



MAY 2021

Growing Undercover

PROTECTED CROPPING AUSTRALIA MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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Are you interested in speaking in the PCA 2021 program?

The deadline to submit your expression of interest to speaker at the 2021 Protected Cropping Australia Conference closes in one week. Submit your interest by **Friday 28 May 2021**, don't miss your chance to be part of this year's exciting program!

We encourage you to submit your interest to present an **oral presentation** for inclusion in the program, and to be a part of PCA Conference. For details on the submission criteria and instructions on how to submit please visit the [Submissions](#) page.

Specific themes of the meeting will include:

- Medicinal Cannabis
- Pollination
- Labour and Talent
- Education and Training
- Land Use Management and Approvals
- Plant Nutrition
- Water and Irrigation
- New Growers, an introduction to Hydroponics

We look forward to receiving your submissions and seeing you in Coffs Harbour!

SUBMIT YOUR INTEREST TODAY!

A message from our Chair

Nicky Mann • PCA Chair

Welcome to the May Growing Undercover Newsletter – I hope this newsletter find you all well, with enough labour, fair growing conditions and good demand in the market place.

I am not too sure where 2021 is going but it's definitely flying by, I'm sure most of us are already preparing for the end of the financial year and all budgets, planting schedules etc are set for the 2021/22 year.

Times are very challenging right now with huge and expensive delays on raw materials coming from overseas for the protected cropping sector ranging from glass, plastic, coir, rockwool, piping, steel, fittings, etc and some growers even reporting that there are rations on various products from suppliers due to the shortages and delays in freight. Labour is also in exceptionally short supply and some growers are changing their planting schedules, crops or strategies due to this limited resource. Here at Family Fresh Farms where I work – we have just paid for quarantine for 39 workers from Vanuatu – a huge but necessary investment – this has allowed some of our team members to return home to Vanuatu. Some of them had been in Australia since 6th August, 2019 – and will be returning to see children they have yet to meet face to face. However, it has been a life changing opportunity for them – turning one season and air ticket into 3 seasons of back-to-back work and allowing them to achieve goals they could have only dreamt of before. So there are always some silver linings.

Until next month – keep safe and well – and hopefully, we will see you at Hort Connections in Brisbane in June 2021 where PCA will have stand and the majority of our Board will be there to network and mingle with the greater horticultural sector.

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PCA Advocacy Update

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• Deputy Chair, Protected Cropping Australia

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As I write this article, the Australian Government has announced a significant boost in next year's budget for biosecurity that is welcomed by the PCA.

Exotic pest plant incursions have increased over the last few years. The horticulture sector has been crying out for further investment in plant biosecurity for some time.

In response to this need, the PCA joined Plant Health Australia (PHA) in 2019-20 as an Associate Member to have a voice, stay in the loop and communicate on emerging issues, particularly with regards to exotic plant pest incursions to our members.

I visited several growers in the Sydney Basin recently and Serpentine Leaf Miner is still a major problem. Damage was seen on cucumbers, eggplants, and capsicums. Many growers are struggling to control it.

In positive news, individual farms are improving biosecurity measures such as the use of better signage, use of a range of tactics including cultural, biological, and chemical control options together with improved farm hygiene practices.

One of the biggest complaints I hear from growers and industry is inadequate biosecurity surveillance at our ports and entry points into Australia and the need for an import levy to fund programs to ensure exotic pests are not entering Australia in the first place.

It is not fair that industry must fund the costs of managing these problems when they could have potentially been prevented in the first place, and it costs government and industry significant amounts of money to either eradicate a pest or transition to manage an outbreak if it cannot be eradicated.

Australia has an enviable record of pest free plant status and it is hoped that the budget announcements this week will assist in addressing some of these issues and protect our reputation. Any unusual plant pest or disease should be reported to the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.

Who is Plant Health Australia and what do they do?

Plant Health Australia is the national coordinator of the government-industry partnership for plant biosecurity in Australia.

The purpose of PHA is for government and industry to have a strong biosecurity partnership that minimises pest impacts on Australia, enhances market access, and contributes to industry and community sustainability.

The PHA also have some excellent resources for growers such as the farm biosecurity program managed in conjunction with Animal Health Australia.

Many of the online courses are free and can be found here at:

<https://www.planthealthaustralia.com.au/resources/training/biosecurity-online-training/>

If you would like to stay up to date, the PHA have a monthly newsletter entitled Tendrils and you can subscribe at:

<https://www.planthealthaustralia.com.au/subscribe/>

The PCA have also had constructive input into the development of the new PHA Strategic Plan and hoping PHA will update our members on a range of projects at our PCA Conference in October.

