

KANE BUSCH

Cultivating leadership skills



Photographs by Lisa Hayman.

An opportunity to grow his leadership skills has opened up a world of possibilities for East Gippsland farmer Kane Busch.

Kane is the Production and Marketing Manager of Busch Organics, a family-run operation that grows organic vegetables and lucerne on 81 hectares of certified organic land at Hillside on the Mitchell River Flats, west of Bairnsdale, Victoria.

As the fourth generation at the helm, he has witnessed a number of changes to the business since coming onto the scene seven years ago.

Kane, who oversees and manages the business' daily operations, says he had never been one to shirk hard work.

"There's a lot of responsibility that comes with this position and knowing the buck stops with me," he says.

"But I think that sense of wanting to continually improve and do better is part of the century-long legacy handed down by my family."

A growing leader

The chance to develop the skills needed to identify and pursue valuable network opportunities was what initially drew Kane to the 2016 Growing Leaders program.

He explained the program, which was recommended to him by a past graduate, had led him to a deeper understanding of how to lead with confidence and leverage his existing skills to improve his business.

The Growing Leaders National Vegetable

Industry Leadership Program focuses on developing personal, business and industry skills in emerging leaders in the Australian vegetable industry.

Run by Rural Training Initiatives, the program is conducted over six months, with participants involved in presentations by guest speakers, industry tours and skill development sessions on teamwork, conflict management, negotiation training, networking and managing people and projects.

Life-long skills

Since starting the program in April, Kane has noted a significant improvement in his ability to exercise effective leadership and problem-solving skills across all areas of his business.

"I already believed that I was a good leader, but now it's about refining this skillset as the business continues to grow and evolve," he says.

“What's pleasing is that these skills are immediately transferrable to the industry.”

"The program has also challenged me on an interpersonal level. It has helped me to discover my strengths and weaknesses, allowing me to better understand what makes me tick and how to use this to my advantage.

"What's pleasing is that these skills are

immediately transferrable to the industry. I'm finding myself constantly referring back to the handbook in a range of situations, which can't be a bad thing."

A leading component of the program is the opportunity for participants to work on a nationally strategic project that sees groups participate in three residencies.

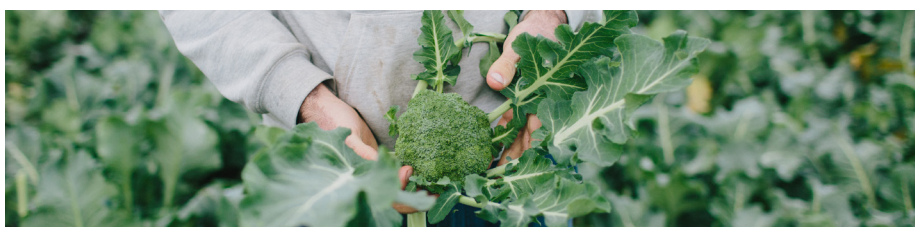
The final residency was held in Canberra in October 2016, where groups pitched their strategies to an industry panel.

"We developed a farm-tour kit designed to bridge the gap between the producer and consumer, while also addressing some of the misconceptions that exist in the industry," Kane says.

Summary:

- Victorian vegetable grower Kane Busch participated in the 2016 Growing Leaders program (Project VG15030) and is looking to develop his leadership skills not only to improve his business but also to improve the standing of the wider Australian vegetable industry.
- The national vegetable industry leadership program develops the skills of new and emerging leaders with a mix of theory, practical industry-based visits and discussion panels with industry experts.
- Growing Leaders has been funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia Limited using the National Vegetable Levy and funds from the Australian Government.

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FOSTERING LEADERSHIP IN THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY

Hort Frontiers is a strategic partnership initiative developed by Hort Innovation that facilitates collaborative, cross-horticulture projects. *Vegetables Australia* spoke to Hort Innovation Relationship Manager – Strategic Co-Investment Sharyn Casey about the Leadership Fund, one of the seven funds within Hort Frontiers, and how it will benefit the future of the vegetable industry.

A long-term focus and a desire to solve major and often complex challenges to secure the future of the Australian horticulture industry led to the establishment of Hort Frontiers – a strategic partnership initiative developed by Hort Innovation which incorporates seven funds that facilitate collaborative projects from a range of co-investors.

After extensive consultation with the horticultural industry around the key areas for cross-industry investment, seven funds were announced which focused on advanced production systems, Asian markets, fruit fly, green cities, pollination, leadership, and health, nutrition and food safety.

The Hort Frontiers – Leadership Fund was developed to address a vital gap in the industry. The fund is targeted at current and existing employees across the horticultural sector and aims to develop leaders in the industry to ultimately increase Australian horticulture’s competitiveness at the farm gate.

Hort Innovation Relationship Manager – Strategic Co-Investment Sharyn Casey said people are the key to the Leadership Fund and its success.

“This fund is about investing in people so that they can build their leadership skills and as a result, the industry will become more competitive, innovative, resilient and profitable,” she said.

“We’re focused on supporting people at all stages of their career to build their leadership skills.”

SUPPORTING CAREERS IN HORTICULTURE

There are several Leadership Fund projects underway for industry members.

One project focuses on attracting new people to the horticultural sector in partnership with specialist recruitment company Rimfire Resources. Final year university students of any discipline are invited to apply for an internship within a horticultural business for up to 12 weeks, and they receive a scholarship to undertake their internship, which will ideally transition to full-time employment.

Hort Innovation has also partnered with the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust to provide three scholarships per year to allow people the opportunity to travel overseas to a country of their choice and investigate a research topic which must have cross-

sectoral benefits to the horticulture industry. Applications for this scholarship open in February 2018.

Another project within the Hort Innovation Leadership Fund is the Masterclass in Horticultural Business, which is supported by the University of Tasmania, Lincoln University in New Zealand and the Wageningen Research Academy in the Netherlands. The Masterclass runs for nine months and includes three face-to-face components as well as online learning.

“Nine vegetable growers took up those scholarships to the Masterclass this year, and we’ve got 21 vegetable scholarships on offer for 2018,” Ms Casey said.

