



The Age Harvest Picnic Hanging Rock



Caroline Creed, MMA, Helena Whitmann, Executive Manager, VGA and Teisha Dower, MMA.



Attendees enjoying The Age Harvest Day Picnic at Hanging Rock.

Since 1988, The Age Harvest Day Picnic has been an annual highlight at Hanging Rock. Fortunately for those attending this year's picnic, the predicted storms didn't eventuate and the resulting hot and humid conditions attracted patrons in huge numbers.

With over 100 displays, The Age Harvest Day Picnic truly celebrated the best in Victorian food and wine. Small producers from around Victoria gathered to showcase their delicious wares against the magnificent backdrop of Hanging Rock.

The Melbourne Market Authority's display proved very popular.

We were kept very busy, handing out samples of fresh produce and answering questions from the public. It was pleasing to see the MMA Schools Program attract considerable interest from parents and teachers.

With tents, blankets and picnic hampers scattered all over the site The Age Harvest Picnic was a great day of entertainment including live music, activities for children, lamington making and cooking demonstrations by Hellenic Republic's Travis McAuley, Justin Wise from The Point and the Kitchen Aid's Jo Richardson.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT



Hello fellow growers,

This year has started with a hectic pace, planting, watering and harvesting the world's best veggies.

Where is the recognition for growing and supplying top quality veggies? I don't hear anybody applauding or thanking us for the great job we're doing in providing clean, green and fresh veggies.

We provide a low cost food supply, that's affordable to all sectors of the community. We help to control the CPI, which makes

governments look great; but it's our work, in extreme, hot and dry summer conditions that makes this possible.

It's just as well that we have tremendous pride in what we grow and the continuity of supply we achieve. We are competitive and efficient growers because we sell on a supply and demand market.

In the first quarter of this financial year the value of our returns is at breakeven price, or below what we need to survive. Its certainly got us all worried about the future of this industry. The rising cost of electricity, water, fuel and insurance keep adding to the pressure we are feeling.

Our industry's benefit to the community is vast, yet seemingly unrecognised by both State and Federal Governments.

I find this appalling, and very short-sighted, given all they seem to talk about is food security for the future. If they don't ensure the viability of current growers, there will be no fresh food grown in Australia; we will be importing vegetables like everybody else.

In Victoria, this industry generates thousands of jobs, both directly and indirectly, including farm labourers, crop harvesters, packaging sheds, pre-packing businesses, transport companies, cardboard

packaging companies, seed and fertiliser companies, crop consultants, supermarkets, independent fruiterers, wholesalers, market authorities and the list goes on.

Growers are the most important link in this employment chain; for everybody's benefit we need the grower to survive. Governments need to listen to what this great industry has to say or the result will be the slow death of clean, green, healthy and affordable vegetables grown by smart Australian entrepreneurs (growers).

The Epping Market Saga continues into its ninth year, with a lot of hard work by the grower's market advisory committee regarding our rights on the trading floor. There are a lot of great ideas, yet the Government has only one, and it's not ours.

Still, there is always next year. In the meantime we will continue to do what we can to survive.

Sincerely,

David Wallace

President

Expo preparations: Early plantings sizing up

The upcoming National Vegetable Expo is shaping up to be another great event. Preparations are well and truly under way, with nearly all trade displays booked and most of the seedlings in the ground. The Expo site is a hive of activity with pegs, plants and plots awaiting planting.

A recent visit to the site was met with an unusual sight; there were no seed company reps planting. Overnight rain had left water in the furrows, so no-one was stepping out on to the soft red Werribee soil. With approximately 20mm of rain falling, site managers Les, David and Chris, enjoyed a well-deserved break from irrigating - a rarity, judging from the level of the dam.

Cabbages were framing up, the first lettuce transplants were in and

other brassicas were in varying states of maturity. In the next few weeks we will see the colour of the leafy salad crops as exhibitors continue preparations for the 2nd & 3rd of May.

Be sure to visit the National Vegetable Expo, walk the plots, visit the displays and talk to representatives from a range of exhibitors and companies that support our industry.

Bookings are now being taken for the Bejo Expo Dinner, to be held on Thursday the 2nd of May, at the Italian Social Club, Werribee.

Bookings can be made by calling Paul Heseltine on 0408 664 491.

For Executive Officer's corner

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SMARTPHONE APPS FOR GROWERS



Growers are increasingly turning to technology, such as smartphones and iPads, to communicate, connect and record information.

Whether in the field, on the tractor or at the office, applications can save time and streamline the entry of data such as QA and OH&S records, and general on-farm observations and activities.

New smartphone and iPad apps are being developed every day. We take a look at some of the apps that may be useful to your business, many of which are free to download and trial.



