



(Left to Right): Steve Potts (NGIAV), Ken Orr (VGA Vic), Kieran Murphy (Vic DPI), Tony Imeson (VGA Vic), Catherine Anderson (VWIA), Robert Chin (NGIAV), Minister Joe Helper, John Wilson (NFG), Tony Allen (Vic Cherry Association), Steven Riseborough (Cherry Hill Orchards) and Luis Gazzola (VGA Vic).

DPI brings IDOs back to Victoria

It's been nearly six months since the **Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria (VGA Vic)** formed a partnership with the **Department of Primary Industries' (DPI) Horticulture Industry Network (HIN)** project to bring **Industry Development Officers (IDOs)** back to Victoria.

And now, following an extensive search, VGA Vic has assembled a first-rate team of IDOs with skills that suit the needs of the Industry's growers.

VGA Vic President, Luis Gazzola said: "The advantage of the project is that the IDOs will work with the VGA and the growers and have direct access to DPI's research and support services."

Mr Gazzola explained that the "support services" would greatly increase the IDOs' ability to address issues such as low water availability, climate variability and biosecurity.

The IDOs will attend meetings every six to eight weeks along with the IDOs from the 14 other horticulture industry associations that are also part of the HIN project.

Mr Gazzola explained that the IDOs would undertake professional development training to assist with their service delivery.

"The tools and resources that the IDOs require, as well as the different meeting themes, will be decided by the DPI and IDOs. This is to ensure the services are efficient, effective and targeted to the needs of our vegetable growers," he said.

"The advantage of the project is that the IDOs will work with the VGA and the growers and have direct access to DPI's research and support services."

VGA Vic President, Luis Gazzola.

The project is to be trialled over three years, and its effectiveness measured by an increase in industry self reliance and level of service capability.

The project was officially launched in October at Wandin by the Victorian Agriculture Minister, Joe Helper who said "...this was a major step forward in ensuring producers had ready access to targeted and relevant support services". ▼

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president's report

Christmas greetings to all

Greetings to all members, Industry Associate Members and suppliers to the Vegetable Industry.

What unusual weather we have had since my spring report. Good rains in some areas, with none in others and also record breaking heat waves in November.

What next? We can only hope that this is not a taste of things to come this summer. Thank God for the good rains in most areas at the end of November.

No matter what Mother Nature throws at us, we are still producing more than the consumers can eat. The markets all around Australia have been oversupplied resulting in slow sales and many lines selling below the cost of production. How much longer can we survive at these low prices?

Last report I spoke of the need to strongly market and promote our fresh and healthy vegetables. I believe the time has come for the Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria to take action on the Consumer and Marketing goals in our Strategic Plan.

Welcome for IDOs

I welcome Ken Orr on board as our new DPI HIN, Werribee Industry Development Officer (IDO) (*See story Page 4*). Do not hesitate to contact Ken and please make him feel welcome on your properties to discuss any issues – new or old. In the South East, we have just appointed Slobodan Vujovic as the new IDO. Central IDO link, Katie Fisher, is still recovering from major surgery. We hope to see Katie back on track early next year and in good health.

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"Since Launceston's 'Keep it Real' Conference - the Federal Government's Environment Minister, Penny Wong, has announced that carbon emissions in agriculture would be put off the agenda indefinitely."

I would like to thank the VGA Vic Executive for their confidence in electing me as your president for another term. Since the Annual General Meeting in October, the Executive, Tony and I have been very busy with many issues.

These issues include, the Victorian Famers Federation Policy Council, Climate Change, the Environment and Carbon Emissions, Sensitive Waterways, new Chemical Standards, EnviroVeg, AUSVEG's Annual General Meeting, Horticulture Australia Limited's (HAL) Young Leader of the Year 2009.

Good news on Carbon Emissions

Since Launceston's "Keep it Real" Conference – the Federal Government's Environment Minister, Penny Wong, has announced that carbon emissions in agriculture would be put off the agenda indefinitely.

This is great news for all of us but we must see the carbon emissions document and check the fine print for the future.

Young leader recognised

In other good news, congratulations to Rick Butler for receiving the Young Leader of the Year Award – keep up the good work (*See story Page 3*).