Other initiatives underway include an alumni program for industry members who complete leadership programs in the vegetable industry (such as the Growing Leaders program, a strategic levy investment under the Hort Innovation Vegetable Fund) or any individual industry leadership program. There are also scholarships to assist women in the industry to build their leadership skills, which is developed in conjunction with Women and Leadership Australia.

“We also have a scholarship program for PhD students run by the University of Tasmania, but it is open to PhD candidates across Australia who are enrolled at any university,” Ms Casey said.

“The aim is to offer a competitive stipend of up to \$40,000 per year, and we want to attract PhD candidates from disciplines who may have never considered a research career in horticulture before. The PhD candidates need to take on a topic that’s got cross-sectoral benefit; something that is quite transformational.”

INDUSTRY BENEFITS

Ms Casey said that the graduate engagement programs can allow the vegetable industry to attract new employees and students who may not have considered a career in horticulture before.

“It will help the vegetable industry overcome a skills shortage and it will help businesses that are keen to expand,” she said.

Ms Casey added that the Masterclass in Horticultural Business is helping the vegetable industry by enabling individual growers to participate in a program that boosts their business skills.

“They’ll be able to take that back to the farm and either enhance



their own business or start a new business that they’ve been keen to start, but perhaps just needed a few more business skills to do so.”

GETTING INVOLVED

Hort Innovation is constantly on the lookout for project ideas, and Ms Casey encourages growers and industry members to submit any ideas through the Concept Proposal Form on the Hort Innovation website.

“Growers know what they need in terms of leadership development,” she said.

“I’d encourage anybody to fill the form out. It doesn’t have to be long and detailed; it just gives us an idea of what is currently missing in the leadership landscape. And that’s what we’re looking for.”

R&D Hort Frontiers – Leadership Fund

INFO

To submit an idea for a future project, visit Hort Innovation’s Concept Proposal Form at horticulture.com.au/concept-proposal-form. *Vegetables Australia* will profile each Hort Frontiers Fund in further detail in future editions of the magazine.

For more information, please visit horticulture.com.au or contact Sharyn Casey on 02 8295 2379 or sharyn.casey@horticulture.com.au.

These projects have been funded by the Hort Frontiers Leadership Fund, part of the Hort Frontiers strategic partnership initiative developed by Hort Innovation, with funding from a range of co-investors and contributions from the Australian Government.



AUSTRALIAN-MADE IRRIGATION FOR AUSTRALIAN GROWERS



Neptune™
Australian made heavy wall drip tube



Aqua-Traxx®
Premium Australian made drip tape for row crops



Waterbird®
Mini sprinklers designed and manufactured in Australia





Photography by Luka Kauzlaric.



A YOUNG STAR ON THE INDUSTRY HORIZON



NAME: Olivia Ryan
AGE: 21
LOCATION: Ballarat, VIC
WORKS: McCain Foods Ballarat

HOW DID YOU FIRST BECOME INVOLVED IN THE POTATO INDUSTRY?

I first became involved in the potato industry with McCain in June 2016. Prior to this I had completed industry placement during my time at Longerenong Agricultural College in Victoria with local agronomists who worked with potato growers and found this very interesting. When I saw the job advertised at McCain I did not hesitate once about applying for it and have never looked back. Coming from a sheep and cattle property and studying mainly broad acre cropping, getting a job in the potato industry was a massive step for me in my career and I have loved every day of it.

WHAT DOES YOUR ROLE AS AN AGRONOMIST AT MCCAIN INVOLVE, AND WHAT ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES?

- Communicating with all McCain growers in Victoria and South Australia to help deliver the best quality raw product to the factory.
- Helping with variety trials and product trials.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT WORKING IN THE POTATO INDUSTRY AND HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN YOUR ENTHUSIASM?

I enjoy working in the potato industry as it is a challenge for me and it is something that I am pretty new to. I hope that I can meet and exceed any goals set for me by McCain and the growers.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU FACE WORKING IN THE INDUSTRY, AND HOW DO YOU OVERCOME THEM?

During my time at McCain, I haven't faced any really big challenges so far. It has been very easy to step into my role as the growers have been very easy to get along with and to work alongside.

WHERE DO YOU RECEIVE YOUR ON-FARM PRACTICE ADVICE AND INFORMATION FROM?

I receive help and advice from my colleagues at McCain as well as other local agronomists. Also I have completed training through McCain.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM YOUR STUDIES AT LONGERENONG AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE AND HOW HAS THIS HELPED IN YOUR CURRENT ROLE?

During my time at Longerenong College I completed an Advanced Diploma in Agriculture and a Diploma in Agronomy.

During this I learnt numerous things that helped me to achieve what I have today. As Longy isn't your typical university-type learning, I felt it suited me very well as it was more of a practical, 'hands-on' type learning. As it is in the heart of the Wimmera, we never learnt about potatoes and it was mostly broad acre cropping enterprises and some livestock. The basic background knowledge of soil health and nutrition, as well as other areas of study, are very similar to that of growing potatoes which has helped give me a good base to step into the potato industry.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT AREAS OF RESEARCH ARE IMPORTANT TO THE POTATO INDUSTRY AND YOUR BUSINESS?

Research is extremely important in the potato industry. To McCain, research into new varieties is very important as this comes with a lot of other benefits such as disease resistance, improved quality and lower inputs.

WHAT NEW INNOVATIONS, RESEARCH AND/OR PRACTICES HAS YOUR BUSINESS IMPLEMENTED RECENTLY?

At McCain we are always looking for and trialling new and different ways to help increase quality and efficiencies with our growers.

YOU RECENTLY TRAVELLED TO CHINA AND EARLIER THIS YEAR TO NEW ZEALAND AS A MCCAIN REPRESENTATIVE. WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THESE TRIPS, AND WHAT DID YOU LEARN AS A RESULT?

During my trip to New Zealand in February, I was taken around with other McCain agronomists and looked at

how they harvest, trials and also the tomato potato psyllid in the field. During my visit to China, I helped with their raw potato testing/grading before storage and learnt about what issues they face compared to Australia and how these are overcome and if we can implement anything from China back in Australia.