ScoutDoc - Field scouting/record keeping app. Create or import a field map and save information collected when scouting or inspecting field crops. (iPad)



gpsScout - A "PocketPAM" App for collecting crop scouting records for PAM Production Recording Software. Collect crop observations, pest and disease records and weed counts - then send your records back to PAM. Use the GPS option to geo-locate your inspection sites. The scouting missions will appear on your PAM Map as a layer of points linked to your crop monitoring records.



Precision Earth - Quickly collect field boundaries and GPS located grid and zone soil samples on iPads and iPhones. (iPhone & iPad)



Elders Weather - Comprehensive weather app which includes over 2,000 locations including key international locations and the ability to add up to 10 favourite locations. (iPhone & iPad)



JD Link - Monitor and manage your fleet of John Deere machines from your phone. (iPhone & iPad)



Weeds: The Ute Guide - Designed to be used in the paddock by growers to assist in identifying the most common annual, biennial and perennial weeds in South Australia. Allows you to search, identify, compare and email photographs of weeds. (iPhone & iPad)



CalcCpray, Spray Calc and Tank Mix Calculator - Quickly and easily generate a tank mix, enter your acreage, tank size and carrier volume, then select your chemicals from the list or add your own. The apps will then provide you with the number of loads required to spray your acreage along with full and partial load mixes of the chemicals you select.



IPM Toolkit - Read news articles, view videos, download publications, and access pictures which will aid you in adapting Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices into your operation. (iPhone & iPad)



Hort Service Finder - A free service designed to help Australian growers find horticultural service providers. Growers can connect with government and private agronomists, financial service providers and more.



F-Track Live - On-the-go farm management app that lets multiple users record and access all their farm information live. The app is linked to a web portal for individual and group farm management. Tracks spraying, sowing, tillage, spreading, harvesting and records all relevant data specific to these events. This is then available to every user in summary and detailed form. (iPhone)



APVMA App - Information from the PUBCRIS database. The app includes information about stopped, cancelled, suspended and archived products. It allows you to email search results for selected products. (iPhone & iPad)



iCropTrak - a multi-user software solution that runs in the field with or without Internet connectivity. It allows users to take advantage of geographic data, the GPS technology in the iPad, the larger screen size and touch interaction. iCropTrak gives users an opportunity to deploy data collection templates for functions as diverse as food safety inspections, field spray management, employee timesheets and more. (iPad)



AGweb News - Get the latest agribusiness news and advice. Read ag management news, farm business blogs and articles from one trusted source AGWEB.com



iAuditor 2 - Workplace safety audits, pre-start checks and inspections made faster and easier. Take photos, keep accurate records in the field and generate and share reports. (iPhone & iPad)



PestGenie/Farm Minder - These apps are a condensed version of the Pest Genie Plus website and provide detailed information about pesticides and animal health products including the latest labels, MSDS and a range of product support material at your fingertips.



Fertilizer Cost Calculator - estimates the value of Nitrogen per unit of Phosphorus source, along with the cost per unit of P2O5 with or without the Nitrogen value. All based on your entered cost per bulk.



WirelessFarmer - is a complete Farm Management Solution specifically tailored and designed for farmers. This Complete Farm Management and Quality Assurance application was built for farmers to record and access information on all aspects of their everyday business and farming requirements.



FarmPAD - to enter farm records, equipment service logs, spray records and take notes or pictures. Draw your field boundaries with GPS or by hand. Sync to your web account where you can print reports, review history and draw and print field maps. All your precision ag needs in one tool.



Yates Garden Problem Solver - Even though this app for iPad and iPhone is a commercial application for home gardeners the high quality images of common fruit and vegetable pests and diseases could make it useful for some commercial growers as well.



Spray Lite - Stores and records spray sheets in one place including chemical details and all historical chemical applications. (iPhone & iPad)



MySci Pubs - Get the best knowledge in the fields of agronomy, crop, and soil sciences. Search thousands of peer-reviewed journal articles. Access full text right on your device. American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America.



Farm Manager - The Farm Manager app allows farmers to record cropping, livestock, and machinery procedures, and access this information with ease. Users can record full history of crops from when they are sown through to harvested. (iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch)



CFA FireReady - FireReady is the official Country Fire Authority (CFA) app for bushfire information in Victoria. Download to assess your own FireReady status and to remain aware of incidents around you in real-time.



MyTraps.com - is a platform to help growers reduce pesticide use. The MyTraps mobile app provides a way for growers to record pest data directly from the field.



SoilMapp - Find out what's beneath your feet with SoilMapp for iPad. Tap into the best available soil information from Australia's national soil databases. Users can pan and zoom the map and tap to locate a place of interest, or use the iPad GPS function to identify their current location.

UPDATE ON FOOD HUB DEVELOPMENT

Thirty people, including growers and producers, heard presentations and joined the discussion at the 'Food Hub Development for SE Melbourne' forum held at the Balla Balla Community Centre, Cranbourne East, on Tuesday 19th February 2013.

