



Some of the Industry's past Vegetable Growers' Association of Victoria past Presidents at this year's National Vegetable Expo at Werribee. Backrow from left: Luis Gazzola (2004 – Present), Dinny Michelon (1983 – 85), John Milburn (1977 – 78), Peter Cochrane (2002 – 02), Peter Schreurs (1996 – 98), Jack Walker (1980 – 81), David Wallace (1991 – 93). Front row from left: Len Souter (1993 – 96) and Les Giroud (1981 – 83).

# Victoria shines as host for key industry events

**It was a week the Victorian Vegetable Industry can be very proud of after being the host state of AUSVEG's National Conference and then dominating the Australian Vegetable Industry Awards Ceremony by winning three out of the five categories.**

The events began on Monday May 4, when AUSVEG launched its National Conference titled 'Growing a Healthy Australia' and featured a top line-up of international and local speakers (see story Page 4).

AUSVEG Chairman, John Brent opened the Conference and addressed more than 350 delegates at the Melbourne Convention Centre by acknowledging AUSVEG had travelled through some "rough waters" but had now implemented a powerful team to move ahead.

"AUSVEG's aim is to be the leading peak advocacy body and is determined to regain any ground it may have previously lost. We are also determined to be an effective service provider," Mr Brent said.

Mr Brent also introduced AUSVEG's new Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Richard Mulcahy. Mr Mulcahy is a former CEO of several major industry organisations and a past Director with the Wrigley Company based in Chicago. He most recently held office as a Member of Parliament, including serving as Shadow Treasurer amongst other portfolios. He was Principal Personal Assistant to a former Victorian Premier and has also held appointments with the United States and Canadian Governments.

Following the two-day Conference, was the two-day National Vegetable Expo at Werribee which took in more than 500 visitors on its first day. The event hosted Australia's key seed companies who displayed some of the latest vegetable varieties either on trial or about to be released.

Both sponsors and visitors all commended organisers by saying the event was a "must" for the Industry in both trade displays and workshop activities for growers. ▼

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president's report

# Selling the fresh vegetable message

**Congratulation to all organisers of the recent AUSVEG Conference and most importantly our Industry's National Vegetable Expo at Werribee, this edition of *Vegetables Victoria* gives you a comprehensive account through stories and photos of both events.**

## Heat Wave outcomes

The record heat wave we had in March did more damage than was initially suspected. Some crops survived better than others and we have all had to either resow or re-plant so now there are quality crops to harvest. The little rain we have had in the last month has helped to revive the heat damaged crops.

Mother Nature can be equally very kind or unkind. An old Italian saying: "Mother Nature did not get married so it could do as it pleased."

Water in most areas is still a big worry. The only hope is for good winter rains. I am very optimistic that this winter things will change and the rains will come.

The markets are not on fire, there is no real shortage of produce, and prices could be better. The Rudd Government Stimulus Package has not helped vegetable sales as hoped. What the Government should have done was to give businesses and employees a stimulus package with tax cuts. Reward the people that are prepared to take risks and hopefully stay in business and employ others.

## Stronger Promotion essential

The Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria (VGA) is working on a new Strategic Plan for the Industry which looks excellent on paper. However, unless the growers are prepared to invest more towards promotion and marketing of our Australian Grown Fresh Vegetables, imports of frozen vegetables will bury us.

Our Industry must do more school promotion and even at an University level to inform the younger generation of the health benefits of fresh vegetables. Our clean green fresh image against fresh imports needs to be promoted. Vegetable growers should demand rewards from the Governments for providing a natural health product. Many people spend a small fortune on Vitamins when all they have to do is eat more fresh vegetables and salad.

## Climate Change

While I am not a qualified scientist, I must comment about carbon or carbon credits or even climate change. What really concerns me now, however, is the fact that many scientists differ on their views about carbon and global warming. I am equally concerned that Prime Minister Rudd and Minister Penny Wong have made rushed decisions to take action immediately on these issues when even the scientists are not sure.

My experience on the land for the past 55 years and what my father taught me from his own experiences identified that Mother Nature is a cycle. Mother Nature is the most beautiful phenomena that none of us can change. The Murray Darling

Basin is a classic example. According to the old timers, about 100 years ago the Murray River dried up on many occasions. Floods and droughts are part of the natural cycle of Mother Nature.