WHERE DO YOU SEE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH IN THE AUSTRALIAN POTATO INDUSTRY?

The main growth in the potato industry will come from research and development into varieties, products and technology, and will help growers to produce a more efficiently grown potato to the standards that are required.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS?

At McCain in the same role I am in today as I thoroughly enjoy it. I hope to learn as much as I can about the industry to help McCain growers perform to their best ability.

HOW DO YOU THINK MORE YOUNG PEOPLE COULD BE ENCOURAGED TO STUDY AND TAKE UP JOBS IN THE POTATO INDUSTRY?

I think the key point here is exposure to the potato industry as it is a smaller industry in Australia compared to grain production etc. I think a lot of people don't understand how much is involved in growing and producing potatoes as they are not aware of how many tonnes are actually produced here in Australia. It is a very specialised industry with plenty of room for growth in Australia.



COVERING ALL BASES OF SEED CERTIFICATION



NAME: Luke James
AGE: 37
LOCATION: Yarragon, Victoria
WORKS: VICSPA
(Senior Certification Officer)

HOW DID YOU FIRST BECOME INVOLVED IN THE POTATO INDUSTRY?

I am a qualified horticulturalist and trained at the University of Melbourne's Burnley School of Horticulture. I have been in my current role with ViCSPA for over 10 years (with a three-year break a few years ago).

WHAT DOES YOUR ROLE IN THE BUSINESS INVOLVE, AND WHAT ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES?

I am a Senior Certification Officer for ViCSPA. My role in the business involves all facets of seed potato certification. My district covers eastern Victoria from Kinglake to West Gippsland, East Gippsland, South Gippsland, Central Gippsland and north-east Victoria.

My tasks include potato cyst nematode (PCN) soil sampling, field crop inspections, leaf sampling, tuber inspections and various other roles.

Providing training is a significant responsibility – training other ViCSPA staff as well as interstate and international certification officers. I recently returned from New Zealand after conducting certification training for NZ potato inspectors.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT WORKING IN THE POTATO INDUSTRY AND HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN YOUR ENTHUSIASM?

I enjoy working outdoors and getting dirty, and production horticulture. The work we do is the basis of the whole potato production system for Australia and supports trade both domestically and exports overseas.

My work is very autonomous; on a daily basis, I work by myself with individual growers but have the support network of our fantastic office staff and management.

In this role you need to be self-motivated. I have a young family – Angus, who is three years old and Angelica (four months) and this is more than enough motivation to keep your enthusiasm up. But it is always good to see certified seed that meets the conditions of the scheme and is really good seed that is produced by professional seed growers.



WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU FACE WORKING IN THE INDUSTRY, AND HOW DO YOU OVERCOME THEM?

Biosecurity is the industry’s biggest threat. Pest and disease incursions can devastate production systems and have massive ramifications on the industry.

Disease threats such as metalaxyl-resistant late blight are also a massive concern.

Reporting anything unusual or symptomatic is essential to maintaining a healthy potato industry. Having clear and transparent communication is always important when handling suspicious plants. In doing so, we work closely with relevant state departments and laboratories.

Internally, we keep informed on issues and have awareness of disease and pest symptoms in the field. Biosecurity is something I take very seriously as a crop inspector.

WHERE DO YOU RECEIVE YOUR PRACTICAL ADVICE AND INFORMATION FROM?

I receive a lot of my information from my colleagues both here and abroad. ViCSPA has strong international connections, vast and varied, with our General Manager Dr Nigel Crump attending regular UNECE meetings. This is where countries from all over the world attend to discuss all things seed potato related. I attend and arrange workshops and presentations throughout the year. The ViCSPA biannual potato industry conference also provides a wealth of information with presenters from across the globe.

Most recently, we’ve spent time with Willem Schrage, the

director of the Potato Program for the North Dakota State Seed Department, and Dr Steven Johnson, a crops specialist with the University of Maine when he visited late last year.

WHAT AREAS OF RESEARCH ARE IMPORTANT TO THE POTATO INDUSTRY AND SEED CERTIFICATION?

Disease management and diagnostics are essential areas of research for seed potato certification. This includes diseases such as powdery scab, late blight, pink rot and potato virus Y. The list could be endless, but the main point is to have the researchers there for problems that could arise in the future rather than the current trend of a declining number of researchers not having funding and industry losing that technical skill set that is critical for our industry. This to me is a massive issue on the horizon and a challenge that must be addressed.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF SEED CERTIFICATION IN THE POTATO INDUSTRY?

Seed certification is as important as water, fertiliser or sunshine and is essential to growing a crop. Seed potato certification provides reliable high health planting material for increased yields and product quality for production of commercial crops in the fresh and processing industries.

Ultimately, seed certification is an extremely successful practice for the management of diseases that limits yield and quality as well as reducing the reliance on the use of pesticides to manage pest problems.

Importantly, seed certification restricts the spread and introduction of potato pests and diseases including pests such as



PCN, black leg and other diseases. It also protects trade, both interstate and export.

WHAT NEW DEVELOPMENTS, INNOVATIONS OR RESEARCH HAS VICSPA IMPLEMENTED RECENTLY?

I have recently returned from Canada with A&L Laboratories in London, Ontario and learnt about the emerging use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and NDVI technology for crop scouting and disease detection in potatoes.

Internally, ViCSPA has achieved compliance with ISO9001:2015 *Quality management systems – Requirements*, which demonstrates the organisation’s commitment to quality assurance and compliance. ViCSPA records are all centralised on our Certmaster database which has been built by ViCSPA and continues to streamline all our data and record management including the issue of certification labels.

WHERE DO YOU SEE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH IN THE AUSTRALIAN POTATO INDUSTRY?

Opportunities are increasing with expanding export market access potentially opening for the certified seed potato industry.

Commercial potato growers in all areas of fresh, processing or crisping need to embrace the benefits of using certified seed potatoes in their production systems, and the improved yields, quality, storage and saleable product. I see this as a massive opportunity.

Domestically, the health benefits of potatoes need to be featured more heavily – like everything else, they become trendy again and an increase in consumption is a win-win for the consumer and the farmer.

