



## Vegetable Expo draws closer

Every two years the National Vegetable Expo provides a venue for vegetable growers, seed companies and industry suppliers to gather and discuss the best our industry has to offer.

The National Vegetable Expo is considered the premier horticultural event in southern Australia. It features spectacular displays of new vegetable varieties offered by seed companies and this year the event is being held at the Dairy Road site (Melways reference 206, D8) in Werribee from May 5-6.

The varieties on offer are the major draw card for the Expo event, with many growers returning time and again to discuss the merits of each of the vegetable varieties on display.

The Expo also provides a valuable link between vegetable growers and those who provide new products and technologies.

Exhibits this year will include: machinery, chemicals, fertilisers, irrigation, filtration, packaging, computer software and material handling equipment.

The VGA first initiated the concept of a growers' field day with the Field and Gadget Day, staged in 1963. This was a one-day event at the Keysborough Reserve. After a few years, however, the event was moved to the Department of Agriculture's site at Frankston and it became a Field Day.

Later developments included vegetable industry apprentices based in Frankston. In 1978 Field Days moved to Werribee and the event

became biennial instead of annual as it underwent another name change to the Werribee Vegetables Growers Open Day and Trade Display.

By 2005, following yet another name change, the event finally took on its current name, National Vegetable Expo Werribee.

The National Vegetable Expo Organising Committee would like to extend a warm invitation all vegetable growers, nursery operators and industry suppliers, to gather for this year's event.

*“The varieties are the major draw card for the Expo event, with many growers returning time and again to discuss the merits of each of the vegetable varieties on display.”*

Those organisations wishing to exhibit should contact Expo Coordinator, Claire Luppino on 0427 335 518 for a copy of the prospectus. The informal nature of the Expo encourages discussion and demonstration of products to prospective customers, so this is an ideal opportunity to exhibit your products.

## President's report



*Greetings to all of the growers, industry associates and general associates of the Victorian vegetable industry.*

At our October Annual General Meeting (AGM) I was re-elected as your President and I stated at that time that I would step down in six months. Taking into account the future plans of the Association, I have decided to stay on until our AGM in October, 2011. The Executive's approval of the new Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria Strategic Plan has helped in my decision to stay on and assist in getting the new plan implemented. With the support and approval of the Executive I am sure our members will be happy with the outcome.

It is great to see two new young faces around the table, Paul Doria and Nick Patsuris—welcome to the Executive.

A lot has happened since my last report and everyone has been kept very busy.

### Market Relocation

One of the main topics at hand is the issue of market relocation. In the past few weeks

there has been much discussion in the marketplace and in the media that we are no longer relocating to Epping, but instead staying at Footscray Road, West Melbourne.

Because of these rumours—and it would be great if what people are saying was true—I contacted Minister Napthine and asked him whether this was true. His response was: “No, but we are looking at all options.”

A cross-section of representatives from vegetables, flowers, fruits, wholesalers and retailers met with Minister Napthine at the MMA Board Room on 27 January, 2011. We all put forward our concerns about going to Epping and that our preference was to remain at Footscray Road, both now and in the future. The Minister thanked us for our honesty in providing this information and explaining our concerns with regard to the relocation of the Central Market.

Minister Napthine promised nothing, but said that he would check all of the options available to him and that he would do whatever was possible. He also advised that he would let us know the outcome as soon as it was possible to do so.

### Magazine Publisher

This edition of *Vegetables Victoria* has been produced by AUSVEG. I would like to thank Katie Fisher and Grant Nelson of AgriHort Communications for their excellent professional service in developing and publishing our quarterly journal since 2008.

### IDO services

Our IDOs Helena Whitman and Slobodan Vujovic are doing their best to visit as many growers as possible in order to communicate with them and assist them with any issues they may have. Unfortunately, when contacted by our IDOs, many growers are too busy to meet with them.

Fellow growers and members, I urge you to make our IDOs welcome and give them some time. Remember, they are there to assist you and sort out any problem or issue that you may have.

### AUSVEG

On behalf of the Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria I would like to congratulate CEO Richard Mulcahy and his staff on a great job putting AUSVEG in a strong position representing our industry. It is good to see AUSVEG holding meetings around all states to communicate with levy payers about what AUSVEG is doing for its members. All growers should plan to attend the AUSVEG Convention in Brisbane from 14-16 April, 2011.

### Veg Expo

A special reminder to all vegetable growers with regard to our National Vegetable Expo, which is to be held at Werribee on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> May, 2011. Please make an effort to attend and support this major industry field day. A special thanks to the Expo Organising Committee for their ongoing support.

