

Australian Chestnut Industry Communication Activities

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Chestnuts Australia Inc (CH06004)

Project Number: CH06004

CH06004

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Completion Date: 31/7/2009

Purpose of this Project: This project was designed to assist the Australian Chestnut industry by providing a formal mechanism to transfer technology to all stakeholders, including growers, other industry partners and consumers, and to provide support to the activities of the Chestnut IAC, Chestnuts Australia Inc. (CAI) and the CAI R&D Committee. An officer was employed on a part-time basis to disseminate information to the industry, using primarily print and electronic means, and to organise and participate in industry activities designed to improve grower knowledge. This is the final report for this project

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TABLE OF CONTENTS



Page 4	Summary and Recommendations
Page 5 & 6	Introduction
Page 6	Method & Activities
Page 7 - 12	Major Communication Officer Activities
Page 12	Evaluation
Page 13	Implications, Recommendations, Acknowledgements, Bibliography

SUMMARY

The Australian Chestnut industry is located in all states, except for Queensland and the Northern Territory, and prior to this project it was a challenge to ensure that industry information reached all growers and other industry related sectors. This project has provided a simple, effective, and cost efficient way of transferring information using print and web-based systems. It has developed a program of farm-based activities to encourage the adoption of new processes by growers. And it has provided support to the committees of the industry, assisting the overall management of business.

CH06004 started on the 1st February, 2007 and was contracted for a period of 12 months with an annual budget of \$34,500. Due to the success of the project in the first 12 months, on the recommendation of the Chestnut IAC a 12 month extension was sought from 1st February, 2008 and granted, extending the project to 31st January, 2009. A further 6 month extension was granted from 1st February, 2009 while a Chestnut Industry Development Needs Assessment (CH08002) was undertaken, with completion of the whole project being 31/7/09.

The key activities have included:

- The regular production of the **industry newsletter** “Nuts & Burrs”.
- The ongoing development and continued enhancement of the Chestnuts Australia Inc. **website** www.chestnutsaustralia.com.au
- The organisation of **Field Days, Workshops, Farm Walks** and participation in these events
- Regular **mail outs** to CAI members of information regarding industry meetings and events as well as general information of importance to horticulture industries
- Preparation of regular contributions on ‘**Chestnut Industry News**’ for the nut industry journal “The Australian Nutgrower”. Preparation of feature article for the same publication.
- Participation in regional **Chestnut Festivals**
- Provision of assistance to the Chestnut IAC and CAI executive

The project has provided a defined way of communicating information to growers and has prompted greater grower involvement in field based activities. The web site, in particular, has provided a means for the general community to access information about the Australian chestnut industry.

An accessible, central point of communicating has proved to be a beneficial feature essential for growers, manufacturers, CAI Executive Committee, Chestnut IAC, wholesalers and the general public alike. Therefore there is an ongoing need for this activity and continuation of the programme is recommended. The role of a Communications Officer is a crucial ingredient to the ongoing effectiveness of this largely disparate industry and cements continuity of information that the industry needs if it is to advance and thrive.

INTRODUCTION

The Australian chestnut industry is a small and disparate industry with approximately 300 growers Australia wide: 80 % of these are in NE Victoria, with other growers in NSW, Tasmania, SA and WA.

The Australian chestnut industry currently produces around 1200 tonnes pa and in the future production is forecast to outstrip domestic demand (*Australian Chestnut Industry Strategic Plan 2006-2010*). To ensure further growth and to retain competitiveness and viability of the industry, it will be essential that developments in horticultural practises, post-harvest handling and quality compliance strategies are communicated to all sectors of the industry. The knowledge base of growers will play a crucial role in determining the long-term viability of the industry. Equally important will be the need to educate consumers and wholesalers about critical aspects of the industry, aspects such as nutritional benefits and storage requirements.

Effective communication is necessary for the transfer of technical understanding and up-skilling of the industry, key elements to the growth and development of the chestnut industry. Historically, many of these activities have been done on a voluntary basis.

For the advancement of the industry the chestnut IAC considered it important to develop a consistent method of communicating with growers. An initial attempt along these lines was made in 2003 when an Industry Development Officer Project (CH03001) was established. However a number of difficulties were experienced with this project (*see CH03001 Final Report*) and after a review of the project the Chestnut IAC elected to trial a Communications Officer project for 12 months in the first instance. This project would develop a formal framework for communicating issues and technical information.