Potatoes are full of vitamins and are very low in fat, low in calories, rich in minerals and contain complex carbohydrates and high grade iron. They are, in my opinion, a true super food that taste great.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS?

Five years is a very long time in the potato industry. I am still enjoying the challenges of the industry and I continue to be given amazing opportunities to learn and travel as part of my role. I also enjoy sharing my knowledge with others. Just between you and I, I have the best job in the world.

WHAT IS YOUR VISION OF THE AUSTRALIAN POTATO INDUSTRY IN THE FUTURE?

I hope that the potato industry remains profitable into the future and there are more opportunities for using Australian certified seed in both domestic and international markets. I get to work with highly professional potato growers and if their business is doing well then the entire industry benefits.

HOW DO YOU THINK MORE YOUNG PEOPLE COULD BE ENCOURAGED TO STUDY AND TAKE UP JOBS IN THE POTATO INDUSTRY?

The industry needs to stop talking itself down, and start selling its positive aspects. It is a great industry that we work in and certified seed potatoes are a critical part of the food production chain.

Personally I enjoy telling my mates at the footy that I played a part in producing their hot chips.





A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON VEG PRODUCTION



NAME: Andres Cruz
AGE: 35
LOCATION: Heatherton, Victoria
WORKS: Butler Market Gardens
GROWS: Herbs, spring onions, leeks, Asian vegetables, oak lettuces and rhubarb

HOW DID YOU FIRST BECOME INVOLVED IN THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY?

I decided to study agronomy, mainly because I always pictured myself working outdoors and around nature. My mother had a big influence on me – she always shared her stories about growing up on a farm. We as a family always lived in the city, but she made sure every year for the family veggie garden we chose a vegetable to grow and look after.

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN THE BUSINESS?

I am the Technical Manager and Agronomist. As the Technical Manager, I'm responsible for technical compliance and quality assurance by achieving optimal food safety and customer compliance under the various standards within the Australian fresh produce industry. I also review and maintain the Food Safety and Quality Control systems.

My role as an Agronomist is to provide agronomy and technical support to production by working constantly in production planning, variety selection, update of agrochemical programs and advising on crop management and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programs for hydroponics crops.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT WORKING IN THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY, AND HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN YOUR ENTHUSIASM?

I like that our production cycles are shorter, so it's always busy. There's always a new crop being sown in the ground, another germinating, emerging, reaching maturity, in harvest, etc.

You get to see all the growing stages in a day if you wish. New technologies and more sustainable ways to grow our produce keeps me excited. There's always something to learn either by a mistake that you wish you didn't do or by reading a new paper online or travelling around the world to see what's out there that you haven't considered yet.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU FACE WORKING IN THE INDUSTRY?

At the beginning, because you looked young it felt like you needed to prove constantly that you knew one or two things about farming. Experienced growers have a vast knowledge so it's understandable to second guess the younger generation, but I feel through hard work and by being responsible and passionate, your voice gets louder and we are able to coexist and cooperate successfully.

WHERE DO YOU RECEIVE YOUR ON-FARM PRACTICE ADVICE AND INFORMATION FROM?

I studied agronomy at Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaiso in Chile and that gave me a good strong base of knowledge. I graduated nine years ago and the experience of working always in the vegetable industry has helped me a lot. I'm honest when I say I'm a frequent user of AUSVEG website resources, along with other universities and research institutions.

YOU TRAVELLED TO SOUTH AMERICA AS PART OF THE 2016 YOUNG GROWER INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT MISSION. WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS EXPERIENCE?

There are so many things that stick with you when you travel, like new friends, graphic memories and cultural exchanges. From Brazil, I was amazed to see very small growers (less than five hectares) covering a high percentage of the vegetable market industry (in Sao Paulo they represent 80 per cent of the market) and through specialty and niche

markets they can sustain their farms, which is quite impressive.

In Argentina, greenhouse growers around La Plata (Buenos Aires) are using many cultural practices and a reduced amount of spraying – they have taken IPM to the next level. The reason behind this is that many pests have become resistant due to many years of over spraying and bad practices. It's a good lesson to learn, because in the long run it pays off to be more sustainable.

In Chile, they maximise their water use efficiency by cropping most of their vegetables with drip lines and, whenever possible, in combination with mulched beds. It's something that I think should be the standard practice anywhere where water is in limited supply.

WHAT AREAS OF RESEARCH ARE IMPORTANT TO THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY AND YOUR BUSINESS?

I personally feel we need to re-educate consumers in relation to what makes a vegetable marketable. Growers put a lot of hard work into growing, but sometimes the weather is not on your side and the amount of produce wasted in farms because of unrealistic customer specifications is quite considerable. My philosophy is: "A few holes or marks won't take the good out of the veggies."

WHERE DO YOU SEE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH IN THE AUSTRALIAN VEGETABLE INDUSTRY?

It is always interesting to find new crops for a demanding market; finding the dream "niche market" as they say. I believe there are opportunities for native edible plants to break through the market as they have adapted much better to the local climate and they add a sense of belonging to the land as well. Now this might have sounded a little bit hipster, but I live in Melbourne.

AS A VEGETABLE GROWER, WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENT SO FAR?

Being able to grow vegetables in different parts of the world like Chile, New Zealand, Germany and Australia.

From my experience in Australia, I will have to mention our hydroponic project that started in June 2015 with one greenhouse at Butler Market Gardens under a Nutrient Film Technique (NFT) system. We grew a wide range of herbs which allowed us to experiment with different varieties, the setup, and the nutrient solution, as well as become familiar with the different pests and

diseases. After a couple of months, we had it successfully running under an IPM program where the main pest control is made by releasing biological controllers and commercially producing basil, watercress and mint. This autumn, the second and third operational greenhouse will be producing a wider range of herbs.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS?

Hopefully here in Australia and working in the vegetable industry. I'm attracted to new challenges and learning from new crops so, more than spatially, I'd like to see myself in a place where I feel my knowledge about farming has been extended and I'm more connected to integrated farming and sustainable development. As an agronomist, you never stop learning.

