



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT:



**LUIS GAZZOLA**  
President

**Greetings to all Victorian vegetable grower members, industry associate members and suppliers to the vegetable industry.**

The winter was very cold and the vegies went into shock especially after the mild autumn. Thanks to Mother Nature for giving most areas good rain fall in June and July. Unfortunately August was very dry with lots of wind, which dried the soil very quickly. We now are desperate for good spring rain, if not next summer will not be good for growing vegetables.

High prices in the early winter period were, as you all know due to a combination of reduced crops in the ground as a result of the drought, then the floods in East Gippsland and frost in Queensland. At present retail shops are quiet, which slows down trading at the wholesale markets.

On behalf of the VGA I would express commiseration for the growers' losses during the heavy rain and flooding in East Gippsland. Being thick-skinned growers,

I am sure that we will be more determined than ever for the future. I believe the biggest concern with Governments is that they will not concede that growers are the backbone of Australia in providing the health food of the nation. We urgently need water catchment programmes and recycling projects that will provide growers with assurance of water in the future years.

Market relocation still remains a controversial issue with the State Government stating that we must move from Footscray Road with a "take it or leave it" attitude. Vegetable growers believe this is wrong and we will lose the central market location presently enjoyed at the Footscray Road site. The proposed Epping site is 24km north of Melbourne and is not considered centrally located. We still await details of the State Governments financial package that will provide growers with some cost recovery for relocating their business to a new location.

On a brighter note the Vegetable Growers Gala Night held at the Crown in September was a great success. It was an opportunity to enjoy each others' company and friendship with good food and beverages and leave the growing worries back at the farm. A special thanks to all

those who attended and to the sponsorship support provide by our industry supporters.

I welcome Craig Murdoch as the new Victorian Industry Development Officer replacing Patrick Ulloa who provided dedicated support to Victorian vegetable levy payers over the past nine years. We wish Patrick well in his new position with Coles Fresh Produce Group. Craig is based at the VGA Office in the Melbourne Market and is well known to Victorian growers after spending 10 years with the Department of Primary Industries.

In my role as your representative and member of the AUSVEG board I can advise that there are a number of industry issues being addressed and we should hear more information regarding a new future structure for AUSVEG later this year.

By the time you read this article, the 2007 AGM will have been held and there will be newly elected office bearers and executive committee for 2007-2008. I would express my thanks and gratitude to all executive members for their support, also the ones who have held positions over the past year.

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### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FOR 2007

#### VGA PRESIDENT

Luis Gazzola 0418 172 320

#### TREASURER

David Wallace 0408 547 708

#### MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

Peter Cochrane,	0418 392 113
Anthony Mason,	0412 591 899
Silvio Favero,	0417 455 610
Paul Gazzola,	0418 556 366
Frank LaMattina,	03 5998 5225
Tom Schreurs,	0418 591 699
Rocky Lamattina	0416 056 458
Craig Arnott	0419 336 454
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#### DISCLAIMER

The purpose of the Victorian Vegetable Grower and the Vegelink newsletter 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 and the national vegetable levy. The information provided should not be interpreted as an advice or recommendation of any kind. The VGA and its officers disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from your relying on any information in this publication.



## Executive Officer's Corner POST



**Tony Imeson, Executive Officer**

**When will Governments respond responsibly and understand growers' frustration that vegetables will not grow without water?**

We have recently experienced a drought period with no positive actions by Government Agencies to provide storage facilities and allow growers to construct turkey nest dams on their properties and under licence pump excess storm water when available into storage. Water allocations have resulted in many growers only planting a small section of land in order to maintain some form of crop income. When rains eventually arrived causing flooding to the East Gippsland area, crops and soil were washed out into the ocean. Governments must act quickly and utilise taxpayers' money in resolving the water storage issue. There have been too many excuses and inappropriate reasons given for not constructing additional water storage dams and ensuring that good rain water does not continue to pour out into the ocean.