The aims of the project were to facilitate the on-going development of the chestnut industry by undertaking general communication throughout the industry, providing a communication conduit between the Chestnut IAC and growers and assisting in the operation of the Chestnut IAC in its deliberations on industry programs. This would be accomplished by part-time employment of an Industry Communications Officer.

Due to funding limitations it was apparent to the Chestnut IAC that the project should focus on basic communication activities, though there was scope for development of additional activities depending on the competencies of the service provider. The principle components of the project included the;

- Provision of industry newsletters (3 pa)
- The organisation of workshops (1-2 pa) and field days (1-2 pa)
- Regular updating of the website
- Attendance at CAI meetings and any other industry-related meetings as deemed reasonable

It was anticipated that the project would provide a simple, effective, and cost efficient way of transferring information using print and web-based systems. Results of other R&D projects would be made available to the industry using the website, providing linkages to all industry projects in an easily accessible form. The website would be important in addressing consumer related enquiries. It was also hoped that the operation of the industry executive committees would be improved due to the provision of services to these committees and simply by having a presence, providing a link between committees and other sectors.

After 12 months operation, due to the success of CH06004, the chestnut industry obtained a 1 year extension of the project. Achievements included an up to date website with links to other sites of interest, a comprehensive newsletter and a focal contact point for all industry enquiries. The industry wished to build on the work achieved; and had suggested additional activities for inclusion in the project, including collection of industry statistics, development of a wholesale market report during peak harvest times to assist grower decision making and the expansion of the farm activities components. The latter activity was considered particularly important as a means of bolstering industry confidence and networks during the drought, as well as passing on new technology that would assist growers to develop strategies to cope in the difficult conditions.

While the chestnut industry is considering potential industry development officer projects for the future, a significant reduction in levy receipts in 06/07 and in 07/08, due to the drought, prevented the industry from proceeding in that direction. In the meantime the continuation of CH06004 provided a mechanism to bridge the communication gap to industry, ensuring that industry members were well informed.

METHOD & ACTIVITIES

Method

A person was employed on a part-time basis (62 hours/month) to act as Communications Officer (CO). Selection criteria included good communication skills (written, verbal and electronic), financial and time management skills, and the ability to organise events and committee meetings.

The position was described as follows: The CO will work closely with the Chestnuts Australia executive and its committees to ensure that industry members are kept informed and that technology is transferred to all stakeholders. This will involve the provision and editing of reports in newsletters and distribution to industry members, the organisation of at least one annual field day, the organisation of any additional workshops and attendance at all meetings conducted on behalf of the chestnut industry. Regular updating of the society's website will also be an essential component to the communication strategy. Training will be provided as required to ensure that this component becomes a key resource for the industry. The website will contain information related to growing chestnuts, technology changes, health messages and links to government agencies. The CO will also play a significant role in ensuring that elements of the Strategic Plan 2006-2008 are implemented within the nominated time frames.

Attendance at meetings and the provision of briefing notes and meeting materials was considered an important responsibility of the CO. This was designed to ensure a close connection between the functions of the CO and the operation of the IAC and HAL, and enable the CO to be fully aware of issues confronting the industry.

The CO was managed by the chestnut IAC and the position was reviewed periodically. Performance of the CO was assessed against agreed goals including the successful production of specified reports and newsletters, organisation of industry workshops and field days, and competent management of operational matters.

Major Communications Officer Activities

The following activities were accomplished throughout the period of the project and occupied 15 ½ hours per week.

1. “Nuts & Burrs” Industry Newsletter

- Write Office Report/Communications Officer feature article
- source other articles
- format and organise the printing of three issues per year, posting out hard copies to the membership.
 - Pre season’, ‘Winter’ & ‘Festive Season’ editions were produced in 2007 and 2008, with a ‘Preseason’ and ‘Winter’ edition in 2009.
 - These issues contained regular reports from the President, R&D Chair, and the Communications Officer.
- A Grower Interview Sheet was developed in 2008 and to date 2 growers have been interviewed and had a feature article along with photos published in the newsletter.

2. Industry Field Days/Workshops

In collaboration with the CAI Executive committee the CO organised venues, suggested speakers, advertised events (newsletters, web page, special mail out), collated RSVPs and attended to catering arrangements. Report event in newsletter.

September 2007: Field Day & Farm Walk held Stanley, NE Victoria.

38 persons in attendance.

This field day was organised in conjunction with the ALPM/AGM.

The focus- examination of mature chestnut trees affected by severe frost events in Stanley; discussion of pruning practises to overcome damage.

There was also a display of equipment.

