropping sector.

The PCA has and will continue to be pro-active in helping our sector respond to the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has presented. The PCA is providing ongoing advocacy on the labour shortages and supports other Peak Industry Bodies in advocacy efforts.

In addition, the PCA writes submissions on a variety of topics, including but not limited to labour shortages, export, biosecurity preparedness, government policy and develops partnerships with organisations that can co-fund member services or projects that can address these issues. The PCA receives regular requests from government, industry, and members for data on marketing, economic statistics, labour trends, the size of our industry and the contribution protected cropping is making to Australian Horticulture.

In short, the protected cropping sector does not have, or at this stage collects nationally specific protected cropping data sets that can answer some of these requests.

To address this gap, the PCA have had numerous meetings with Hort Innovation, Hydroponic Farmers Federation, Future Food Systems Cooperative Research Centre, and the Australian Government (to name a few) to determine how to address this issue.

The PCA, together with Hort Innovation and other partners convened a roundtable in 2019 to prioritise and formulate strategies for the protected cropping sector. A discussion paper was developed by the PCA entitled "Growing Protected Cropping in Australia to 2030" to assist with advocacy efforts.

This document can be found at:

<https://protectedcropping.net.au/about-pca/governance/>

This work led to the PCA advocating to Hort Innovation (the grower owned Research and Development Corporation) to co-fund (subject to final approval in 2021) a mapping project that could develop credible and verifiable protected cropping data sets that are ground truthed to ensure accuracy of the data.

The PCA have been working closely with the University of New England's team led by Andrew Robson and was a partner in a 2-year project proposal submitted to Hort Innovation in 2020 through the concept funnel for funding consideration.



Subject to funding and the tender being released, it is hoped that a national protected cropping map will be developed that can assist with advocacy and help our sector grow to meet the targets within the 2030 vision. The PCA will play an active role in communicating and extending the results of this project. This data will also be invaluable for the Horticulture Innovation protected cropping Research, Development and Extension strategy which is being led by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

It is anticipated that this strategy will be released for industry review in the first half of 2021 and the PCA encourages every member to comment and have input into this important strategy. In the coming months, the PCA will also be participating in the review of the Strategic Investment Plans for different levied commodities such as berries, vegetables and so on. It is critical that protected cropping research gaps are communicated and included in these plans in the future.

In addition to the mapping project, the PCA is looking at how protected cropping data can be incorporated into projects such as the Australian Hort Statistics Handbook (recently released).

In summary, why is this information important?

- **The PCA cannot lobby and undertake advocacy effectively if we do not have accurate statistics on the size, scope, and value of our sector**
- **Ability to provide timely data to our Corporate partners, including other peak industry bodies and most importantly our members**
- **Prioritise research and development gaps for further investment**
- **Assist Government with timely data in emergencies and biosecurity incursions**
- **Enable greater access to funding opportunities through better data to support such proposals**
- **Ensure investments are in line with the 2030 vision for our sector**
- **Can be used by our members in expansion of their enterprises**
- **Determine if the protected cropping sector will meet its target of becoming a \$2 billion industry by 2030**

Please reach out if you would like more details and all the best to our members.

Warm regards
Matthew

Two new members join PCA board

Two new Directors, Neil Miles and Michelle Mak, have joined the PCA Board bringing perspectives from either side of the continent.

Neil Miles is a qualified horticulturist with more than 18 year's experience and a deep understanding of agronomy, farm support practices and business development. He is Director and founder of Planted Passion, a privately owned company in Western Australia.



Michelle Mak is an Associate Lecturer in Protected Cropping at Western Sydney University in Richmond, New South Wales. She is an agricultural scientist specialising in sustainable agriculture for food security who considers herself an applied scientist her goals are always for solutions to reach growers and help businesses.



At WSU Michelle is working to develop and teach agricultural and horticultural science with a particular focus on developing coursework specifically tailored to the protected cropping industry. She is excited to see where our industry can build and prosper, especially in the areas of technology adoption, resource sustainability, workforce security, career development, export markets, data utilisation and agricultural literacy for consumers.

More information

To find out more about our new Directors see their full profiles in the Autumn issue of Soilless Australia magazine, out soon to all PCA members.

Contact **Neil Miles** at
neil.miles@protectedcropping.net.au or on
0429 599 977

Contact **Michelle Mak** at
michelle.mak@protectedcropping.net.au or on
(02) 4570 1376

Avoiding spray drift in blueberries

Blueberry Development Officer, Melinda Simpson, has released a new DPI Primefact guide: **Avoiding spray drift in blueberries**

The Primefact, published on the NSW DPI Horticulture website, under the Berries - Growing Guides section, outlines key issues to consider with spray equipment and calibration, to ensure the right amount of product is delivered to the desired area.

Topics include adjusting fan speed and spray water volume to match the canopy size and selecting the right nozzle for the job.

For more information contact
Melinda Simpson

Blueberry Development Officer

melinda.simpson@dpi.nsw.gov.au



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From further details of the glasshouse and associated equipment contact **Jon Ferguson** on **0457009990**

www.hortraco.com.au • (02) 9625 8333



Funding For Women's Leadership Development Available

Funding is available through Women & Leadership Australia to support the development of female leaders across Australia's agriculture sector.

The initiative is providing women with grants of between \$1,000 and \$5,000 to enable participation in one of three leadership development courses designed for emerging through to senior leaders.

The scholarship funding must be allocated by the end of March 2021.

Expressions of interest

Find out more and register your interest by completing the [Expression of Interest form](#) prior to **19th March**.

Transplant Systems new Sales & Services Specialist Appointment - NSW & ACT regions

Transplant Systems is pleased to announce the appointment of Andrew Harford as its Sales & Service Specialist for the NSW and ACT regions. Andrew joins a talented and experienced team of production nursery automation specialists that offers high-quality advice, consultation, quoting, sales, installation and strong after-sales service to the horticulture industry.

Andrew says, "With lifelong experience in the horticulture industry, I'm naturally excited to join the team at Transplant Systems. I'm looking forward to supporting the company's drive to provide 'best fit' production and automation solutions to Australian nurseries—utilising machinery and technology from our global suppliers: Urbinati, Demtec and TTA."



Welcome to our new members!

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

We look forward to many successful years together!

Individual Members

- Hayder Anmar, Manz Greenhouses
- Jason Chung, P&J Fresh Direct Produce P/L
- Mariske De Wit, Sunny Hill Flowers
- Aaron Heath, HMG
- Greg McCulloch
- Stuart Miller, De Sangosse Australia Pty Ltd
- Gavin Scurr, Pinata Farms
- Brad Skinner, Proptec Pty Ltd
- Saverio Virgara, Adelaide Hills Berry Farm
- Mark Wege, Abundance Fresh Farms
- Mike Woodrow, AiroFresh Intl

Student Members

- Stephen Elworthy, North East Estates
- Thomas McPherson
- Polani Shadur

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

Details of Membership options are available 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



Minister MacTiernan (centre) opening the new protected cropping structure at the Carnarvon Research Station in December 2020. The structure has a retractable roof.

Here's 'preview' article from the autumn issue of [Soilless Australia](#) magazine which is out soon to all PCA members as part of their membership.

WA research station gets funding boost

Protected cropping in the north of Western Australian has received a boost from the state government.

The Western Australian government has invested more than \$1.1 million into upgrading the Gascoyne Research Facility, now known as the Carnarvon Research Facility, in the north of WA.

The investment program is supporting an increased number of local horticultural research scientists at the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development including two researchers to pursue research opportunities for vegetable crops and subtropical fruit. Recent department appointments of leads for fruit and vegetable production will provide support for the researchers' work.

The Gascoyne irrigation district plays an important role in providing quality fresh produce to the domestic market including tomatoes, capsicums, sweet corn, mangoes, asparagus, melons, bananas, herbs and chillies, worth up to \$100 million per annum.

New Infrastructure

A high-tech shadehouse with advanced irrigation and misting systems has been installed, as well as a greenhouse with a retractable roof for environmental control and cyclone protection. Existing structures have been retrofitted with protective cropping netting.

A digital data network has been installed and connected to soil moisture meters. Water flow meters and new weather stations provide a demonstration site to encourage the adoption of data-driven information to aid growers' operations and profitability.

WA's Agriculture and Food Minister, Alannah MacTiernan, said the Research Facility's new assets, including the new shadehouse and irrigation system for trials of new tree crops such as lychees, longan, citrus and recently planted mangoes, opens up diversification and expansion options to industry.

"The digital data network has the potential to deliver transformational benefits to growers, who can now access valuable, real time information to improve water use efficiencies, reduce costs and increase profitability," she said. "We are particularly proud to welcome new scientists recruited to the department, including a researcher who is able to converse with the Vietnamese community, adding to the depth and service to the local industry, as well as a specialist fruit researcher."

"The region is an important fresh produce contributor to our food security, providing fresh produce to the domestic market with potential to expand into export markets to build industry growth, diversification and resilience."

"This investment in the Gascoyne horticulture industry, together with upgrades to the Frank Wise Institute at Kununurra, illustrates this government's commitment to reinvigorating agricultural research in the state's north," said Minister MacTiernan.



Field walk, led by Senior Research Officer Neil Lantzke, who is describing trials commencing under the newly refurbished, netted orchard structure at the Carnarvon Research Station.

THANK YOU TO OUR CORPORATE MEMBERS FOR YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT



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