Property ID

Another future priority is working with the local Victorian DPI with regards to "Property Identification Numbers" for vegetable growers. VGA Vic's Executive applauds the Industry Advisory Committee for approving a HAL-funded "Property ID Numbers" project.

The Property ID number would monitor the collection of research and development funding; biosecurity incursions; sensitive chemical fertiliser purchases; Food Health and Safety issues; Occupational and Health Standards; water and environment issues; marketing and promotions and much more. This idea is a major issue for the future of our industry as we move forward.

In going forward, we need YOUR feedback as we make decisions about the future.

Thank you all for your support and trust and may God Bless all of you with more rain, better prices and good health!

Luis Gazzola

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Young grower reaps Industry Award

At just 31, sixth generation Victorian vegetable grower, Rick Butler is a keen, innovative grower who likes to "give back" to the Industry. And in recognition for all his hard work and industry contribution, Rick was recently honoured with a 2009 Young Leadership Award which is sponsored by Horticulture Australia Limited.

Rick is the Managing Director of his family's business, Butler Market Gardens, at Heatherton located on the outer south east rim of Melbourne. In his 31 years, his hard work and passion for learning have played a part in the property's growth. Today, the farm employs 70 staff and for the past 40 years has supplied supermarkets nationally.

Rick is not shy of trying new things and, in 2007, was granted funding from Victoria's Smart Water Project to design and build a vegetable washing system that, through recycling the water, saves up to 80,000 litres of potable drinking water each day.

Rick is also quick to offer young school graduates, eager to learn about "his" industry, work positions during summer so before they go on to University they have learnt about the Vegetable Industry and how fresh food is grown and supplied.

And within the Industry, since 2007 Rick has represented the Victorian vegetable growers on Horticulture Australia Limited's Industry Advisory Committee's Production Advisory Group. ▼



Victorian vegetable grower, Rick Butler (right) receiving the prestigious 2009 HAL Young Leadership Award from former HAL Chair, Dr Nigel Steele Scott.



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Meet the IDO team

Through the Department of Primary Industries' (DPI) Horticulture Industry Network (HIN) project, the Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria (VGA Vic) has brought together a team of highly competent Industry Development Officers (IDOs) who each bring a different set of skills to the table.

Ken Orr IDO West

Ken Orr is the VGA Vic's Western District IDO. His previous work experience was with the DPI in Horticulture Extension as well as being a National Horticulture Agronomist for Pivot – now IPL.

Mr Orr has had extensive experience in horticultural - agricultural production (government and corporate) with the major emphasis in perennial and annual commercial crop production (vines, tree crops, speciality crops, potatoes and vegetable production).

He has also had expertise in horticultural production covering four states where the major areas of responsibilities included production agronomy, extension, research and development, training, nutritional programs, sales and marketing.

To contact Ken Orr M: 0428 502 936 or E: idowest@vgavic.org.au



Slobodan Vujovic IDO East

Slobodan Vujovic is the VGA Vic's Eastern District IDO. His vast work experience includes more than 12 years at the DPI as a research agronomist where he completed widespread research and extension work on a variety of vegetable crops and programs including; Lettuce, Asian Vegetables, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Plant Breeding and Selection.

Mr Vujovic's most recent appointment was as a Field Agronomist for the International seed company ENZAZADEN. He comes highly qualified to the Vegetable Industry.

To contact Slobodan Vujovic T: (03) 9687 4707 or E: idoeast@vgavic.org.au



Katie Fisher IDO Central Contact

Katie Fisher has worked closely with the VGA Vic on a number of communication and marketing initiatives since early 2008. Ms Fisher was previously appointed to the IDO position following the decision by Horticulture Australia Ltd to extend the Victorian Industry Development Project for a further six months (January 1, 2009 to June 30, 2009).

Ms Fisher also works closely with the DPI on a number of vegetable industry related projects.

To contact Katie Fisher
M: 0402 444 878 or E: katiefisher@optusnet.com.au



The Horticulture Industry Network explained...