There has been an unfortunate reaction in the media that vegetables will be scarce and prices increase for the consumer. Any market user or visitor to the Melbourne Wholesale Market will observe that there is still plenty of fresh produce available each day and that movement is considered moderate, so there should not be any immediate justification for panic reporting in the media.

Vegetable Growers Gala Night held at the Crown Melbourne on Saturday 8 September was an outstanding success. The evening was well supported by

vegetable growers and industry supporters who made contributions to the evening through sponsorship and ticket prizes.

Guests at the Presidents table included the State Minister for Agriculture, Mr. Joe Helper and the Leader of the State Liberal Party, Mr. Ted Baillieu. With good food and beverages, roving magicians and dancing to the Brian Fitzgerald Band, the 500 guests enjoyed an excellent evening.

I read with interest a recent article by Growcom CEO Jan Davis, "Motivating Australians to Eat more Fruit & Vegetables" and the overweight nation that Australia has become.

Vegetable growers have rued the day they agreed to contribute to an R & D levy that did not include a promotional segment. The Melbourne Market Authority (MMA) provides an excellent market fresh schools programme, promoting fruit and vegetables to primary schoolchildren and the MMA web page ([www.marketfresh.com.au](http://www.marketfresh.com.au)) is geared to encourage children to understand the benefits from a healthy diet. Other States have similar healthy eating programmes and it is becoming more evident that an Australia wide programme with support from all governments and industry will restore the Australian image as a healthy sporty nation.

The VGA has a strong relationship with training providers. Over the last twenty years it has assisted in the development of industry apprenticeship, certificate and diploma courses. Growers also provide services and have donated equipment for production horticulture training. VGA continues to support apprenticeship and training programs currently held at Gordon Institute of TAFE's Werribee Campus. Should you have persons on the farm who would benefit from attending a training course please contact David Milburn Tel : 0438 413 505 at the Werribee Campus.

The introduction of the Horticultural Code of Conduct earlier this year initially caused some disruption to growers but recently there have not been any reports of formal disputes.

The Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Hon Peter McGauran announced the appointment of a Horticultural Code Committee to advise the Minister as to the impact of the code and any general issues that are raised from trading arrangements.

If you haven't renewed or subscribed to membership of the VGA Vic we would encourage you to consider supporting VGA Vic, which is the only body to represent the specific interests of Victorian vegetable growers. Currently, the VGA is primarily concerned with water management and the inaccessibility of agricultural chemicals. Many growers are not fully operational due to the drought and the VGA is lobbying for them to receive appropriate support and fair access to water resources. Also, many growers have been adversely affected by the Australian Government's decision to restrict access to pesticides and agricultural chemicals due to the threat of terrorism. The VGA has joined with the Farmers' Federation (VFF) and AUSVEG to represent these concerns to government.

We would express our sincere thanks to Victorian vegetable growers who have renewed membership of VGA Vic for 2007-2008 and continue supporting the industry.

Keep smiling

Tony Imeson

VGA Executive Officer

## THOUGHTS FOR SPRING

No one can do everything.  
Still, everyone can do something.  
Together, we can do anything.

Footprints in the sands of time  
Were not made by folks who stood still.



## VGA Victoria 2007 Annual General Meeting.

The 2007 AGM was held on Friday 5 October 2007 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Spencer Street, Melbourne and commenced at 4.30pm.

Reports from the President, Treasurer and Executive Officer were presented. Nominations for office bearers and executive committee had been received and the nominations were accepted.

President : Luis Gazzzola. Treasurer : David Wallace. Secretary and Public Officer : Tony Imeson.

Executive Committee : Craig Arnott, Peter Cochrane, Silvio Favero, Paul Gazzzola, Frank Lamattina, Rocky Lamattina, Anthony Mason, Robert Nave, John Said and Tom Schreurs. There were no nominations received for vice president positions.

Special business agenda items were approved and general industry issues debated between members.

Craig Murdoch presented his first IDO report and responded to questions from members.