If it were not for the vision of our forefathers to build dams, weirs and locks many years ago to hold back flood waters and release when necessary, the Murray River would be dry today. This is no different to other farming areas where we must be allowed to harvest and store storm water when it is available otherwise it is lost and wasted. Water is our lifeline for the future: "No water no vegies." Then what? Governments must invest heavily in water storage projects including recycled water for the future survival of general farming and most importantly horticulture.

## Market Relocation

Market relocation is still a big concern for all growers as well as the Market Community. In a business that is as big as the Footscray Wholesale Market with hundreds of businesses involved, it is a total disgrace that this relocation process to Epping has been allowed to drag on for so long. It is time for the VFM Board to come clean and tell the Market Community exactly what is happening.

## IDO future

I will touch quickly on our Industry Development Officer's (IDO) position. For me personally and the VGA Executive, it was great to have our own IDO and has been the best way to communicate with growers on the ground. Unfortunately Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) sees the future differently and has designed a completely new structure to be run by an independent body.

The HAL Industry Advisory Council has approved this new design and only time will tell if it will be an improvement. A special thanks to Katie Fisher for taking on this short term IDO role with us which expires on June 30, 2009.

Katie has been a very active member with assisting as many growers as possible and has been fully involved with the development of the new weather station at Werribee. She has toured the market with me meeting most growers and traders with lots of interest. She would love to meet or hear from anyone who needs to talk or ask her something that requires further attention – 0429 990 503.

To our past IDO, Craig Murdoch thank you for your continued spare time help with Katie and your continued professional support with the VGA through your position at the Department of Primary Industries. Also a big thank you to my Executive and most importantly the VGA Executive Officer, Tony Imeson whose professionalism and guidance are appreciated.

Thank you all for your loyal support and trust and God Bless.

Luis Gazzola



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## Victoria comes up trumps for a second year!

Victoria has done it again - at the recent AUSVEG Industry awards three out of the five categories went to locals. At last year's awards Victoria also dominated the winning board.

- Held at the National Vegetable Industry's Gala Dinner, the awards went to...
- Dr Paul Horne, Integrated Pest Management Researcher for the Syngenta Researcher of the Year.
- Steve Skopilianos from Ladybird Organics at Keilor for the Brisbane Produce Market Innovative Marketing Award.
- Chemical Standards Expert, Peter Dal Santo from Strathfieldsaye for the AUSVEG Industry Recognition Award.

The presentations were made in front of 350 industry guests. AUSVEG Chief Executive Officer, Richard Mulcahy was impressed with the high standard of this year's awards finalists and recipients, who have achieved outstanding success within the Industry.

"Congratulations to every winner and finalist for their commitment to excellence and for setting a benchmark for the Australian Vegetable Industry," Mr Mulcahy said.

On accepting the Brisbane Produce Market Innovative Marketing Award, Ladybird Organics Director, Steven Skopilianos said: "To be recognised for our efforts in this time of drought and bad economic news is very encouraging. It helps us to go back into the paddock and keep planting seeds."

Dr Paul Horn, winner of the Syngenta Researcher of the Year award, thanked Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) for funding his projects and said the award was a great honour.

"Unfortunately the value of research is not seen until growers get to implement the results. I set up IPM Technologies with this in mind and took up research into Integrated Pest Management to get growers to develop it," Dr Horn said.

The winner of the AUSVEG Industry Recognition Award, Peter Dal Santo, said his work coordinating pesticide access and management was rewarding, but difficult at times.

"The Industry is going through some big changes with regards to pesticide access, but thanks to past and present Industry Development Officers, we have access to some very clever people and resources," Mr Dal Santo said.

Other industry awards were given to Kim Vincent at Crossmaglen in NSW for the Landini Grower of the Year and Nathan Clackson from Peats Ridge in NSW for the Landmark Young Grower of the Year. ▼



Dr Paul Horne, Integrated Pest Management Researcher, won the Syngenta Researcher of the Year.



Chemical Standards Expert, Peter Dal Santo from Strathfieldsaye won the AUSVEG Industry Recognition Award.



Steve Skopilianos from Ladybird Organics at Keilor won the Brisbane Produce Market Innovative Marketing Award.

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# Hard Sell for Fresh Veg



**The consumer must be the number one focus and they need to be convinced to eat more 'home grown' vegetables, echoed key speakers at this year's National Vegetable Industry Conference.**

Hosted by AUSVEG and with the Conference theme, 'Growing a healthy Australia', all speakers emphasised the need for the Industry to promote the health benefits of vegetables to consumers as well as vegetables being a naturally produced food which is more ethically suited to today's society.