Attendees looking over a modified harvester



June 2008: Pruning Workshop held at Beechworth, NE Victoria.

30 persons in attendance.

This was a special workshop organised to demonstrate the latest pruning techniques in use in the industry. One of the local pruning contractors demonstrated the use of a cherry-picker and how it could be used to manage large trees.

Attendees at the Pruning Workshop



January 2009: Chestnut Rot Workshop, Hoskinstown NSW.

44 persons in attendance. Growers from NSW (Orange, Batlow, Blue Mtns), NE Victoria (Eurobin, Stanley, Myrtleford) and SA.

This was the first regional workshop, a new activity in the project. These workshops are aimed at developing strong networks within regions, and building cohesion within the industry.

This workshop was an extended outcome of CH07001: John & Heather Kane invited Prof Dennis Fulbright to Australia so that he could gain an appreciation of the Australian industry. Dennis kindly agreed to give a presentation at this workshop.

The topic ‘Chestnut Rot’ was chosen as the theme. Other speakers included David Ogilvy (grower undertaking private research into chestnut rot), Lucas Shuttleworth (PhD candidate, University of Sydney (CH06002)) & Dr Stephen Morris (Sydney Post-Harvest Laboratory).



Presenter Lucas Shuttleworth setting up an experiment for attendees to view

February 2009: Soil Health Workshop.

40 persons in attendance. Wandiligong, NE Victoria.

This workshop was held to explain the preliminary research results from the ‘Caring for our Country’ – ‘Developing Sustainable Chestnut Management Practices’ project designed to benchmark the soil and irrigation requirements for sustainable chestnut production.

Presenter Ray Borschmann explaining his results



3. Website

The website has featured heavily in the dissemination of information to members and the general public from the notifying of upcoming industry seminars, workshops, trade fairs to the first time publicising of the 2007 Sydney Market Reports. Recipes and Chestnut news and events are also publicized. A Gallery featuring pictures of recent CAI activities was established in 2008.

The home page was reviewed monthly with additions and deletions made to keep it up to date. In 2007 four new content pages were added with

- information on our nutritional Industry mascot ‘Mr. Chesty’
- the complete Chestnut Industry Strategic Plan 2006-2010 was made available
- Book Review section was added

- OH&S section with links to every state in Australia growing Chestnuts, allowing persons to access and create their own OH&S program.

New to the website for 2008 was the launch of a ‘blog’, Gallery and Market Report (during the season) and the re-introduction of a ‘Members Only’ section.

Below are real statistics of website hits during the six months to June 2009. By far the majority of hits are during the peak of the Chestnut season, May.

Month	Unique visitors	Number of visits	Pages	Hits	Bandwidth
Jan 2009	703	913	4132	14735	141.12 MB
Feb 2009	665	886	5097	16827	159.67 MB
Mar 2009	1223	1554	10895	28904	278.79 MB
Apr 2009	2319	2794	18846	83338	593.78 MB
May 2009	2485	2895	17194	67346	347.50 MB
Jun 2009	1258	1457	7533	34572	153.98 MB
Jul 2009	0	0	0	0	0
Aug 2009	0	0	0	0	0
Sep 2009	0	0	0	0	0
Oct 2009	0	0	0	0	0
Nov 2009	0	0	0	0	0
Dec 2009	0	0	0	0	0
Total	8653	10499	63697	245722	1.64 GB

The impact of the website is gauged by the number of enquires it generates. From the start of the Project to date no less than 330 enquiries have been responded to and followed up on.

4. Mail Outs

Regular mail outs on all up coming Chestnut Industry Events were sent to CAI members and in some cases Non Member Levy Payers on file, including the 2009 flyer advertising the Horticulture for Tomorrow Guidelines for Environmental Assurance in Australian Horticulture.

5. ALPM – 2007/2008

Prepare print, mail out meeting papers for the Annual Levy Payers Meeting.
 Organise Guest Speakers/Venue/ Caterers/AGM Dinner/Advertising for the event (Newspapers/Industry Newsletters and on CAI Website).
 Provide secretariat services.

6. AGM – 2007/2008

Prepare print, mail out meeting papers for the Annual General Meeting.
 Provide secretariat services.

7. Australian Nutgrower

Submitted Association articles in the 2007/2008 editions March/June/September/December on ‘Chestnut Industry News’ with photos.

Review and provide a current CAI Membership list for Australian Nutgrower subscription list.

8. IAC Secretariat

During the life of the Project attend and provide Secretariat duties for 5 scheduled IAC meetings, including the preparation and circularisation of minutes.