The Horticulture Industry Network (HIN) is an initiative aimed at strengthening working partnerships between the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and the Horticulture Industry sector – such as the Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria (VGA Vic) – in order to deliver better services to growers.

The HIN includes a grants program that funds the co-investment and partnership between the DPI and the VGA Vic. The VGA Vic then uses this funding to employ their own Industry Development Officer(s) (IDO) to deliver on industry and region specific issues.

With respect to the VGA Vic, the three IDOs (see story left) will be delivering the related goals addressed in the Victorian Vegetable Industry's Strategic Plan, which are:

- > **Consumer and Markets** – to be a leader in positioning and driving demand for Victorian vegetables leading to consumers eating more fresh vegetables.
- > **Competition** – Enhance industry competitiveness – to increase international competitiveness.
- > **Information** – For growers to be aware of, have access to and act on the latest industry information.
- > **Leadership & Management** – For the Victorian Vegetable Industry to have capable, willing, skilled and engaged, productive and recognised management and leadership.
- > **Resources** – Proactive management of natural resources and awareness of climate change.

The IDOs are employed and managed by VGA Vic, with advisory committees formed to ensure the IDOs work plan remains relevant to the changing needs of the Vegetable Industry.

DPI supports the HIN by providing secretariat, communications and practice change support and ensuring the Horticultural Community stays informed of the latest Research & Development, funding opportunities and market access imperatives.

Aside from VGA Vic, the other Horticulture Industry Associations who have partnered DPI in the networks first year are: the Australian Table Grape Association; Fruit Growers Victoria; the Victorian Wine Industry Association; Summerfruit Australia; the Murray Valley Winegrowers Association; Nursery and Garden Industry Association of Victoria; Australian Dried Fruits Association; Victorian Cherry Association; Australian Processing Tomatoes Research Council; Murray Valley Citrus Board; Australian Rubus Growers Association; Australian Blueberry Growers Association and the Victorian Farmers Federation (Potatoes & Flowers).



A "think" tank for leafy vegetables

A forum of researchers and grower representatives spent two days in Adelaide last month discussing the priorities of the Leafy Vegetable Industry.

The aim was to provide clear feedback to the Horticultural Industry's key research and development peak body, Horticultural Australia Limited (HAL), on the research and development priorities for the Leafy Vegetable Industry.

Ken Orr, Industry Development Officer in Victoria's west for the Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria attended and explains.

The forum was fittingly titled the "Leafy Vegetable Think Tank" workshop and was facilitated by Alison Anderson, Senior Environmental Consultant with Arris.

Leafy vegetables include lettuce, baby leaf, spinach, silver beet, celery and parsley. Victoria produces 33,620 tonnes of lettuce worth \$28.5 million almost 30% of Australia's lettuce production. The main growing areas are around Werribee and Bacchus Marsh.

Alison Anderson facilitating the future project prioritization with growers and researchers.

The workshop consisted of presentations from researchers and project co-ordinators covering key outcomes and knowledge gaps from the recent Vegetable Industry Development Programs and Leafy Vegetable Projects.

Group discussions centred on identifying key research topics, such as soil monitoring, Integrated Pest Management and marketing, grower concerns and then prioritising future research and development projects for the Leafy Vegetable Industry.

The Priorities were then discussed, collated and voted on by the workshop participants and will be used to provide clear feedback to HAL and the Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee as to the research and development priorities for leafy vegetables.

Some of the concerns – priorities raised were:

- > Improving the shelf life of leafy vegetables.
- > Costings and bench marking for growing leafy vegetables.
- > Supply chain improvement.
- > Disease control.
- > Consumers' awareness - benefits of fresh leafy vegetables.

Freshcare 10 years on

...still pushing food safety and quality code

Quality assurance in the Horticultural Industry has become well established in Australia. On farm HACCP-based plans have been adopted due to pressures from supermarkets and other buyers including fresh markets.

Supermarket systems and more general quality assurance (QA) systems have been used by growers to meet these new requirements. FreshCare, and SQF have been introduced across the country.

Now in its 10th year, Freshcare is the largest on-farm assurance program in Australia with more than 4300 members nationally. It is an Australian non-profit program owned and managed by the various peak horticultural grower organisations.