WHAT IS YOUR VISION OF THE AUSTRALIAN VEGETABLE INDUSTRY IN THE FUTURE?

I can see Australia getting bigger in sustainability. There are many studies about reduced tillage or no tillage, permanent beds, cover crops, beneficial insects, etc. While in Australia, I've been able to attend field days and see the benefits from those practices which influence the way in which you grow your crops.

HOW CAN MORE YOUNG PEOPLE BE ENCOURAGED TO TAKE UP JOBS IN THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY?

Last year, I participated in the Urban Agricultural Forum in Victoria and I was able to meet a lot of young people interested in farming all across the country. I think we are seeing a current trend in people wanting to engage more with vegetable gardening or knowing how their food is being farmed. We should promote their voice and let the young farmers share their stories. I think it works by diversifying the messenger and how the message is presented to young people.

R&D Drive Train INFO

The 2016 Young Grower Industry Leadership and Development Mission was funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia Limited using the research and development National Vegetable Levy, contributions from Australian vegetable growing businesses and funds from the Australian Government.

Project Number: VG15703



SAMANTHA LIZARS: PAVING THE WAY FOR QUALITY IN THE LEAFY VEG INDUSTRY



NAME: Samantha Lizars

AGE: 24

LOCATION: Lindenow, Victoria

WORKS: Bulmer Farms

GROWS: Baby spinach, baby leaf varieties, baby broccoli, iceberg and cos lettuce

HOW DID YOU FIRST BECOME INVOLVED IN THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY?

After completing my Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) in 2011, I secured an agri-food traineeship through the East Gippsland Food Cluster. The traineeship gave me the opportunity to work within three local businesses, two of which were vegetable farms.

WHAT DOES YOUR ROLE INVOLVE, AND WHAT ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES?

As Quality Supervisor in the pack house, I am responsible for ensuring all produce and processes undertaken meet our

customer's requirements as well as meeting regulatory, industry and international standards.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT WORKING IN THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY AND HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN YOUR ENTHUSIASM?

I love being surrounded by fantastic fresh food. I think quality assurance and provenance are very important. Australia has a great reputation for producing world-class, safe, quality fresh food. Being able to validate that process is something I am passionate about. I get to work with a great group of people who keep me motivated in my role.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU FACE WORKING IN THE INDUSTRY, AND HOW DO YOU OVERCOME THEM?

One challenge that is within the industry is dealing with people who struggle with constant evolution and change. The second challenge is outside the industry and that is the disconnect between the producer and the consumer. Many consumers have a limited understanding of the processes undertaken to produce the quality fresh food that they eat day in and day out.



Photography by Lisa Hayman.

YOU RECEIVED A VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT YOUNG FARMERS SCHOLARSHIP IN DECEMBER 2017. WHY DID YOU APPLY FOR THE SCHOLARSHIP, AND HOW WILL IT BENEFIT YOUR FUTURE IN THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY?

The Young Farmers Scholarship will give me the opportunity to develop my career pathway, which was previously limited by a lack of formal qualifications.

As part of my ‘Upskill’ component of the scholarship, I will undertake the Diploma of Food Safety Quality Assurance Management. On completion, I will be able to implement the world’s best practices and processes in food safety and quality. I will have developed the knowledge to be able to action the food safety needs and improvement opportunities that are specific to our business. It will allow me the capability, confidence and training to grow from a supervisor position into front line management.

WHERE DO YOU RECEIVE YOUR ON-FARM PRACTICE ADVICE AND INFORMATION FROM?

My current Pack House Manager, who was my mentor during my traineeship. Both my senior managers and our resident agronomist are fantastic to work with and offer lots of support and encouragement.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT AREAS OF RESEARCH ARE IMPORTANT TO THE INDUSTRY AND YOUR BUSINESS?

Growing, harvest and postharvest technology to increase production efficiencies within the industry; extending shelf life and quality of produce through plant breeding and technology; continued research into pests and diseases which have an

impact on the appearance and overall quality of produce that ultimately impact the bottom line of the business; and understanding the necessary practices to reduce the risk of microbiological outbreaks, as these can be detrimental to human health and therefore the industry.

WHAT NEW INNOVATIONS, RESEARCH OR PRACTICES HAS YOUR BUSINESS IMPLEMENTED RECENTLY? WHAT ARE YOU DOING DIFFERENTLY TO OTHER GROWING OPERATIONS?

The purchase of equipment to improve our processes on-farm, such as the Sormac wash line and drying tunnel (first to implement in Australia) and a state-of-the-art Ramsey Highlander harvester.

We work closely with seed companies and breeders to trial new varieties specific to Australian conditions. We have adopted an online farm management program, allowing for real-time information to be instantly available.

We are currently in the process of assessing predictive weather stations and soil moisture probes for our farm to improve crop management.

WHERE DO YOU SEE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH IN THE AUSTRALIAN VEGETABLE INDUSTRY?

Export and value-adding products, as well as the promotion of healthier diets, which encourages people to eat more fruit and vegetables to combat the obesity and diabetes crisis within Australia.

Also, the development of nutraceuticals, which are products derived from food sources with extra health benefits in addition to the basic nutritional value found in foods. Using surplus and

aesthetically imperfect vegetables to create nutrient-dense products will assist in reducing food waste, developing longer shelf life products and achieving healthier alternatives to snack and convenience foods.

It revolves around using food waste such as hail-damaged product that is not visually appealing to buyers, extracting the nutritional value and using it in products such as multi-vitamins, baby formulas and snack foods.

It is a growth opportunity for Australia’s fruit and vegetable industry to be involved in, as well as being able to use these products for export.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS?

I plan on continuing to progress my career within the Bulmer Farms business. I would like to move from a supervisor level

position to a management role where I am actively participating in the front line management of Bulmer Farms.

HOW DO YOU THINK MORE YOUNG PEOPLE COULD BE ENCOURAGED TO STUDY AND TAKE UP JOBS IN THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY?

I believe young people are not fully aware of how many wonderful job opportunities there are in the horticulture industry. The horticulture industry is just like any other industry; it requires people of all different skill sets, from higher level management to hands-on roles.