Special guest Lisa McGuire, General Manager of AUSVEG, the national peak body for vegetables and potatoes, provided an update over the past five years of the development of AUSVEG and the current projects and national issues that are being addressed. This presentation was very well received, questions were lively from members and informative answers were received from Lisa.

The President thanked both Craig and Lisa for their attendance and presentations.

A buffet dinner followed the AGM and members and guests enjoyed a presentation by Ian Muir covering the development of EE Muir & Sons from its beginnings as Melbourne based family company to a national identity in the horticultural industry and still family controlled.

On behalf of members and guests, the President thanked Ian for an informative and entertaining presentation.

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT:

(continued from Page 1)

This has proved to be a year of many meetings and addressing major issues of water, fertiliser usage and market relocation. We look forward to 2008 being a more rewarding year.

On behalf of the executive committee I would extend to my Senior Vice President David Wallace special thanks for his support in attending the many meetings over the past year and to our Executive Officer Tony Imeson our appreciation for his loyal and professional attention to the VGA.

**May God bless all growers with health and prosperity and again lots of mother natures rain!**

**Luis Gazzzola**  
President

## Comprehensive Cover for you and Extra Support for VGA



Now there is a way for you to receive an easy to understand product, tailored to your requirements, backed up by local personal service - and help support the Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria. How is this all possible? Well, by simply calling your local Wesfarmers Federation Insurance (WFI) Area Manager.

The Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria is an alliance partner of WFI. As such, the Association receives a small commission each time one of our members takes out or renews a policy with WFI. These extra funds help us to continue to represent and support vegetable growers, and the industry. With WFI you receive personal on-farm service from a local Area Manager. There are 16 WFI branches across Victoria, so you can rest assured that WFI is never far away.

To decide whether WFI's Rural Plan is the right product for you, give them a call on 1300 934 934 to obtain the product disclosure statement and an obligation free quote.

You will not only be helping yourself to comprehensive cover, but also helping your Association.

*The Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria does not make any recommendation or provide any opinion about this product. Any advice or product information contained above was provided by WFI and does not take into account any individual's objectives, financial situation and needs.*

**Note:** If your business is receiving too many copies, or not enough copies of this newsletter, please contact the Industry Development Officer to correct our mailing list.

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If you are not on the mailing list for this newsletter, return this slip by **fax on: 03 9687 4723**  
**mail to: Mailbox 111, Melbourne Market, 542 Footscray Road, West Melbourne 3003**

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Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria  
thank all sponsors for their generous support given to the

# VGA GALA NIGHT

at the

## CROWN

Saturday 8 September 2007

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Werribee South General Store and Farm Supplies







## HOW GOOD ARE YOUR SOILS?

**Growers know the value of a healthy soil but what are some of early signs of soil “sickness”?**

Scientists can measure a range of physical soil properties including infiltration rate, bulk density, pore size distribution and soil strength using special equipment but the results can be difficult to interpret in a practical way.

Fortunately some straightforward indicators of soil health are well known to growers.

The “Maryland Soil Quality Assessment Book” (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1997), summarises some straight forward ways to gauge soil health.

Try this checklist.