The Australian Food Hub Network and Victorian Eco Innovation Lab (VEIL) at University of Melbourne are facilitating the design of the Food Hub in Casey. The project is funded by VicHealth.

WHAT IS A FOOD HUB?

The Food Hub will work with local growers and producers to help aggregate and distribute their products. The Hub will foster relationships with marketers and distributors so that producers can concentrate on growing the best possible product for the consumer. The Hub aims to enable consumers to call a phone number, order locally grown products and have them delivered.



The Food Hub forum indicated there is a need to develop a working model that potential users can see so they can provide suppliers with a better understanding of how The Hub could help them individually.

For more information on the next stage of this exciting project and how the Hub can help local producers send an email to: tanya.massy@unimelb.edu.au



YOUNG GROWER PROFILE

Name: Joe Boratto

Location: Bacchus Marsh, Victoria

Works: Boratto Farms

The growth in demand for leafy green salads as Australians' appetite for convenience goods increases, hasn't been lost on Dino Boratto. Dino and his son, Joe, have expanded their cropping area, with Joe taking on a major role in the family's crop production.

Joe is the third generation of Boratto to work in the family business that has expanded to approximately 40Ha across three sites at Bacchus Marsh. We asked Joe about his interests, motivation and expectations at Boratto Farms.

What are the principal crops grown?

Rocket, fancy head lettuce and herbs.

What is your role on the farm?

All facets of field production including soil preparation, planting, irrigation, spraying and some harvest supervision.

What information sources guide

Boratto Farms' management decisions?

We have built-up considerable experience cropping the soils at Bacchus Marsh and the new farm seeks to exploit a relatively low frost-risk site. New varieties are constantly being assessed by the seed companies, for disease and pest resistance, as well as production benefits.

We also contract Agronomist Stuart Grigg to undertake weekly farm observations and recommend pest and disease control measures, turning more and more to 'soft' chemical options and methods.

What courses or training have you undertaken?

No general course, my brother has done that. I have done a two-year welding course and, of course, my ChemCert training. In 2011 I travelled to New Zealand on an AUSVEG Young Growers Tour and in 2012 I did the Growing Leaders course. I gained a lot of confidence

to talk to different people in our industry; other growers as well as reps and suppliers.

What daily challenges do you deal with?

Well the weather for one, it can be so variable, but I can't do much about that!

Staffing issues are often critical. Finding good staff that we can rely on and who understand our quality issues make a real difference. We take all staff through induction on commencement and OHS factors associated with field harvesting are addressed. Safety around machinery, lifting and cutting techniques are emphasised.

Why did you decide to stay and work on the farm?

I would much rather be outside and working physically than inside and tied to a desk. The variety and challenges as well as the opportunities appeal. I think that we have found some good staff by giving young students work during summer holidays. They have stayed, even though the days are long they enjoy it - the type of farming we do.

What do you see in the future for Boratto Farms and yourself?

We are bringing one new block into production and that can be run with our existing equipment and facilities, I think. Although to save time and road miles it's best that each farm has its own set of equipment for tractor work. We will always just be a growing or production business - there's no intention to process baby leaf.

When the new block is developed (starting in two years) we will have to expand our seedling production, as we like to have that under our control. There's going to be lot to do when we fully expand and planning each day will be important. Staying in touch through the day means communication is crucial.

Successful Use Of Composted Materials

The use of commercially available quantities of high quality composted material has been successfully trialled by Mark Bell from Hussey & Co on the sandy soils of Pearcedale.

In the last twelve months 25t/ha, or more than 800 tonnes, of compost have been successfully applied.

“I have noticed paddocks had better capacity to withstand climatic and environmental challenges than paddocks without the compost additions,” said Mark Bell, General Manager of Operations at Hussey & Co.



Mark Bell, Hussey & Co



The long-term improvement of soil health will provide an economic benefit through the sustained production of quality produce.

Commercial Production of Compost

The benefits of using organic matter as part of a soil management program are:

- **Improved soil structure** - As organic matter decays to humus, the molecules ‘cement’ particles of sand, silt, clay and organic matter into aggregates which will not break down in water. This cementing effect, together with the binding effect of roots and fungal strands in the decomposing organic matter, makes the soil aggregates stable in water.
- **Improved drainage** - These larger, stable aggregates have larger spaces between them, allowing air and water to pass through the soil more easily.
- **Moisture retention** - The aggregates are also very effective in holding moisture for use by plants. Humus molecules can absorb and hold large quantities of water for use by plant roots.
- **Rich nutrients** - Organic matter is an important source of nitrogen, phosphorus and sulphur. These nutrients are created as microorganisms decompose the organic matter. As it takes time for this breakdown to occur, organic matter provides a slow release form of nutrients. If crops are continually removed from the soil, there is no organic matter for microbes to feed on and break down into nutrients; so fewer nutrients are available to plants.
- **Improved cation exchange capacity** - Humus molecules are *colloids*, which are negatively charged structures with an enormous surface area. This means they can attract and hold huge quantities of positively charged nutrients such as calcium, magnesium and potassium until the plant needs them. Clays also have this capacity, but humus colloids have a much greater CEC than clays. (2004 NSW Department Primary Industry “Soil Organic Matter”)

A combination of composted materials and the growing of green manure crops should be considered as part of a farm’s soil management plan. Taking a long-term approach to soil health is the key to achieving the desired results.

EnviroVeg Field Walk in Werribee **EnviroVeg**

A recent EnviroVeg Field Walk took a look at several new products being field tested to combat Diamondback moth in brassicas.

Research company, Peracto, provided the opportunity for growers and agronomists to visit their trial site located at John Zausa’s Werribee South farm.



Field Walk participants are led through the trial by Peracto staff.



Growers inspect cauliflower for signs of pest pressures.

The crop protection trial is comparing a number of different IPM-friendly treatments and approaches against conventional methods. Details of the commercial product being used were confidential, but growers were able to compare the results first-hand.

Netafim also took part in the workshop, giving an excellent presentation on irrigation management and recycling. The presentation provided attendees with formulas for calculating the exact quantity of water required to meet the needs of their crops.

AUSVEG’s Environment Coordinator, Jordan Brooke-Barnett, provided a brief update on some of the new reporting features of the EnviroVeg Program.

A successful day was capped off with a BBQ, providing an opportunity for growers to have a chat and discuss their operations.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S CORNER



Another era has passed with a VGA Vic decision, that from 1 March 2013, it will not be in a financial position to retain the Industry Development Officer (IDO) services for the Victorian vegetable industry. Unfortunately, vegetable industry funding has not been available at a level that allows retaining the two part-time IDOs John Runting and Rod Hall.

For 12 years VGA Vic has enjoyed IDO services, and over the past year both John and Rod have provided excellent support to their respective areas of Victoria. Helena

Whitman retains the position of Executive Manager, and will continue providing industry information for Victorian vegetable growers and responding to your enquiries.

The National Vegetable Expo that is being held on 2 and 3 May 2013 at Werribee, is fast approaching. All seed plots are progressing with a range of vegetable varieties. The prospectus for exhibitor's static sites has been well-received with only a limited number of sites still available. If you wish to display your products or services contact Expo Co-ordinator, Helena Whitman, on 0407 772 299.

During February, VGA Vic President, David Wallace, accepted an invitation to speak as part of a Melbourne Conversations panel. "Feeding a Growing Melbourne" was held in The Edge Auditorium at Melbourne's Federation Square. David highlighted the pressure on production costs due to higher fuel and power prices, and the availability of affordable clean water to grow vegetables in all rural areas. To view the video visit www.vegetablesvictoria.com.au.

Property Identification Codes (PIC) and vegetable grower registration has been on VGA Vic's agenda for many years. VGA Vic has made many representations on this matter to the Victorian DPI. PIC registration is now available to the horticulture industry, but only on a voluntary basis to the vegetable industry. VGA Vic encourages all vegetable growers to register and list the range of produce they grow. This will ensure traceability via a number allocated to your farm property. VGA Vic would like see that non-registered vegetable growers are prevented from obtaining farm supplies such as chemicals. Information regarding PIC is available on the VIC DPI website, www.dpi.vic.gov.au by searching for property identification.

The annual VicFresh Gala Night was held in Crown's Palladium Room in February. "The Roaring Twenties" themed event was enjoyed by 720 guests from the Melbourne Market Community.

2013 VicFresh Annual Award winners were:

- **Regional Retailer:** Tully's Corner Produce Store, Moorooduc.
- **Metropolitan Retailer:** The Froot Shop, Ivanhoe.
- **Additional Awards:** Customer Service Award: Bendigo Wholefoods, Bendigo.
- **Foodbank Award (Donor of the Year):** Kaporis Bros, Melbourne Market Wholesaler.

Vegetable grower, Vince Doria, represented the industry on the organising committee which was commended for its selection of meals and entertainment.

Our VGA Vic website promotes the critical and often undervalued role of vegetable growers and their daily struggle to produce the healthy food we enjoy at our dinner tables. The site regularly attracts over 3000 visitors each month. The site is home to over 2000 pages of articles, R&D report summaries and topical news and events at www.vegetablesvictoria.com.au or www.vgavic.org.au.

Keep Smiling,

Tony Imeson

Remember VGA Vic is YOUR voice and needs your support. Should you require more information about vegetable industry services please contact :

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