However, this is not the general public’s perception of the industry. High schools in horticulture regions should be working with students and encouraging them to explore pathways within the horticulture industry.

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Photography by Jessica Liebrechts.

EMBRACING ON-FARM AND BUSINESS GROWTH



NAME: Mitchell East
AGE: 24
LOCATION: Manjimup, Western Australia
WORKS: Willara Gold
GROWS: Broccoli, passionfruit, avocados and fat lambs

HOW DID YOU FIRST BECOME INVOLVED IN THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY?

I am a third generation vegetable farmer. My family has been farming in the region for over 60 years and I was raised on the farm. As a young boy I was always around what was happening on the farm, driving tractors, picking vegetables and learning invaluable skills. This gave me a practical skillset that has helped me throughout my life.

Although I wasn't always interested in the farm – as I grew older I wanted to experience other things and further my knowledge, so at 18 I left for Perth. After five years of studying and working in the city I decided I wanted to be a part of

WHAT DOES YOUR ROLE IN THE BUSINESS INVOLVE, AND WHAT ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES?

Over the past two years, I have been growing and managing a passionfruit crop which I am planning to expand this year. I am also looking to take on the broccoli program and hopefully implement some new practices. The rest of the time I take care of day-to-day management of the farm, from general maintenance to managing a crew of backpackers each day. The jobs on the farm change all the time as we have an array of tasks.

Broccoli and sheep are our main contributors but we are venturing into avocados and passionfruit. This is uncharted territory for us as we have always been vegetable growers, so fruit growing is a whole new ball game and has involved a lot of research. I am rapidly learning and taking on new challenges each day; it keeps the job interesting.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT WORKING IN THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY AND HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN YOUR ENTHUSIASM?

I love that this industry offers me the opportunity to be creative – I feel that to be an effective farmer, you have to be willing to try new

things and being creative is a great way to do this. The industry is very exciting at the moment with so many new advances in technology and new practices. It's always motivating to see other people working on new ways to benefit the industry.

At times the work can be solitary and more so in the cold winter

months – I find a couple of weeks' respite helps to crank up the enthusiasm for the rest of the year. One of the best parts about the industry is going to see your product that you have taken so much time to perfect, be sold at the market or in a supermarket. At this point you realise that you have done your job well knowing that someone wants to spend their money on a vegetable you supplied.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT AREAS OF RESEARCH ARE IMPORTANT TO THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY AND YOUR BUSINESS?

Research into new software for drones and robotics could lead to greater efficiency. This could be used to predict the yield of crops and map out the growth rates, then by comparing new and old data you could see what variables influence each crop, such as types of fertiliser or weather events.

Greater market research into export opportunities could also prove valuable to the industry. Free trade will likely push this forward and hopefully the viability of export to provide competitively priced produce will ensure continual growth for farmers.

WHERE DO YOU SEE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH IN THE AUSTRALIAN VEGETABLE INDUSTRY?

Export presents excellent potential for growth in the industry and Australian farmers have the opportunity to take advantage of this. Better storage practices will mean fresher produce can be shipped further than before. Businesses becoming more efficient and increasing yields will make export a more appealing option as they become more competitive in a global market. Australia has a reputation for providing great quality fresh food and emerging middle class markets overseas are demanding higher grade and safer produce.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS?

This is really only my third year back full-time farming, and already so much has changed in quite a short time. I hope to be expanding my knowledge and hopefully take on some passionate young

people to work with. As markets change I'd like to explore some new products and hopefully see some of the niche vegetables become more staple products for consumers. All I hope is that it continues to be challenging and exciting!

HOW DO YOU THINK MORE YOUNG PEOPLE COULD BE ENCOURAGED TO STUDY AND TAKE UP JOBS IN THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY?

Learning farming skills from a young age would be a start to getting more people in the industry. For instance, having partnerships with schools and universities that show students how to put the skills they learn into practice.

It would be good to see a farm placement program that gives interested young people the ability to work on properties and gain knowledge that can't always be replicated in a classroom. This would give exposure to jobs and experience that otherwise wouldn't be available due to a lack of on-the-job training resources for adults.

DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING ELSE TO ADD THAT MAY BE OF INTEREST TO READERS, AND THE WIDER VEGETABLE INDUSTRY?

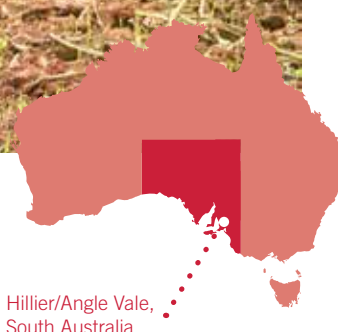
This year, I attended Hort Connections for the first time. This conference brings together the largest number of growers, supply chain members, industry service providers and government stakeholders. The event goes for three days and includes a massive trade show and an endless array of talks by industry leaders and passionate people.

It was one of the most exciting events I have been to, and I got to meet so many like-minded people. It was great for networking and getting an insight into what others in the industry are achieving. I made some great contacts and learnt a huge amount in just a couple of days. I met amazing people in the industry and got to ask them questions that I otherwise wouldn't get the opportunity to ask. It was a very rewarding experience and I look forward to attending again – I would highly recommend it to anyone who wishes to attend.

something that I could be passionate about; a future that was both physical and rewarding – naturally, farming was an obvious fit. I already had the skills to get back into the farm lifestyle so I gradually went back to it working alongside my sister and my parents.



Photography by Andrew Beveridge.



Hillier/Angle Vale,
South Australia

Young grower profile

Name:

Thang Hoang Le
(Aussie Kev)

Age:

32

Location:

Hillier/Angle Vale,
South Australia

Works:

LVE Pty Ltd – soil
grown protected
cropping, greenhouses
and glasshouses

Grows:

Capsicums, tomatoes,
cucumbers and zucchini

How did you first become involved in the vegetable industry?

I've been involved in farming since I was 12 years old. I started by folding boxes for my folks to pack our produce and sell to our merchant. I helped out on the farm every weekend throughout primary school, high school and university. Despite all my studies, I still ended up on the farm. It was when the family decided to sell produce in the Adelaide Produce Market that we expanded our business and we have been going strong for the past 10 years as grower merchants.

What is your role in the business?

I am the Operations Manager. My role is to make sure the produce is grown, packed and sold to maximise profits and return minimal problems to the family business. If I could give myself a title, it would be, "The guy that the family makes do everything."

How would you describe your average day at work?

My workload has dramatically reduced but when we first started becoming merchants, I would easily average 15 hours a day during the summer periods organising pickers and packers, picking up stock from growers, organising watering and fertilisers and managing pests and diseases on the farms. Then the family and workers started packing well into the night so we could sell the produce as fresh as possible. Then it was off to the markets for a second shift to sell the produce. Now I enjoy more of a management role and occasionally I still do some of those tasks.

What do you enjoy most about working in the vegetable industry, and how do you maintain your enthusiasm?

What I absolutely love about the industry is it has a family feeling about it. Everyone knows everything about everyone. We

all compete against each other, but everyone in the market and on the farms genuinely cares for one another. At the end of the day, there is a very strong sense of comradery in the agricultural industry.

I maintain my enthusiasm by meeting up with like-minded young growers under AUSVEG in the Northern Adelaide Plains and we have meetings and barbecues where we can discuss problems, trials and new ideas. No matter how small, big or stupid the ideas that are being thrown around, we always have a crack at it.

What are the biggest challenges you face working in the industry?

The biggest challenge in the industry is unity and lack of awareness for the problems related to it. Firstly, the industry has too many groups and, to be effective enough to bring awareness of the problems our farmers face, we need a strong voice to bring the plight of our farmers to the public's attention.

Secondly, we are facing a changing marketplace where major retailers are dominating



sales and this affects smaller retailers and small/medium farms. We, as an industry, need to address these issues and many others in order to maintain continuity of our industry and prepare to adopt and embrace change.

What has been your greatest achievement so far?

Straight up, it has been winning AUSVEG SA Young Grower of the Year (at a state level) and AUSVEG Young Grower of the Year (at a national level). Being acknowledged for such a prestigious award is a very humbling experience. Also, helping develop and being a part of the young growers group has given me inspiration and encouragement throughout the years. I love those guys.

What does winning the national AUSVEG Young Grower of the Year award mean to you, in terms of your career in the industry?

Winning the award opens up new business opportunities and

provides me with valuable new connections to both buyers and suppliers within the industry.

I think winning the AUSVEG Young Grower award is an important achievement in my life and helps guide me towards building up my future dreams and ambitions. It also gives me great pride to be a second generation Australian farmer with a Vietnamese heritage. I hope winning this award inspires other young people to choose farming as a profession and love this job as much as I do.

How do you think more young people could be encouraged to study and take up jobs in the vegetable industry?

If they had Vietnamese parents, they would end up either being a doctor or a farmer. But seriously, the best way to encourage young people is to target their mindset. Young people think the farming profession is dirty, too hard and at the lower end of the social class. They don't actually realise that other industries aren't doing too well but the farming industry

is always continuing, because people will always need to eat. There needs to be more focus on dressing up the industry to make it more attractive to younger Australians.

Where do you see opportunities for growth in the Australian vegetable industry?

I think the real opportunities lie in soil grown produce that can be exported around the world. We just need to put more emphasis on the marketing. What we don't realise, and still have not capitalised on, is that the whole world recognises Australian produce as being the cleanest and healthiest. We need to implement modern farming practices, for example Integrated Pest Management (IPM), and market soil grown Australian produce, firstly to Asia and then the world. We must maintain that image and use what we are blessed with here and that is an abundance of land and clean water.

The Asians will pay for premium produce. They are already buying bottled Tasmanian air. They will buy

Australian IPM soil grown produce, trust me.

If you weren't working in the vegetable industry, what would you be doing?

I would continue my economics and marketing degree and if that fails, I'll be Aussie Kev the plumber.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

In five years, I see myself expanding my business and building an export shed. I believe my export market lies in Vietnam and from there we'll have a crack at the neighbouring countries.

I also believe in embracing technology and modernising farming by delivering farmers with the right informational tools for their business. So we will introduce Farmate, an app that hopefully helps farmers receive critical information.



NEXT GENERATION IN THE TOP END



NAME: Chris Pham
AGE: 26
LOCATION: Marrakai, Northern Territory
WORKS: Nexgen Produce
GROWS: Lebanese cucumber, snake beans, bitter melon, sin quar, winter melon, long melon and okra

HOW DID YOU FIRST BECOME INVOLVED IN THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY?

I've been involved in farming since my parents moved up to Darwin back in 1996. As a child, I would do the odd jobs around the farm with my brothers to help out Mum and Dad.

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN THE BUSINESS?

I am currently the owner/operator of Nexgen Produce. My parents are semi-retiring and have been kind enough to let me use their land to cultivate my own produce.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR AVERAGE DAY AT WORK?

I can sum it up in one word and that would be BUSY. No two days are the same but there is always something to do.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT WORKING IN THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY, AND HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN YOUR ENTHUSIASM?

I enjoy the process of watching my crops grow from a tiny seedling to a fully-fledged harvest. There is something very beautiful and satisfying about knowing that my produce will end up at a family dining table. This is what keeps my enthusiasm and motivation up.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU FACE WORKING IN THE INDUSTRY?

As we have well and truly moved into the wet season in the NT, one of the main challenges I'm facing as a new farmer is controlling the amount of water to feed the crops.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT SO FAR?

My greatest achievement so far is simply being recognised by my own parents, who have been farming for over 20 years, as being very capable of running the farm. My father especially has been a great mentor and with their guidance, I hope to achieve much more.

WHERE DO YOU SEE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH IN THE AUSTRALIAN VEGETABLE INDUSTRY?

I definitely see growth in the export sector of the vegetable industry. As a country, our produce is one of the highest of qualities in the world and there is a big demand for that.

HOW DO YOU THINK MORE YOUNG PEOPLE COULD BE ENCOURAGED TO STUDY AND TAKE UP JOBS IN THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY?

I feel that if we start talking more about where healthy food comes from, and how it is produced and harvested, it will encourage the younger generation to be more interested and involved in the vegetable industry.

IF YOU WEREN'T WORKING IN THE VEGETABLE INDUSTRY, WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING?

Believe it or not, I was working for one of the big four banks before farming. So I guess if I wasn't given the opportunity to take over the farm, I would still be in the corporate world.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS?

I see myself still farming in the next five years, but on a bigger scale. I also hope that in due time I can set up and branch out into the organic market.



Photography by Nichole Taylor.



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Growing Leaders 2017 participants with Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston.



Growing Leaders 2017 participants with Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry the Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon MP.

GROWING LEADERS 2017 PRESENT THEIR VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF THE AUSTRALIAN VEGETABLE INDUSTRY

The Growing Leaders of 2017 have successfully completed the six-month leadership program and presented their mission strategies on the ways they can help improve the sustainability, productivity and profitability of their industry. Shaun Lindhe reports on these highly impressive projects and their potential to help the industry for years to come.

Under the shadows of Parliament House, 18 emerging leaders of the Australian vegetable industry met with industry in September to discuss the work they had undertaken as part of the Growing Leaders professional development program.

The project *Growing Leaders 2016-2018* (VG15030) is a strategic levy investment under the Hort Innovation Vegetable Fund and involves 18 growers and industry members undertaking an extensive leadership program over three separate three-day workshops throughout the year.

As part of this project, each Growing Leader must work in a group to undertake a project that aligns with their vision for the future of the industry. With the 2017 mantra of ‘building a connected vegetable industry with a sustainable future’ in mind, four groups presented strategies that they believe will result in a more sustainable, productive and profitable vegetable industry.

GROUP ONE – GET VEGGED

Members – Alexandra Keith (Bulmer Farms), Rachel Archbald (Syngenta), Tayla Field (One Harvest), Kaushik Mulukutla (Fresh Select) and Lachlan Schreurs (Schreurs & Sons).

What does it involve?

Get Vegged is an educational and promotional strategy aimed at millennials to bridge the disconnect between growers and consumers. The group has developed a toolkit with resources for growers to better promote their stories via social media, with instructions and resources on how to film videos, upload them on social media and other information to make their stories resonate with consumers.

The project makes these resources available in a branded box that includes a USB with the information, as well as promotional material such as stickers and flyers for growers to use to publicise the project and their farms.

By giving growers the tools and know-how to tell their stories, Get Vegged is working to engage the growing community in promoting their products through increasing engagement with younger consumers and producers through social media.

GROUP TWO – VEG CONNECT AND SEEDLINK

Members – Herman Kemp (One Harvest), Kellisha Mahendran (One Harvest), Roslyn Pennings (Barden Produce) and Satish Chand (Coolibah Herbs).

What does it involve?

This strategy focuses on two important areas to improve the future viability of the Australian vegetable industry – promotion and mentoring.

Veg Connect provides vegetable growers with the information and tools they need to market their businesses on social media. The team created a step-by-step marketing guide to direct growers on how to use social media to promote their businesses, including the benefits of generating visual, relevant, valuable content with a call to action.

Seedlink connects new industry members with experienced members to aid in knowledge transfer so that the lessons and information learned over many years is retained by new entrants to the industry. Seedlink provides a platform for mentees to form an alumni that will benefit them well after the formal mentoring has concluded, and will create a valuable community for future industry leaders to kickstart their careers in the Australian vegetable industry.

GROUP THREE – COLLABORATIVE MARKETING

Members – Alex Russell (PEAQ Farms), Chris Friars (Riverside Produce), Katie Tierney (Organic Growers Group) and Andy Shaw (AUSVEG).

What does it involve?

The Collaborative Marketing team conducted desktop research and surveyed vegetable growers and industry members to measure support for collaborative marketing in the vegetable industry. The group’s activities included:

- Investigating similar industries;
- Collecting data from Australian vegetable industry members; and
- Communicating their results to industry.

The team studied collaborative marketing in the Australian wine industry and its priorities, which included increasing demand (and premiums paid for Australian wine) and increasing industry competitiveness. It also investigated the Australian seafood industry, which faced issues with imported products and consumer knowledge gaps, as well as the experience of the Australian sweetpotato industry in creating a marketing levy.

Collaborative Marketing undertook a survey of Australian vegetable growers to assess the level of support for an industry marketing levy, with most growers agreeing that if a marketing levy were created, they would like to see it invested in the promotion of the whole vegetable category.

GROUP FOUR – TRACE AUSTRALIA

Members – Kim Phan (4 Ways Fresh), Sina Niakansafy (Houston’s Farm), Jamie Alabakis (Fresh Select), Andrew Moore (One Harvest) and Darren Wood (Seminis).

What does it involve?

Trace Australia undertook a strategy that sought to address the important issue of product traceability in the Australian vegetable industry supply chain. The team also reviewed

the successful rollout of a traceability system in the Australian livestock industry (National Livestock Identification System, NLIS).

The team developed a functional IT Traceability system (VegTrace Australia), which utilises QR codes to give buyers real-time updates on the location of produce in the supply chain. The team used products from their own farms labelled with the codes as examples of how this would be implemented and how the system would work to improve traceability in the Australian market to give foreign buyers confidence in the quality and freshness of Australian vegetable produce.

While the system will need to be trialed further before it is rolled out more broadly, the team’s work in creating a functional system is testament to their time and expertise in creating a platform that aims to improve Australia’s image to foreign buyers and improve the traceability of Australian vegetable products.

Applications are open for 2018. For information please visit ruraltraininginitiatives.com.au/home/programs/vegetable.

R&D  Drive Train

INFO

For more information on the *Growing Leaders* project, or to find out how you can apply for the 2018 program, please contact Rural Training Initiatives Managing Director Jill Briggs on 02 6035 7284 or jill@ruraltraininginitiatives.com.au.

This project has been funded by Hort Innovation using the vegetable research and development levy and contributions from the Australian Government.

Project Number: VG15030

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