Table 20.1  
**Qualitative Soil Health Indicators**

Indicator	Best Assessed	Poor	Medium	Good
<b>Earthworms</b>	Spring/Fall. Good soil moisture	0-1 worms in shovel-ful of top foot of soil. No casts or holes.	2-10 in shovel-ful. Few casts, holes or worms.	10+ in top foot of soil. Lots of casts and holes in tilled clods. Birds behind tillage.
<b>Organic Matter Color</b>	Moist soil.	Topsoil color similar to subsoil color.	Surface color closer to subsoil color.	Topsoil clearly defined, darker than subsoil.
<b>Organic Matter Residues</b>	Anytime.	No visible residues.	Some residues.	Residues on most of soil surfaces.
<b>Root Health</b>	Late spring (rapid growth stage).	Few, thick roots. No subsoil penetration.	Off color (staining) inside root.	Roots fully branched and extended, reaching into subsoil. Root exterior and interior is white.
<b>Subsurface Compaction</b>	Pre-tillage or post harvest. Good soil moisture	Wire breaks or bends when inserting flag.	Have to push hard, need fist to push flag in.	Flag goes in easily with fingers to twice the depth of plow layer.
<b>Soil Tilt Mellowness Friability</b>	Good soil moisture.	Looks dead. Like brick or concrete, cloddy. Either blows apart or hard to pull drill through.	Somewhat cloddy, balls up, rough pulling seedbed.	Soil crumbles well, can slice through, like cutting butter. Spongy when you walk on it.
<b>Erosion</b>	After heavy rainfall.	Large gullies over 2 inches deep joined to others, thin or no topsoil, rapid runoff the color of soil.	Few rills or gullies, gullies up to 2 inches deep. Some swift runoff, colored water.	No gullies or rills, clear or no runoff.
<b>Water Holding Capacity</b>	After rainfall. During growing season.	Plant stress two days after a good rain.	Water runs out after a week or so.	Holds water for a long period of time without signs of drought stress.
<b>Drainage Infiltration</b>	After rainfall.	Water lays for a long time, evaporates more than drains, always very wet ground.	Water lays for short period, eventually drains.	No ponding, no runoff, water moves through soil steady. Soil not too wet, not too dry.
<b>Crop Condition (How well it grows)</b>	Growing season. Good soil moisture.	Problem growing throughout season, poor growth, yellow or purple color.	Fair growth, spots in field different, medium green color.	Normal healthy dark green color, excellent growth all season, across field.
<b>pH</b>	Anytime, but at same time of year each time.	Hard to correct for desired crop.	Easily correctable.	Proper pH for crop.
<b>Nutrient Holding capacity</b>	Over a five-year period always at same time of year.	Soil tests dropping into “low” category.	Little change or slow down trend.	Soil tests trending up in relation to fertilizer applied and crop harvested but not into “very high” category.

-Modified from USDA, 1997

## SOIL – WHATS THE PROBLEM?

Forty local growers, agronomists and researchers had their say on soil problems at Cranbourne on 28th August.

The workshop was one of a series setting national priorities for future soil health projects funded through your national R&D levy.

Short talks from guest speakers included:

- Lessons from the Land & Water R&D for broadacre cropping soils.
- Indicators of soil health developed for sub-tropical vegetables.
- Understanding physical, chemical and biological indicators of soil health.

- Helena Whitman (Enviroveg, Soil Health Ute Guide) reported on the success of grower soil training days run in QLD and SA and is keen to run similar field days for Victorian growers.

Many soil issues were raised in the workshop discussion. These were grouped into major themes such as: measuring soil health, raising soil organic matter and reducing soil inputs. The groups views will help develop better targeted R&D levy proposals on soil health.

*For more information contact:*

Ian Porter at DPI-Knox on 9210 9217



## CHARCOAL & SOIL FERTILITY

AGRICHAR, a charcoal-based soil amendment, has huge potential to increase soil fertility AND bury greenhouse carbon.

The agrichar process converts a wide range of biowastes including rice hulls, sawdust and crop residues to charcoal and a fuel gas that is used to power the process. Carbon stored as charcoal in the soil is stable for hundreds of years.

Trials at Wollongbar Agricultural Institute, 20 km east of Lismore, showed that applying agrichar at 10 tonnes per hectare increased wheat and soybean yields 2-3 fold AND

reduced the production of greenhouse gases from the soil.

Produced at temperatures around 500°C, agrichar is effectively sterilised free of plant pests, diseases and chemical residues. When mixed into the soil, agrichar holds nutrients in the root zone and improves soil drainage and microbial activity. One application of agrichar is said to have the same benefits as 10 years of compost.

Agrichar is not yet commercially available though further field trials are expected. We look forward to hearing more on this promising technology.

**For more information visit:**

<http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/s2012892.htm>

<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/research/updates/issues/may-2007/soils-offer-new-hope>

<http://www.biochar-international.org/>

[http://www.css.cornell.edu/faculty/lehmann/terra\\_pret/TerraPretahome.htm](http://www.css.cornell.edu/faculty/lehmann/terra_pret/TerraPretahome.htm)





# vegelink

## CRAIG MURDOCH – YOUR NEW IDO



Adapting to change comes natural to vegetable growers, each day offers something new.

In the last few months, several long serving IDO's across Australia have moved on to new things. The IDO's are a vital part in making sure that the R&D process remains relevant to growers and it's essential that this work continues.

The VGA have appointed me to identify issues and assist with developing and reporting on R&D levy projects. I'm working from the VGA office at Melbourne Markets with Tony Imeson the VGA Executive Officer.

Many growers will know me through my past work with DPI-Victoria. Over the years, I've had the good fortune to study a variety of vegetable crops and learn how to deal with some troublesome problems. My most

recent contributions have been with plant biosecurity, dealing with pests including Lettuce Aphid and Potato Cyst Nematode.

### A bit about the past:

Fresh from school I joined Kraft Foods at Port Melbourne beginning a long career in the dairy processing industry. Much of my married life was spent working for Bonlac Foods (now Fonterra) at Camperdown in the Western district.

Regrettably my wife and I separated in 1996 and I now live with my son David, an apprentice locksmith at Kilsyth. Outside of work I enjoy Tai Chi, Yoga and a little bushwalking whenever I get the chance.

### And the future:

In this first year I plan to visit many vegetable businesses across Victoria. The main task is to build grower involvement in the R&D process and develop strong links with all those

interested in improving the outcome for Victorian vegetable growers.

Victoria has an efficient and productive vegetable industry conditioned by many hardships. Lifetimes of practical experience and talented support from a host of innovative industry specialists work together to keep high quality food on our tables. There will always be new challenges and I am confident they too will be managed just as well.

The IDO role provides great scope to assist vegetable growers improve their businesses. I feel proud to have this rare opportunity to contribute to the success of Victorian vegetable industry.

Keep safe,  
**Craig Murdoch**

Office : 9687 4707  
Mobile: 0429 990 553  
Email: ido@vgavic.org.au

## Brown coal for horticulture

Brown coal has become a valuable raw material for a range of useful organic products and soil conditioners for horticulture.

In many respects, brown coal is similar to soil humus, both come from decayed vegetation and the humic acids from both soil and brown coal share identical chemical and physical properties.

Brown coal products improve soil structure by physically interacting with clay and sand particles.

### For more information:

<http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au>

follow the links to :

Energy>Projects, Research & Development>Brown Coal Research and Development

## REMINDER

Important meetings on

### Maximum Residue Limits

**Cranbourne:** FRIDAY 26th October 3-5 pm

Ranfurlie Golf Course  
825 Frankston-Cranbourne Road  
Melways 133 B8

**Werribee:** FRIDAY 2nd November 3-5 pm

Bridge Hotel Function Room,  
97 Watton Street, Melways 205 H9

## Improving soil health with brown coal products

The value of Victorian brown coal products has been demonstrated on an acidic clay-loam vineyard soil in Victoria's Yarra Valley.

Results showed that commercial coal derived products were effective in reducing soil acidity and Aluminium toxicity as well as increasing the level of Calcium, Magnesium and Phosphorus available to plants. The treatment also improved water retention and drainage.

Commercial trials are planned this season at Werribee to evaluate the ability of brown coal products to correct nutrient imbalances in vegetable soils.

### For more information:

<http://www.aie.org.au/coal2000/mining.htm>

[http://www.regional.org.au/au/asssi/supersoil2004/s10/poster/1735\\_imbufta.htm](http://www.regional.org.au/au/asssi/supersoil2004/s10/poster/1735_imbufta.htm)

<http://www.chem.monash.edu.au/green-chem/news/docs/06news-apr2002.pdf>