### Special Thanks

A special thanks to one of our Executive, Roger Turner for his representation on the Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee (IAC). Roger is very passionate about the vegetable industry and is doing a great job.

I must thank the Executive for their continued loyal support, especially David Wallace, our Senior Vice-President and Treasurer. Also, a special thanks to Tony Imeson for his loyal support and assistance in dealing with industry issues and managing our office at the Melbourne Market.

Once again thank you all for your support and I promise to continue doing whatever is within my power for the vegetable industry.

I finish by saying may God Bless us all with health and lots of kindness from mother-nature and continuing good prices for our veggies.

Yours sincerely,

*Luis Gazzola*  
President

For Executive Officer's Corner

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DISCLAIMER: The purpose of *Vegetables Victoria* is to communicate to the Victorian vegetable industry a sample of the activities that are being carried out in the state in relation to the VGA Vic. and the National Vegetable Levy. The information provided should not be interpreted as advice or a recommendation of any kind. VGA Vic. and its officers disclaim all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from relying on any information in this publication.

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## VGA Website - Information for growers

The VGA website offers many useful tools and resources for growers. By simply typing in [www.VegetablesVictoria.com.au](http://www.VegetablesVictoria.com.au) you will find information on weather, recent news relevant to the Victorian industry, R&D updates and more.

Growers will notice that if you type in 'vegetable grower' into Google or any other leading online search engine that the VGA's website is listed among the top websites worldwide.

The VGA website aims to serve the interests of Victorian vegetable growers and regularly attracts more than 3000 unique visitors each month.

The popularity of the website is due to its extensive and easily searchable content, covering issues and technical matters relevant to success in our industry.

**VegetablesVictoria.com.au** promotes the critical and often undervalued role of vegetable growers in their daily struggle to reliably produce the healthy food we all enjoy at our dinner tables.

Growers and their advisors can access more than 300 R&D report summaries, as well as topical news and upcoming events.

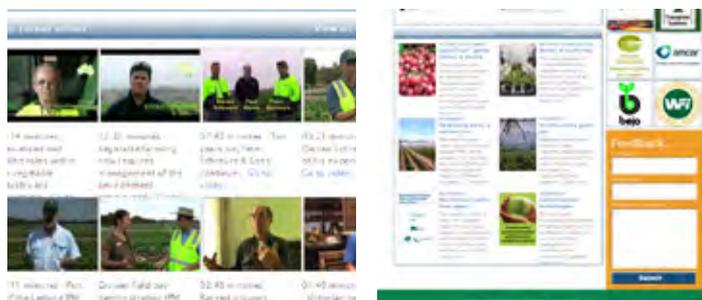


Searchable site content has expanded to almost 2000 pages of interesting articles, news and technical reports.

### Featured sections on the VGA website include:

- **R&D projects** funded by Horticulture Australia through the Vegetable R&D levy
- Highlights the work of prominent **vegetable researchers**
- **Summaries and extracts** from 180+ selected research projects, work shops and posters
- Back issues of the **"Vegetables Victoria" magazine and newsletters**
- **ABS statistics** on vegetable crop production
- **Video clips** covering aspects of the Victorian vegetable industry
- **Profiles and histories** of Victorian growers and markets

So check out **VegetablesVictoria.com.au**, view the information that's available, and contact us with any feedback you might have on how we can improve our website to serve you better.



Videos and R&D information are a highlight of the VGA website.

## Adopt a farmer launched



Coburg Primary School students with their 'adopted farmer' Steve Skopilianos, of Ladybird Organics

The Organic School Gardens 'Adopt a Farmer' Program was launched at Ladybird Organics' Farm in Keilor on Wednesday 23 February 2011. VGA Vic member Steve Skopilianos of Ladybird Organics is the program's first 'adopted farmer'. As an adopted farmer, Mr Skopilianos will visit the school as well as host school tours and education days on the farm.

*"I look forward to teaching children about growing good healthy food and see this as a great opportunity to promote not only organics but also the vegetable industry."*

Mr Skopilianos' love of farming and eagerness to pass on information to the children was clearly shown with children being encouraged to ask and answer questions.

Mr Skopilianos explained how different crops grew with great interest shown by all students.

The students each potted their own lettuce plant to take home before descending on the rear paddock to pick their own strawberries.

The Adopted Farmer program aims to help bridge the urban-rural divide by providing school children with firsthand experience of primary production industries.

For more information contact Helena Whitman VGA Vic IDO West.