9. Festivals and Promotions

Support the activities of the chestnut industry by taking a leading position in the communication to the general public of the attributes of chestnuts.

May 2007: *Chestnut Month In May* – Help organise and disseminate information.

May 2007: Beechworth Harvest Celebration – Event coordinator

May 2008: Beechworth Harvest Celebration – Event coordinator

May 2009: La Fiera – Myrtleford – Event coordinator

Contribute association/industry information - photos, maps and recipes to various publishing houses on request.

cooking with chestnuts

Chocolate chestnut torte

- 400g chestnut puree (or to make - use 350g peeled chestnuts simmered 18l tender in water and sugar to taste then pureed)
- 150g dark chocolate, melted
- 1½ cup cream
- 1/2 cup brandy
- 3/4 cup caster sugar
- 180g soft butter
- 6 eggs
- 2 tbsp of cornflour (gluten free)

Beat cream, chestnut puree and brandy till smooth.
Beat in butter and sugar till creamed then add melted chocolate.
Continue to beat while adding eggs and flour.
Place in sprayed 22cm tin.
Bake at 150C for 60 minutes.
Cover with ganache when cool.
Serve small slices with double cream.

Ganache

- 200g chocolate
- 1 cup cream

Place chocolate and cream in bowl over steaming water until melted.
Stir to mix, when thickened and glossy, spread over torte.

Chestnuts Australia

There are approximately 340 chestnut growers in Australia producing around 1,300 tonnes of chestnuts annually. At the present time 70% to 80% of Australian production is located in the North East of Victoria - Bright, Myrtleford, Buckleford Valley, Harrietville, Beechworth and Stawell. In the South of the Divide Region of Victoria, chestnuts are grown in the High Country of the Gippsland and the Macedon Ranges.

Chestnuts are sold in the domestic fresh fruit market. It is expected production will increase considerably in the next 10 years as large numbers of trees have been planted in the last 15 years.

- Chestnuts are versatile - they can be used in savoury or sweet recipes for all the family.
- Chestnuts are in season March to June - and available all year around with frozen, peeled, meat, flour and puree.
- Chestnuts are good for you - they are naturally low in fat, naturally salt free, naturally low in sugar, naturally high in dietary fibre, gluten free, low GI for slow release energy.
- Fresh chestnuts have the Heart Health Tick of approval.

Key Messages:

- Chestnuts are versatile and easy to use - simply cut, cook, peel, enjoy.
- There are new savoury or sweet chestnuts recipes for all occasions.
- Chestnuts are good for you and are Heart Foundation Tick approved.

For further information on Victoria's Chestnut industry contact Chestnuts Australia on 5751 1458 or email admin@chestnutsaustralia.com.au
www.chestnutsaustralia.com.au

North East Victoria

Winter 09 FOODWINE | 29

“Example of CO contribution to article – Map and association details, published in No 4 Winter 2009 Food and Wine Magazine”

10. Industry Development Needs Assessment

IDNA held 19th October, 2008 in NE Victoria. Organise Venue/Caterer/Attend/Participate. Report to Membership in the Nuts & Burrs November, 2008.

11. HAL Forum

Attend HAL Forum May/November 2008 on behalf of the Chestnut industry and report to membership via the Nuts & Burrs. In May this trip also included a visit to the Sydney Wholesale Market.

12. General Operational Activities on behalf of CAI

CAI Meetings

2007 – Executive Committee Meetings were held May, July, August, September and November. Preparation of Agenda/Financial Reports x 3/Accounts Approved for Payment List/Correspondence In-Out/Project Budget Update Sheet for each meeting.

2008 - Executive Committee Meetings were held February, May, August, September and October. Preparation of Agenda/Financial Reports x 3/Accounts Approved for Payment List/Correspondence In-Out/Project Budget Update Sheet for each meeting.

2009 - Executive Committee Meetings were held January, February, May. Preparation of Agenda/Financial Reports x 3/Accounts Approved for Payment List/Correspondence In-Out/Project Budget Update Sheet were for each meeting.

Travelling

Maintaining Excel sheet recording all Communication Officer Travel expenses

Office

File correspondence/respond to numerous phone calls/Reconciliation of Bank Statements/Assist in preparation of quarterly BAS/Payment of Invoices

Office Hours – Mon/Wed 1 – 5 Fri 9 – 1. Total hours per month 62.