Food safety is of increasing importance to industries like horticulture, as consumers, buyers and governments demand increased assurance that food is safe.

Following the recent review and development of the third edition of the Food Safety and Quality Code, Freshcare is now a practical option for a large group of growers supplying fresh produce directly to Coles Supermarkets. Coles has set the deadline of March 1, 2010, for its direct suppliers to move to Freshcare Version 3 (V.3.)

Freshcare V.3 training is required for all existing members and needs to be completed by March 1, 2011. All current members must undertake a one-day upgrade/transition training workshop to implement the new components. Transition training is also available to growers wanting to move from another program to Freshcare V.3.

Growers with no system currently in place will need to undergo full training which involves attending an initial one-day workshop and an on-farm follow-up with the trainer to ensure everything is in place for the audit. ▼

executive officer's corner



New market's latest floor design welcomed

The Fruit and Vegetable Market Community has welcomed the design changes to the trading area of the new market, to be relocated to Epping, from a T shape to M (anchor). However market businesses are still waiting for the costs of stands, stores and warehousing. The Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria's (VGA Vic), representatives, David Wallace and Vince Doria, have stressed to State Government representatives, the urgency in providing the costing information so businesses can make financial decisions.

Fresh produce on the media "radar"

Recent enquiries to the VGA Vic office from the media, mainly in regards to green vegetables, have increased due to the variable growing conditions experienced in Victoria during both winter and spring. Their main questions refer to the increase in consumer prices for fresh produce. Our explanation is standard - it is a simple case of supply and demand for the volume of fresh produce available on the day.

There is also a clear message given out that growers are not receiving better returns in times like these when there are extreme increases to farm gate costs from fertiliser and fuel. Wholesale markets are experiencing an oversupply of fresh produce and sales are not clearing daily stocks.

AUSVEG AGM

There has been a positive turn around in the activities and operations of the National Vegetable and Potato Industry's peak body, AUSVEG, since the appointment of new Chief Executive Officer, Richard Mulcahy. Mr Mulcahy was appointed earlier this year, and has since increased and improved the information flow to the Industry. VGA Vic's President, Luis Gazzola and I attended the 2009 Annual General Meeting (AGM) at Sydney in late November and the future "in 2010 looks very positive".

John Said was re-elected the Victorian representative for the AUSVEG board, VGA Vic Executive Member, Roger Turner was elected the Victorian representative to the Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) and Rick Butler was elected as the Victorian representative on the IAC's Production Division.

The National Vegetable and Potato Industry Conference is scheduled for May 2010 to be held at the Gold Coast in

Queensland. An educational, instructive industry related and imaginative program is being planned to suit all growers and their families together with an associated industry supplier exhibition. More details will be available in the New Year.

Ongoing chemical review

The Department of Agriculture, Forest and Fisheries (DAFF) is continuing its review into the implementation of a National Chemical Model with respect to the individual models currently valid in each state. VGA Vic has representatives attending meetings in order to present the interests of Victoria's vegetable growers.

Count down to VIC FRESH

VGA Vic is represented on the Vic Fresh Dinner Dance and Presentation Night Organising Committee to be held at the Crown on Saturday 27 February, 2010. It is great night for all market users to network, relax and socialize in a great atmosphere as well as enjoy excellent entertainment and dancing. Invitations and table booking forms are being distributed by the Melbourne Market Authority.

VGA Vic's 2009 AGM

The VGA Vic AGM held in October received good attendance with industry reports and presentations from invited guests being well received by members. Our dinner speaker, Dr Siwan Lovett from AUSVEG provided an excellent environmental message resulting in good question time and table discussion.

VGA Vic's regional dinner dance

More than 200 guests attended the Villa Adriana at Dandenong South on Saturday 25 October for a vegetable grower regional event. It was an excellent night of fellowship, good food, beverages entertainment and dancing by all in attendance. The event was quickly organised to replace the VGA Vic Ball, usually held at the Crown in August, which was cancelled due to the lack of support from sponsors. This was understandable due to the financial down turn experienced throughout the whole of industry.

Keep Smiling,
Tony Imeson

VGA Vic. proudly recognises our industry supporters:

