

OCTOBER 2020



Growing Undercover

PROTECTED CROPPING AUSTRALIA MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

INSIDE THIS MONTH'S ISSUE:

- Chair Message - 1
- Situation Reports - 2
- Membership and Marketing Committee Update - 4
- Member Resources and Events - 4
- Fall Armyworm Marches Across Australia Story - 5
- PCA Membership Options - 6

Tell us your story

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. The Summer edition is currently being created and rates and deadlines are available at:

<https://protectedcropping.net.au/publications/advertising/>

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 a call on 0487 003 363, or drop our editor, Jennifer Stackhouse, a line at editor@protectedcropping.net.au.

A message from our Chair

Nicky Mann • PCA Chair

Welcome to our valued members and subscribers of PCA and welcome to another "Undercover" newsletter.

Firstly, a big welcome to Alyson Botha, Shona Kennedy and Kerrie Harris-Spencer from ASN Events who have taken over the Secretariat and Administrative services of Protected Cropping Australia Ltd from 1st October 2020. I am sure many of you will get to know this team very well in the coming months. We will include their contact details at the end of this email should you wish to get in contact. We have luckily retained the services of the charismatic Jo Archer who will continue to drive the Marketing & Membership committee's strategic plan and look after members and advertisers for the *Soilless* magazine. Jennifer Stackhouse has also remained on-board with PCA and will continue editing and doing her magic with our quarterly magazine. Just a reminder the deadline for advertising and stories is Monday 2nd November 2020.

PCA has said farewell to Jan Davis and Megan Rodgers - we wish them both all the very best and thank them both sincerely for their contribution to our organisation. There will be an article in the upcoming *Soilless* magazine on Jan.

This newsletter is a little different, we've asked some of the Directors to give us a "sit-rep" (situation report) of their part of the industry to keep everyone up-to-date and informed. We hope you enjoy.....

Situation Reports - Industry Update



Nicky Mann • Chair and, in her other life, as WHS & Labour Manager for Family Fresh Farms, on NSW's Central Coast.

Nicky.mann@protectedcropping.net.au • M: 0404 921 209

As I write, it is pouring with rain and the radiation levels are extremely low..... It is kind of nice to get some reprieve from a busy and unrelenting production period that we have been in this season, but also negative in that supply levels can be disrupted by consecutive days of dull and overcast weather – so it is bitter-sweet. We have been fortunate that up until now the weather has been great and we have managed to keep disease and pest pressure under control. Therefore, quality and supply has been very positive this spring.

The only big ticket item on our mind and that of a lot of our neighbours and fellow growers is LABOUR! The shortage of skilled labour to harvest and process the crops is REAL and any effort to-date by state and federal governments have had little or no flow-on affect to ourselves or surrounding growers. We ran a 7 week advertising campaign looking for locals and received ONE genuine applicant – which we have employed and he is going tremendously well, but didn't fill the 20 jobs available. I am surprised as this is of national importance and directly relates to food security throughout Australia. Our current team is working very well and we have changed our production strategy to cope over the next 6 months but this is not a long-term solution. However, I encourage every single one of you to speak up and voice your concerns so that our leaders take our industry seriously. PCA wants to assist you but we need letters and examples for politicians to see first hand.

Tony Bundock • Treasurer and Director of PCA who runs his own consultancy and training business Genesis Horticultural Solutions based in Narre Warren South, Victoria.

Tony.bundock@protectedcropping.net.au • M: 0409 007 610

Being based in Metropolitan Melbourne has certainly presented plenty of challenges to running a business across the past few weeks. With strict lockdown protocols in place across the past 10 weeks travel has been highly limited, and don't even think about interstate travel!.



And that is a real issue when you run a training business that has predominantly relied on face to face training. So when you are presented with a roadblock, the best way forward is to work out how you can get over, under or round the obstacle. This has seen a lot of our work at Genesis Horticultural Solutions being delivered by video conferencing such as 'Zoom' so that we can keep the doors open.

On a positive note we have also been involved in training overseas with work being undertaken in India and United Arab Emirates to name a couple of countries. Coupled with this we now have many of our resources established on an online platform to make the training solutions more accessible to our customers.

But there are some things that can't be fixed with online solutions. Many of the growers in Victoria are facing severe issues with a lack of hands on workers with the supply of backpacker labour effectively drying up. This is seeing many growers withdrawing from replanting specific crops which will ultimately see a shortage of produce in the market.

Whilst there has been a lot of focus on the financial impact of Covid-19, there is also concern about the mental impact the whole pandemic and associated rules are having on everyone's health. As a collective, growers are a pretty resilient lot, but I know of a number of growers who really are at their wits end with the whole Covid-19 situation. Organisations such as Beyond Blue and the Blackdog Institute are doing sterling work in offering support to many.

However, with daily Covid numbers now in single figures, we are hopeful that these draconian lockdown measures will soon be eased and Victorian businesses will be able to function again.

Shané Steffen • PCA Director and Technical Sales Agronomist at Novum Lifesciences in Queensland.

Shane.steffen@protectedcropping.net.au • M: 0466 976 399

Delving back into the world of Agronomy, here is a little insight.

As a Technical Agronomist covering most of Australia, but traveling exclusively within Queensland at this moment, I support a wide range of growers, including those under Protected Cropping. Unfortunately labour is the topic of the year, some of customers have ample, some are returning seeds or fertilizer because it can't be guaranteed they can harvest the crop. This isn't region or crop isolated either, it doesn't matter if they're large or small, they're all worried of running short. You aren't alone out there and I encourage our members to contact your local growers association to lodge your labour requirements for the season in advance with their government initiative labour programs. It's hard to predict, it's hard to plan, but a plan is certainly better than none.

I've also noticed a heavy lean on Agronomic advice for Hydroponics and Protected Cropping. I want to highlight there are a number of Protected Cropping courses now available to assist you in making a well educated decision about your crop. I encourage any members that are curious to reach out to the institutions offering them, or us here at PCA if you aren't sure where to look first.



Andrew Potter • PCA Director and Head Grower for P'petual Holdings in South Australia.

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A word from South Australia, as the new season starts we've had some pretty erratic spring weather with light levels down around 20% for the month of September. Despite this the growers that are undercover with minimal climate control are busy applying shading paint in preparation for South Australia's hot and dry summer.

On the 28th of October the De Ruiter demonstration glasshouse in Virginia will be planted out with the latest tomato varieties on offer, the glasshouse will be open for visitors early 2021.

If you would like to arrange a visit please contact: Adrian Simkins E: adrian.simkins@bayer.com M: 0427 327 475

Good luck to all our PCA members for the coming summer season.

Marcus van Heijst • PCA Director and Melbourne based Account Manager for Priva Oceania

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In general terms we have seen low levels of investment in the greenhouse vegetable industry. This is most likely due to uncertainty surrounding restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. The effects of this has seen prices go up and down, as well as an effect on labour availability. Furthermore, with travel restrictions in places, it has been difficult to plan and realise projects.

The berry industry has been hit even harder, mostly due to uncertainty surrounding availability of seasonal labour - mostly backpackers.

The flower industry is one of the few industries that as a whole has seen a benefit from the large reduction in imported flowers due to the low level of international flights. This has been coupled with a strong demand in their products. Also the nursery industry in general has seen benefits from the fact that a lot of people have paid more attention on their gardens during lockdown and travel restrictions.

The medical cannabis industry has continued to develop, mostly with smaller projects being realised both in Australia and New Zealand. New Zealand is waiting on the outcome of the national cannabis referendum (due on 30 October).

Membership and Marketing Committee Update

Matthew Plunkett • Deputy Chair & Chair of Membership & Marketing Committee

Greater Sydney Local Land Services

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Thank you to all our members for their support throughout a very challenging year.

Business Development Manager

The PCA Board engaged Josephine Archer to develop and implement the PCA Membership and Marketing strategy with the aim of building and diversifying Membership and, importantly, enhancing the value PCA delivers to Members. PCA Membership continues to grow: currently we have over 1100 grower and allied trade Members and subscribers. Jo also works with the PCA team and corporate and allied trade Members to develop and deliver PCA's flagship quarterly industry magazine, *Soilless Australia*. Give Jo a call to discuss options for communicating with the protected cropping sector, identifying key services or becoming a Member. P: 0417 114 311 or business@protectedcropping.net.au



Member Resources and Events

The Membership and Marketing team have been working hard to deliver for our members and planning an exciting program for 2021.

Our webinar and virtual tours program commenced in July and has grown in popularity with over 320 attendees to date. There are two webinars left this year on pollination and alternative crops. The plan is to continue our webinars as a permanent offering for our members in the future and thanks to all our presenters.

Our PCA 2019 conference videos are now accessible on our website to watch at your leisure. Please see the link at (please sign on to get the member login): <https://protectedcropping.net.au/activities/conference/2019-conference-videos/>

Your membership entitles you to discounts on regional farm tours, conferences, and advertising. There is also discounts with Growcom and the Growing Undercover E-Newsletters will become more frequent to keep you in the loop.

One of the key roles of the PCA is to advocate for our industry on issues such as labour shortages.

Further information on member benefits can be found at: https://protectedcropping.net.au/wp-content/uploads/PCA-Membership_advert_August-2020.pdf

Similarly, if you have any photos or interesting articles you would like to share on social media please forward through and our team are happy to share them.

The Committee are also developing a draft regional tour program from February to June 2021. Events are being planned in Qld, NSW, Victoria, and South Australia so keep an eye out for these early in the new year.

Our team cannot wait to start our regional face to face tours and early planning has commenced for a potential PCA Conference in late 2021.

Your Membership and Marketing Committee

I would like to thank the Membership and Marketing Sub Committee members Shané Steffen, Andrew Potter and Marcus Van Heijst and Jo Archer together with other Directors for their work on the Committee to date.

Until next time, happy growing and all the best.



Fall armyworm larvae on corn.
Photo Adobe Photo Stock

Fall armyworm marches across Australia

Jennifer Stackhouse

Editor Soilless Australia

The worldwide pest, fall armyworm (*Spodoptera frugiperda*), known as FAW, arrived in Australia in February 2020 at that same time that the world's attention was focused on the spread of COVID-19. Like the virus, this moth and its larva rapidly spread across the country. It is now active across much of northern Australia from Bundaberg north and west to Geraldton with incursions reaching south into north-west New South Wales. It has been found on corn (foliage and cobs) and cotton as well as on rockmelon (fruit) but has the potential to feed on around 350 species including ornamentals.

FAW has spread from South America rapidly spreading through the United States to Africa (where it arrived in 2016) to parts of the Middle East, much of Asia and now Australia. Although it is a pest of warm climates, its spread is not restricted to the tropics and subtropics. During summer it can spread into colder areas. Each year it regularly spreads north from Florida and Texas in the US to Ontario in Canada but the cold winter conditions means it doesn't survive diapause in cold zones. With this pattern of activity recognised, there is every chance that FAW will reach all parts of Australia this summer and will be evident in gardens and parklands especially around coastal Australia. It could also spread to New Zealand.

AUSVEG held a webinar in late September to update horticulturists about the pest, how it can be identified and chemical controls. The take home message from the webinar was that FAW has come to stay and we need to learn how to manage it in a sustainable way. As the insect is resistant to Group 1 chemicals and pyrethrum gives poor control, spinosad is recommended. In cropping, chemicals including Match and Proclaim are recommended in combination with pheromone traps. The insect has a rapid life cycle with eggs hatching in just a few days. A key control, especially on sweet corn and maize, is to spray the foliage where egg clusters are laid. Time sprays just prior to hatching to kill the larvae when they are small and as they begin to feed before they disperse over the plant. Work is also underway to identify possible natural biological controls.

Key points

- Adult moths are nocturnal and can fly 100km in a night and up to 500km in their lifetime.
- Egg clusters can hatch in as little as two to three days in warm conditions.
- Around 350 plant species are targeted by this pest.
- It has the potential to spread across Australia especially during summer.



PCA offers a range of Membership options:

- Financial Individual Members are usually individual grower or smaller allied trade organisations
- Corporate Memberships are usually for larger grower or allied trade organisations. See our corporate members at <https://protectedcropping.net.au/our-partners/> A Corporate Membership 'bundle' includes five Individual Memberships and up to 10 Subscriber memberships
- Subscribers are non-financial members – usually smaller grower or allied trade organisations – who are welcome to upgrade to financial membership status to access PCA's full range of benefits and opportunities.

Details of Membership options are available at: <https://protectedcropping.net.au/become-a-member/> or by contacting:

Jo Archer M: 0417 114 311 or at business@protectedcropping.net.au

Growcom benefits PCA members

Queensland-based Growcom has more than 90 years of experience providing relevant and practical services to businesses in the horticultural sector. Protected Cropping Australia members can now benefit directly from Growcom's advice and services. Through Protected Cropping Australia's new Industry Membership with Growcom, eligible PCA members can now receive a 12.5 per cent discount on Growcom's specialised industrial relations products and services. The discount is available to financial individual and corporate members of PCA. PCA will advise eligible members directly to provide the discount code that needs to be quoted when accessing support.

For more information on Growcom:

The Growcom Membership Team

P: 07 3620 3844

members@growcom.com.au

www.growcom.com.au

admin@protectedcropping.net.au

www.protectedcropping.net.au

P: 03 8560 4391

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