Coles General Manager for Fresh Foods, Peter Pokorny warned delegates that customers were being challenged with a tough economy and increasing utility costs so "...our industry had to be smart in the way it marketed vegetables".

"We have already seen customers opting to eat more often at home and in fact according to the *US Produce Magazine* 82% of consumers are now eating at home not less than three times a week," Mr Pokorny said.

However, he stressed that supply chain relationships and an aligned industry were the key ingredients to increasing the potential growth of the Vegetable Industry.

"The Australian domestic market can be conquered but without a strong partnership you will not be able to exploit the market," Mr Pokorny said.

"Our market is very immature in terms of fresh vegetable consumption therefore

your industry must work as one to make things happen."

Echoing Mr Pokorny's message was the President of the Coast Produce Company in Los Angeles, Jin Ju Wilder who said the challenge was to educate consumers better about the benefits of healthy food.

"Today's consumers have a lower knowledge of food compared to those in the past," Ms Wilder said.

"Many consumers are bored and confused with the different food products in front of them so it is vital you never devalue your products by competing on price.

***"How do you grow a healthy Australia as well as increase vegetable consumption - find better ways to promote vegetables and their health benefits."***

***Nutritionist and Dietician,  
Dr Joanna McMillan Price.***

"You need to be able to sell your product by its point-of-difference."

In order to do this Ms Wilder encouraged the Vegetable Industry to develop strong brands and stories behind those brands.

"Consumers love stories about where their food originated from," she said. "Remember, food safety is no longer a marketing tool, it is a given."

Ms Wilder said ways of increasing consumption included: being organic; marketing to kids; being a snack food



VGA Executive Officer, Tony Imeson, manning the Vegetables Victoria stand at the AUSVEG Conference.

option; being locally grown and providing effective packaging.

Prof David Hughes, the Emeritus Professor of Food Marketing at the Imperial College in London also continued to focus on understanding consumers needs.

Prof Hughes said, even in a recession, consumers were prepared to pay more for quality ready-to-eat food.

However, he stressed that the key was not to have too many selections in the one product for consumers as it becomes too confusing.

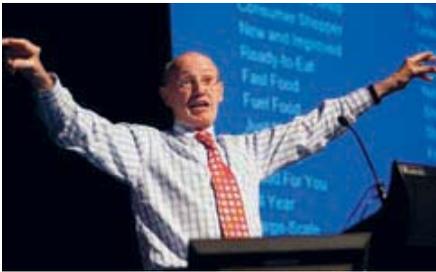
He added that traditional vegetables like broccoli had to find another marketing niche – such as being in 'snack forms'.

Celebrity Nutritionist and Dietician, Dr Joanna McMillan Price added that vegetables needed to change their image and become more "...sexy, fun and vibrant..." if we want them to become a prominent part of consumers' diet.

Dr McMillan Price said while health professionals were keen for consumers to eat more vegetables as they were a key nutritional ingredient, the Industry was not giving good reasons as to why more needed to be eaten.

"Your challenge is to convince consumers that vegetables are not just a side dish," she said.

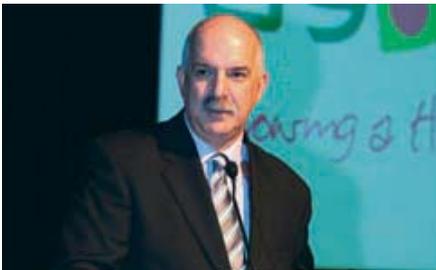
"Realistically, vegetables and fruit should take up at least half a plate with the



*Prof David Hughes, the Emeritus Professor of Food Marketing at the Imperial College in London, told conference delegates that even in a recession, consumers were prepared to pay more for quality ready-to-eat food.*



*The President of the Coast Produce Company in Los Angeles, Jin Ju Wilder, stressed that the challenge was to educate consumers better about the benefits of healthy food.*



*Coles General Manager for Fresh Foods, Peter Pokorny warned delegates that customers were being challenged with a tough economy and increasing utility costs.*

rest consisting of lean protein or carbohydrates.

“However the major issue with vegetables is their lack of convenience – consumers are convinced they are difficult to buy and the convenience factor is to do with today’s consumers being time poor.”

The answer according to Dr McMillan Price, is to ensure consumers have the skills to prepare fresh produce such as recipe cards of ready pack products.