# February flood update

- Helena Whitman – IDO Western Victoria



Ljubo Parovic, VGA member at Cora Lynn.

## The recent flooding in Werribee has resulted in about 30 per cent crop losses, mostly in lettuce that was ready for harvest.

The damage occurred during one hour of heavy rain which caused flash flooding. Once the water subsided, crops that still looked good externally were found to be either full of mud or damaged inside and unsuitable for harvesting. Cauliflower and broccoli crops fared much better.

Other western areas also incurred damage from the heavy rains, however, most of the damage was to younger crops. Some of these growers have had successive crops washed away and are now starting to feel the financial impact of these continuous losses.

“We can plan and budget for drought, however, how can you plan for this continuous rain? Once the water is there you can't take it away,” one grower told us.

The continuous rain brought with it additional costs in mildew treatments, replanting, crop losses, fertiliser etc. Some growers are starting to struggle to make ‘ends meet.’

### Mildura Region

In Mildura, some growers still had water lying about the paddocks from the previous January rain events, while others had only just finished pumping water from their properties when the heavy rains hit again on 4 February. Generally in the immediate Mildura area crop damage did not appear to be significant, although it was hard to tell until waters subsided.

The week before the recent floods I visited growers in the Mildura region. I met Matt and Koreena Lush who grow melons, pumpkin and wine grapes out of Curlwaa on the NSW side of the River. Matt is a third generation grower, with his grandfather who settled in the area more

than 60 years ago planting citrus and stonefruit. Matt's father replanted the property with mixed vegetables and Matt still farms the same land. Matt's wife Koreena originates from Western Australia and works the farm alongside Matt.

I met them at one of the properties where they were picking melons in the 45°C heat with what felt like 96% humidity and swarmed by mosquitoes—thank goodness for Bushman's.

“We had been affected by the locusts,” Matt said.

“But they mainly ate through the wind rows, and this saved us some work clearing those before harvest,” he noted.

The Lush's property is close to the junction of the Darling and Murray Rivers with the water only two metres below the bank. Fortunately the heavy rains didn't cause any damage with the River rising only 250mm, however, there is still more to come with the prediction of water coming down the Darling as a result of the Queensland floods.



Matt and Koreena Lush inspecting pumpkin crop.



## Luis Gazzola comments on *floods*

A major change in the weather has tested our ability to grow vegetables in the wet again.

The floods have been devastating in most areas along the eastern coast of Australia, with flood inundation occurring in most areas of Queensland, New South Wales and then in our own state of Victoria.

There has been damage and crop losses, and the quality of vegetables at present is not the best.

There will be financial hardships for many growers with the extra costs of cleaning up and getting the soils back in order for cropping again, and in many cases also replacing infrastructure.

We can only hope that mother nature will be much kinder for the rest of summer and into autumn.

Prices of most vegetables have increased since the flooding which has been good for those growers who have the produce, but the immediate impact of higher prices is that the consumer starts buying sparingly and this has slowed sales at the wholesale markets.



## VGA lobbies government

### President's comment

#### New State Government

The appointment of a new government in Victoria has been a big change. We have had discussions and meetings with the Minister for Major Projects and Ports, Denis Napthine, and the Minister for Agriculture and Water, Peter Walsh, and I must say that it has been a breath of fresh air meeting the new ministers, who've demonstrated a positive attitude in support of our industry.

There are many issues that need urgent attention by our new ministers but we must be patient. They are having a lot of problems trying to sort out all of the past agreements and contracts entered into by the previous government, which now need urgent attention before we can move forward. It will take time to sort through these issues—whether it is the market relocation, town planning, re-zoning, power, water, rates, land taxes etc. etc. We do need change but with positive long-term, sensible planning, and incorporating full consultation with our industry when it concerns vegetable growers.

#### Water Security

A group of us also met with Minister Peter Walsh at the Rural Press Club on 3 February, 2011. The Minister's presentation was very informative and he promised to sort out most of the water issues where possible. Our growers informed the Minister of the possible problem with regard to the recycled water salinity issue at Werribee.

We also asked that the Minister investigate the stormwater issue, and in particular to review stormwater harvesting licenses to allow currently licensed growers to harvest stormwater 12-months of the year, if and when mother nature's excess water is available.



Karl Forsyth and Helena Whitman IDO West.



Luis Gazzola and Rocky Lamattina.

## Calculating carbon!

Recently, the VGA organised a workshop on the topic of the new carbon calculator tool for vegetable growers. Karl Forsyth, a Senior Engineer from the Australian Wine Research Institute in Adelaide, presented to growers on the day.