Advocacy with other Peak Industry Bodies-

The PCA Board have recently met with Berries Australia, AUSVEG and Greenlife Industry Australia to provide an update on a range of initiatives the PCA are advocating for.

It is pleasing that our Conference Committee have finalised a contra arrangement with Berries Australia for our respective conferences. Berries Australia are planning Berry Quest in 2022 and it is hoped that the PCA can broker other similar arrangements with other Peak Industry Bodies in the future.

On behalf of the PCA, I would like to thank AUSVEG, Berries Australia and our friends from the Hydroponic Farmers Federation for their support with regards to advocacy for prioritising the Greenhouse Construction Code in the National Construction Code.

Happy growing, stay safe and thank you for your support of the PCA.

Regards

Matt Plunkett

Your chance to provide feedback on your industry's Strategic Investment Plan

Hort Innovation has been consulting with the horticulture sector on each industry's investment priorities so that their Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) can be refreshed for 2022-2026. Each SIP lays the foundation for decision-making in levy investments and will help Hort Innovation prioritise and implement relevant R&D, international trade and marketing projects in the next five years.

The draft SIPs for all levied industries (with the exception of vegetables who are on a different timeline) will be available on the Hort Innovation website from Friday 21 May at www.horticulture.com.au/growers/sip-refresh.

Hort Innovation encourages levy-payers and other industry stakeholders to take the opportunity to review the draft SIPs and give their feedback. This can be done through the online feedback form available on the Hort Innovation website.

If you'd like to discuss the SIP in more detail, please contact your relevant Hort Innovation Strategic Industry Partner, whose details can be found on the Hort Innovation website.

The drafts will be available for two weeks until **COB Friday 4 June 2021**. Feedback provided will be reflected in the final SIPs which will be published in July 2021.

Workshop for Emerging Leaders a success!



Photo Acknowledgement: Prof Zhonghua Chen

At the end of April, students in the Graduate Diploma in Protected Cropping and MSc programs participated in on-site workshops at Western Sydney University – Hawkesbury campus. These workshops were part of the Emerging leaders in Protected Cropping program.

The workshops were related to units on Greenhouse Control Systems and Greenhouse Crop Production. The workshops are part of a blended learning program consisting of online lectures, tutorials and essential readings. In the workshops, participants were informed on aspects of greenhouse control and crop production by Western Sydney University academic and technical staff.

We were privileged to have very informative sessions from industry experts, including Graeme Smith (Graeme Smith Consulting), Dion Potter (Syngenta), Marcus van Heijst (Priva) and Bao Duy Nguyen (Sun City Produce). Engagement with the industry is an important aspect which contextualises the more theoretical learning which is necessary for students to have a deep understanding of plant processes and interactions.

Practical sessions for the workshops were held in the National Vegetable Protected Cropping Centre at WSU-Hawkesbury. Participants in the Greenhouse Control Systems unit worked with the NVPCC technical staff to learn about the Priva system installed at the facility. For the greenhouse Crop production unit, participants investigated aspects of crop growth related to plant nutrition and root / shoot temperatures. They were able to work with some high tech plant monitoring equipment which is used to measure aspects of crop health and plant photosynthesis, and also were introduced to the high tech world of plant genetic modification.

The workshop is the second for this program, the previous one being held last December. We are looking forward to the first cohort of students graduating from this program and moving on to make a positive contribution to the protected cropping industry in Australia.

For more information on this program;
Contact **Dave Randall:** david.randall@westernsydney.edu.au
Please [click here](#) to visit our website.

Produce protection for Queensland apple and pear growers

The Queensland Government has released details of the Horticulture Netting Program for apple and pear growers in the state.

Eligible growers will receive 50 per cent of the cost of purchasing and installing protective netting, up to a maximum of \$150,000.

The scheme will begin from **24 May 2021 and will operate until 30 June 2023** or until funds are fully exhausted. Applications will be assessed strictly in order of receipt from **24 May 2021**.

Fast Facts:

- The agreement with Queensland is a part of the 'Horticultural Netting Program - trial' included in the 2019 MYEFO.
- Eligible growers will receive 50 per cent of the cost of purchasing and installing protective netting, up to a maximum of \$150,000.
- Queensland produced 10 per cent of Australia's apples and 12 per cent of overall horticultural exports in 2019-2020.

For more information visit daf.qld.gov.au or phone 13 25 23.

PCA 2021 Webinar Series



Hopefully you were able to attend our recent webinar presented by Haifa with speaker Peter Anderson on some of the specifics of Hydroponic Nutrition and what to consider with product selection.

We have a number of webinar topics coming up also with speakers presenting on:

- Substrate and Irrigation Management
- Pollination under high tunnels
- Bee Health
- Lighting

And Agronomic Waste and Bio-stimulants.

Our subscribers get access to two webinars for free and our financial members have unrestricted access.

I look forward to seeing you at the webinars!

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Irrigation Audits carried out by PCA Board Members



Photo Acknowledgement: Tony Bundock



Photo Acknowledgement: Tony Bundock

Board members Matt Plunkett and Tony Bundock were in the Coffs Harbour region recently with their respective 'work' hats on. Tony and Matt were working together on behalf of Local Land Services to conduct irrigation audits for a range of growers in the region.

'The audits were the next stage of a programme following a Hort 360 survey that the growers undertook.

'The intent of the process was to evaluate the growers irrigation systems for operational efficiency and to identify where improvements could be gained' said Matt.

Nine growers were evaluated across a week long period, and the sites represented growers producing herbs, blueberries, raspberries and cucumbers using drip irrigation systems.

'The intent of the audits was always to evaluate efficiency by measuring a number of factors including Distribution Uniformity and working pressures. We were also able to talk to the growers about the triggers they were using to start irrigation and advise on alternate strategies' said Tony.

The results were recorded on an app called iauditor, which is a free app that is available through the apple store.

'Having the ipad in our hands allowed for instant electronic recording of results without running the risk of losing paper based recording. We intend to upload the template so that other growers can utilise this' said Tony.

The process identified mixed efficiencies in irrigation application from one grower who recorded an average of 95% to another who only scored 13%.

'The good thing about the audits is that has allowed growers to be alerted to any potential issues and rectify them ahead of the active growing and irrigation season' said Matt.

Reef Regulations

From 1st of June 2021, new cropping requirements and new industrial standards commence in the Great Barrier Reef Catchment areas!

New Cropping enterprises in the Great Barrier Reef Catchments may need an environmental authority permit because of new standards for Environmentally Relevant Activity - under the Environmental Protection Act 1994.

Any new horticulture/cropping operations in the Great Barrier Reef Catchments that are 5 hectares or more, that do not pass a crop history test will require an environmental authority permit prior to being able to commence new farming operations.

The new sediment and nutrient emission standard for new point source activities is also coming into effect.

Information sessions are currently being held in numerous locations for producers, advisors and anyone that is interested in understanding the new and ever expanding requirements coming into effect over the next few years.

For more information please visit:

www.qld.gov.au/environment/agriculture/sustainable-farming/reef/reef-regulations

Looking for farm loans, grants, scholarships or agriculture funding opportunities to develop your skills, expand your farming business or support in time of need?

It can often be difficult to find relevant farm funding and assistance packages. This Australian AgFunding farm database brings together funding programs relevant to Australian farmers, rural Australians and agribusinesses, from across government, educational, community and private institutions.

Whether you are in need of immediate assistance due to drought, flood or other disaster, looking at scholarship opportunities to undertake further study, or infrastructure investment to take your farm to the next level, there will be something in here for you.

Browse the AgFunding database by state or by area of funding, or use the search tool to discover and browse. We hope that by bringing all these funding opportunities together in the one place, the search will become easier to find a relevant grant, loan, subsidy, scholarship, or rebate for you.

<https://farmtable.com.au/grants-funding/>

The Australian Institute of Horticulture Awards 2020

The teaching team from Western Sydney University who spearhead the new courses offered specifically for the protected cropping industry have received the prestigious Award of Merit for 2020 from the Australian Institute of Horticulture.



Left to Right: Mr. Michael Casey (AIH President), Prof. Zhonghua Chen (WSU), Dr. Michelle Mak (WSU), Mr. David Randall (WSU), Mr. Matt Mitchley (AIH Secretary).

Due to Covid restrictions and considerations the Australian Institute of Horticulture Awards night was regrettably postponed until it could be held safely, albeit in a reduced capacity, mid last month. It was never the less an exceptional event showcasing some of the forward thinkers and talented visionaries in the horticultural industry. The location of the Ivy Penthouse with its beautiful backdrop of living greenery set the scene for what was a celebration of the NSW awardees who have worked tirelessly to bring about awareness of the importance of horticulture under a variety of theme areas. Prof. Zhonghua Chen and his team were recognised for their contributions in supporting the industry and raising awareness of the need for career path supported education options. Western Sydney University is leading the field in providing a smooth transition from high school and vocation education into higher tertiary education to support the industry's need to fill middle and upper management positions with locally trained talent. Keeping in the theme of education the awards event also celebrated the efforts of "Student of the Year 2020", Lauren Danecek (Certificate III Horticulture) of Ryde College TAFE NSW and the "Kim Morris Student Award of Merit 2020", Brook Toovey (Certificate III Horticulture) of Canberra Institute of Technology.

The Awards highlighted the lifetime achievements of Dr. Peter Valder in his service to horticulture, science, media and the community. This award was accepted on his behalf by the eloquent Judy Horton, leaving the audience moved by her recounts of his dedication, humour, kindness and exceptional intellect. A similarly impressive career is being forged by "Horticulturalist of the Year 2020", Mr. Clarence Slockee. Through his love for the horticultural industry, its people and the overarching passion to protect country and share knowledge, Mr. Slockee has promoted horticulture within the broader community through his work with the Botanical Gardens Trust and his television segments on Gardening Australia. There was not a dry eye in the awards room as Mr. Slockee humbly accepted his award, thanking all those who had mentored him during his career and reminded the audience of the important work still to be done supporting indigenous youth and culture through horticulture and conservation. This is of course, just a snippet of the awardees and their important work which the Australian Institute of Horticulture has recognised and continues to support. For full details of the nineteen awards presented including Awards of Excellence, Green Space Awards, Awards of Appreciation and the prestigious "Golden Wattle" and "Silver Gum" awards please visit www.aih.org.au/awards-2020/

Innovation in Adversity



360° VIRTUAL TOUR

Since day one, De Ruiter has been dedicated to the art and science of helping our customers bring products to market with pride. And our greatest source of inspiration is you. We're as deeply committed to collaboration as we are to innovation, so please enjoy this 360 degree virtual tour featuring our latest tomato varieties.

by Genie Bottas

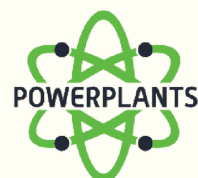
The De Ruiter Experience Center Australia has gone virtual! Click <https://deruiterexperiencecentre.com.au/vr/>, enter access code DECANZ and click submit to check out the latest from the glasshouse!

Adrian Simkins – De Ruiter Business Manager and Market Development Specialist knows how important it is for growers to stay ahead of the latest trials and trends. Traditional grower and innovation days were key to engaging with our customers providing opportunities for on-site collaboration, networking and education. Enter the global pandemic, lockdowns and travel bans throughout 2020 removed these opportunities and we were challenged with finding new ways to facilitate meaningful interaction. This wasn't just about posting links on social media that took you to a website loaded with information, the team wanted to showcase how varieties were performing under local conditions as if they were visiting on site and much more. To answer this challenge the team developed a 360° virtual tour where customers can experience and interact with all De Ruiter has to offer remotely. This isn't just an answer to the challenges brought on by the global pandemic, this is a place where our customers can engage with us on all topics including new varieties and education at their convenience. We will continue to add more digital support functions including virtual seminars such as 'The Masterclass Series' where Adrian will provide education about growing techniques and broaden the knowledge and skills of growers.

Adrian can now bring customers direct access to all the latest varieties from overseas faster and provide opportunities for growers to collaborate on a regular basis to share knowledge or ask questions about the De Ruiter range. Inside you can walk the rows to view the crops and watch informative videos out of the glasshouse. The hot spot function will show you a map of the glasshouse allowing you to quickly view any variety. The virtual experience is packed with information and visual content to inspire our customers for their next planting. It's simplicity of use makes it easy for our customers to enjoy all that De Ruiter has to offer right from the get-go. Community engagement is at the forefront of the De Ruiter culture and we continue to support local farmers having partnered with local grower, SA Tomatoes. The center is a traditional 7m high glasshouse with a raised gutter system, energy screen and misting system. There are currently 22 tomato varieties in trial with an annual production capacity of 57.6 tonnes. Adrian speaks with pride about the center, "The DEC provides us with a competitive advantage to showcase our products and to interact with our customers in a unique way. The feedback from the local growers has been exceptional and we are seeing increased traffic to the facility".

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