Membership

99 Members at 30th June, 2009. Maintain Membership data base. Maintain membership list of current members - Names/Addresses/Email Addresses/Phone Numbers/Follow up potential new members. Create and post out Membership Renewal invoices 1st November each year.

Collection of Industry Statistics

In 2008 started collecting industry statistical information on number of trees planted, varieties being grown, production levels

Recipe Card Distribution

At the request of members, wholesalers, growers, levy payers, retailers, marketing agencies and the general public, chestnut marketing material, recipe cards and varietal stickers are posted out or are prepared for pick up from the CAI Office, or in some cases delivered.

HAL

Prepare and submit CH06004 Final Report.

EVALUATION

This project has been extremely successful for the Australian Chestnut industry. The website is fully operational, industry members have a focal point of contact, and activities of benefit are being regularly organised. Evaluation of these activities is difficult to quantify, however the CO did undertake a simple survey related to the newsletter.

Nuts & Burrs Industry Newsletter Survey

A survey conducted late in 2007 targeted 25% of the Member ship as to the effectiveness and relevance of the industry newsletter the Nuts & Burrs.

An overwhelming majority stated that they read the newsletter, felt the articles were relevant and appropriate and information provided timely.

The question was put to Members how they would like to see the newsletter improve and more than half those surveyed were extremely happy with the newsletter and felt it had improved. Some made comment that they would like to see more grower related articles.

In light of this the CAI Committee approved the suggestion of the Communications Officer that a standard interview sheet be drawn up and 1 Grower each issue be interviewed.

Management Committee Review

The management committee is extremely pleased with the way in which Mrs Tanya Edwards has conducted this project. Our view is unchanged from that submitted in the 2007 application to HAL for an extension of the project *ie* 'Mrs Tanya Edwards has proved to be an outstanding acquisition for the chestnut industry. She is bright, keen and has an engaging personality. Tanya works independently and recognises the value of undertaking additional training. More over in the short time that she has worked with the industry she has acquired an understanding of the industry that has assisted her when organising industry activities.'

She has met all the required outputs listed in the project application

- Agreed goals have been met on time and within budgetary limits. Newsletters have been produced, the ALPM and field day organised, and the website has been regularly updated with information and links of interest to the industry.
- Additional training, principally related to website management, has been completed.
- High level communication skills (verbal and written) have been demonstrated.
- Provides regular input into the conduct of the project. Tanya has suggested ways to improve the content of the website, the newsletter and industry activities including recommending speakers.
- Efficient and competent support during IAC meetings.

Tanya has a 'can do' attitude to her project and this positive approach has had enormous impact on the industry members. Members now contact her with industry issues, she handles matters that re in her job description and area of expertise and disseminates others to the appropriate committee members.

The Industry Development Needs Assessment (CH08002) reported favourably on the communications activities of the chestnut industry. Some further development of some

activities was recommended - collection of industry statistics, distribution of press releases, strengthening of networks - and work has commenced to address these areas. Overall, this small industry has created a communications plan using a very small budget that is working for the industry.

IMPLICATIONS

The chestnut industry efforts to establish a communications officer have been helped by adopting a simple approach, with a clearly defined plan of expectations. The plan has scope for new activities and altered approaches. Crucial to its success has been the appointment of a suitable person who has undertaken the role with the support of the executive committee.

The industry will continue to work with the model that is working well for the industry. One of the chestnut industries greatest challenges is the small budget that is available for this project. Levy incomes have been severely impacted by the drought and there is no possibility to increase the allocation of funds to communication activities.

The drought has also affected growers in other ways and apathy to industry activities has slowly pervaded the industry. So this has been another challenge. This challenge has been met head on. Additional, low cost farm-based activities were added to the calendar and this seems to have worked well. Attendance at events is increasing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chestnut industry will act on the recommendations of CH08002 and expand the communications activities to include promotion regional activities, development of press releases at opportune times, collection of industry statistics as well as continue the good work that has been done with the methods that are in place.

The website has been a key tool in the project. It is scheduled for a revamp, with a fresh modern look that is attractive to members and the general public and enhanced functionality being planned.

The Chestnut industry should continue to retain a Communications Officer project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Communications Officer acknowledges the support of the CAI Executive Committee in the execution of this project. They have encouraged me to take on the industry challenges, listened to my suggestions, answered lots of questions and supported me to undertake additional training.

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CH07001 A study tour of the American chestnut industry with a focus on peeling equipment,
October 2007

CH08002 Chestnut Industry Development Needs Assessment

Prepared by Communications Officer
Tanya Edwards in conjunction with Project Administrator Heather Kane