The workshop was held at Amstel Golf Club in Cranbourne on Wednesday, 1 December, 2010 as part of a national road show.

The Vegetable Carbon Calculator has been funded by Australian vegetable growers through Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL), with matched funding from the Australian Government.

The project is entitled VG09187 Australian Vegetable Industry Carbon Footprint Tool: Stage 2.

Mr Forsyth began his presentation by explaining what a carbon footprint is. Today, the most adopted definition is "a direct measure of greenhouse gas emissions (expressed in tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents) caused by a defined activity," he said.

The Vegetable Carbon Calculator is an online tool designed to help growers calculate their on-farm greenhouse gas emissions. The tool will help growers understand the carbon footprint of their entire operation (within the farm boundary), as well as for specific crops or crop categories. It will also identify the greenhouse gas emissions associated with: **fertiliser, electricity, fuel, waste, refrigerants and land use change.**

Mr Forsyth said that the Vegetable Carbon Calculator is basically an equation that converts farming inputs into greenhouse gas emissions. All of the calculations occur 'behind the scenes', meaning the tool appears simple, yet in the background many calculations are being performed. The tool has been specifically designed for Australian vegetable growers and it will give growers the ability to improve their on-farm efficiencies and become more sustainable. The results produced by the tool will show growers the total greenhouse gas emissions produced by their farm, and by individual crops on their farm.

In order to estimate their on-farm carbon footprint though, growers will need to collect information relating to their farming inputs. They will need information on: electricity and fuel bills for the reporting year, records of fertiliser usage, and if they have a cold room they will need any service documents from the reporting year.

Once the grower has all necessary information they can go to [www.vegiecarbontool.com.au](http://www.vegiecarbontool.com.au) and register to proceed with the carbon calculation. Any growers who require assistance with this tool can contact their local Victorian IDO's.

## Pathologists hit the fields

In late January plant pathologists Liz Minchinton and Len Tesoriero made field visits to a couple of vegetable farms in the south east. The visits were arranged by Slobodan Vujovic - IDO East.

The purpose of the visit was to 'field inspect' a few crops to evaluate disease presence and provide a chance to speak with growers about the issue.

John Cochrane, VGA member at Rosebud said that he appreciated farm visits, including the opportunity to talk directly with researchers as he can get answers specific to his farm and his crop in a short timeframe.

On the afternoon of the field visits the researchers presented information to a group of Victorian and Tasmanian growers on a proposed lettuce anthracnose project.

This growing season the lettuce industry suffered significant losses due to the fungal disease anthracnose. The meeting was held to determine the next step in the war against lettuce anthracnose.

Liz Minchinton, Len Tesoriero and John Cochrane.





## HIN IDOs visit Rijk Zwaan Australia

- Helena Whitman – IDO Western Victoria

Following the December 2010 meeting of the Horticulture Industries Network (HIN) IDOs, most of whom represent the fruit and nut industries, the group visited Rijk Zwaan Seeds & Services in Daylesford. Most had not seen seed propagation at this level before.

Vegetables Victoria had the privilege of being shown around by Rudi Van der Voort, and Stephanie Knight who manages the seed production operation.

The company employs around 35 permanent staff and is involved in the sale of vegetable seeds, the production of seeds and research and development.

During our tour of the facilities we were joined by Managing Director, Arie Baelde, who explained Rijk Zwaan's international operation to the group. Mr Baelde has been with the company since 1991 and he explained the benefit of having operations on both sides of the hemisphere as allowing them to develop seeds in half the time it would take if they were only based in Europe.

Attendees heard that the Daylesford location was selected because of its good climatic conditions, allowing prospective seed varieties to be

trialed against one another in the field. Those varieties showing promise are then grown out to quantities that can be trialed in fields across various sites around the world before becoming commercially available to growers.

Vegetables Victoria expresses its thanks and appreciation to Mr Baelde and his staff for making their time and premises available.



## University of Melbourne Masters students visit hydroponic capsicum farm in Keilor

Early in February 2011, approximately 30 Masters students from the University of Melbourne piled into a bus and made their way to Wallace Farms in Keilor, Victoria.

As part of the subject "Buildings to Beans: Food in Cities" run at The University of Melbourne's Burnley campus, the students spent an afternoon learning about the challenges of commercial hydroponic capsicum production in Melbourne.