Dr McMillan Price added that the Industry should also investigate veggie snacks as “...this part of the food market hasn’t been explored properly”.

“How do you grow a healthy Australia as well as increase vegetable consumption – find better ways to promote vegetables and their health benefits,” she said.

“Your industry needs to find the middle ground between convenience and freshness and then you are almost there!” ▼

## Profiles of our winners...

### Peter Dal Santo AUSVEG Industry Recognition Award

After graduating with an agricultural science degree in 1982, Peter Dal Santo began working in pest management for the Agrichemical Industry. Since 2000, Mr Dal Santo has worked primarily with vegetables, generating the necessary data for the Industry to access new pesticides.

In 2004, his company, AgAware Consulting, expanded its role—it now coordinates pesticide access and pesticide management issues on behalf of most horticulture industries. Mr Dal Santo has a particular interest in substituting currently-available older pesticides, for newer, reduced-risk pesticides with sound Integrated Pest Management (IPM) profiles and international market acceptance.

Mr Dal Santo, on behalf of the Vegetable Industry, is now working with AgAware’s United States counterpart, IR-4, to bring new pest management options sooner to Australia.



### Dr Paul Horne Syngenta Researcher of the Year

Dr Paul Horne is an entomologist who has, for the past 13 years, been owner and director of IPM Technologies Pty Ltd.

He has been involved with the development and implementation of IPM in a wide range of crops and has specialised in helping growers adopt IPM on-farm. He has conducted research on how to use biological control agents, cultural methods and selective pesticides, and has demonstrated best practice for IPM to growers and other interested parties.

Dr Horne has written four books about insects and published more than 70 scientific and conference papers, as well as many other articles in industry literature. He is currently an Honorary Research Fellow at La Trobe University.



### Ladybird Organics Brisbane Produce Market Innovative Marketing Award



Ladybird Organics’ innovative contribution to the Industry has been the development of a biodegradable plastic made from corn resin that contains all the positives of conventional plastic, and increases product life by approximately 30%.

Made from poly lactic acid and known as “PLA”, the plastic is used to package Ladybird’s salads, which has expanded the organic market by achieving 2 million sales per annum—in only 18 months since its launch. A key achievement has been accessing major supermarkets.

Both the produce industry and other non-competing industries have begun to investigate biodegradable packaging as a result of PLA. In addition, Ladybird Organics has been asked to participate in seminars and training DVDs about biodegradable packaging. ▼

# 2009 National Vegetable Expo...

*Highlights from this year's National Vegetable Expo, held May 7-8 at Werribee.*





## executive officer's corner



Have you checked our website...

[www.vegetablesvictoria.com.au](http://www.vegetablesvictoria.com.au)

Our re-vamped website has become the forefront of our Victorian Vegetable Industry and would have to rank as one of the most up-to-date sites in the Industry. It marks the move by the Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria (VGA VIC) to be leaders in regular communication with our growers through web pages, email, fax or mail.

### Strategic Plan progress

The Victorian Vegetable Industry Strategic Plan is now in the final draft stages and will be shortly published in booklet format and distributed Industry-wide. It is coupled with a three year Action Plan that requires the VGA to implement with the welcomed assistance of the Victorian Farmers' Federation (VFF) Horticultural Group, Fresh State Ltd and the Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI).

### Membership

Membership renewals and new member applications of the VGA are now being circulated to all Victorian growers and Industry associates and we urge your consideration to join, or re-join, for 2009/10. A vegetable grower membership also includes affiliation with the VFF Horticultural Group. A benefits pack will be included with all distributed membership renewals and new applications.

### Working with DPI

We welcome the initiative of the Victorian Government in its new model for Better Services to the Horticultural Industry by the DPI. The Association is very keen to be involved in projects and in assisting to provide vegetable growers with opportunities of regular industry briefings and forums.

### Activities for 2009

1. PLEASE note that the Vegetable Growers Gala Night at the Crown Palladium Room has been postponed - it was scheduled for August 1, 2009.
2. August 7, 2009 Vegetable Growers Annual Golf Day at Lang Lang Golf Club, South Gippsland Highway, Nyora. More details Tel: (03) 9687 4707.
3. October 9, 2009. VGA Annual General Meeting Crowne Plaza, Spencer Street, Melbourne at 4pm.

Keep smiling,  
Tony Imeson



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Log on to [www.vgavic.org.au](http://www.vgavic.org.au)

|                                      |                       |   |
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