David Wallace, whose family has been farming the property for 100 years, showed the students how his high-tech system worked and answered a multitude of questions—everything from fertiliser regimes to the impact of the floods in northern Australia on his ability to sell his product. At the end of the tour the students were given a chance to sample the "fruits" of David's hard work. A selection of red, yellow, orange and green capsicums, as well as some Habanero (hot chilli peppers), were tested by a few of the bravest students.

Habanero chili peppers are one of the hottest chillies in the world. They are rated 350,000 spicy heat units on the Scoville scale. Amidst the sounds of crunching, some of the comments that were heard included:

"The orange one is the best... tasted like a fruit. I'll only buy orange capsicums from now on!"

"What a beautiful crop... I have never seen such a system before. I have to admit that I don't like the taste of capsicum—but the coloured varieties were truly delicious and I will seek them out in the future!"

Wide-eyed and weary after an afternoon in the heat, the students were very impressed with what they had seen:

"I gained a new appreciation for all the work that goes into making delicious capsicums."

"It was really interesting to see hydroponics in action rather than just in books. Your Habanero chilli is still in my fingernails!"

Mr Wallace had started his working day around midnight. He went to the market, worked on the farm and was now hosting a group of students.

*"I love what I do; all growers do, otherwise we wouldn't be on the land. We take pride in our work and produce, that's why I am standing here in front of you to share some of my passion for fresh produce with you today."*



David Wallace and Melbourne University students discuss capsicum plants.

## Executive Officer's corner



### Devastating floods

On behalf of the President and the Executive Committee we would like to extend our deepest commiserations to those fellow vegetable growers who have experienced the devastation of the recent flooding that has created such havoc with homes, lives and properties.

The damage to crops, loss of machinery and buildings will have caused additional hardship during the rebuilding phase. We sincerely hope that various government

bodies will provide ongoing financial and people resources for as long as needed to rebuild lives and livelihoods during the long and painful recovery.

Please be assured that our thoughts are with all growers and wish them and their families a speedy restoration.

### National Vegetable Expo

The showcase for all vegetable growers is the National Vegetable Expo to be held on 5 and 6 May 2011 at the Expo site in Dairy Road, Werribee. All systems are go with the organising committee, and seed companies are already on-site planting new varieties. Booking of space in the static display area is moving very quickly. Prospectuses are still available for organisations not registered to display. If you would like to be involved please contact Expo Coordinator Claire Luppino on 0427 335 518 for a prospectus.

### DPI Vic Horticulture Industry Network Programme

In Victoria the DPI Vic Horticulture Industry Network Programme is proving a very positive project for our two Industry Development Officers. This work has been strengthened by the addition of Horticulture Australia (HAL) funding received from a section of the Vegetable Industry Program in maintaining direct contact with Victorian vegetable growers.

VGA Vic is introducing a new communication note called "In The Field" supporting our two IDOs in providing a regular flow of industry information and direct 'on-farm contact' with Victorian vegetable growers.

IDO Contacts : Helena Whitman IDO West : 0407 772 299 and Slobodan Vujovic IDO East : 0422 583 784.

### VGA Vic. President

Our President Luis Gazzola has continued lobbying the Victorian State Government on various grower issues, such as the market relocation. Reflecting on the events of the past year, it is remarkable that the Honorary President of VGA Vic, with assistance from a part-time Executive Officer, has made so much of his valuable time available to attend meetings, not only in Melbourne but in other Victorian vegetable growing areas, and on behalf of the industry to lobby State Government. This has included travelling interstate and overseas at his expense.

### Regional Vegetable Growers Dinner Dance

The annual Regional Vegetable Growers Dinner Dance was held on Saturday 20 November 2010 at the Villa Adriana Reception Centre in Dandenong South. A great attendance of over 200 guests thoroughly enjoyed the evening. A special thankyou was extended to all our industry supporters who donated prizes for the raffle.

### National Awards for Excellence

The annual vegetable industry National Awards for Excellence will be presented at the AUSVEG Convention, to be held from 14-16 April 2011 in Brisbane. There appears to be reluctance from vegetable growers to nominate for the listed awards. When approached be positive and give it a go.

### VGA Vic. Website

Our website continues to provide updated industry information and has received numerous praises not only from within Victoria, but also from interstate and around the world.

For the latest vegetable information related to Victoria take a look at our website: [www.vegetablesvictoria.com.au](http://www.vegetablesvictoria.com.au) or [www.vgavic.org.au](http://www.vgavic.org.au)

### For more information please contact:

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Keep Smiling,

*Tony Imeson*

## VGA Vic. proudly recognises our industry supporters:

