

Cittgroups Australia 2005 - 2008

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Australian Citrus Growers
Incorporated (ACG)

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CT05009

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CT05009

CITTgroups Australia

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Murray Valley Citrus Board
Citrus Growers of South Australia
Riverina Citrus
New South Wales Department of Primary Industries
John Owen-Turner Pty Ltd
Northern Territory Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development
Western Australian Fruit Growers' Association Citrus Council
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Media summary

CITTgroups (Citrus Information Technology Transfer Groups) Australia are regional grower groups that meet regularly to facilitate information exchange in an informal environment as part of the national citrus communications strategy.

The project is funded through the national citrus levy – research and development, which is managed by Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL).

Citrus industry personnel (researchers, extension officers, commercial providers, marketers, exporters, grower organisations and boards, and growers) contribute to the project through presentations, meetings and tours.

CITTgroups Australia is managed by the Australian Citrus Growers (ACG) Communication Manager and operates in the major citrus production areas through part-time coordinators: Riverland, Murray Valley, Riverina, NSW North and Central Coast, Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia.

The CITTgroups Australia program is a critical component of the citrus industry's communication strategy and complements other communication initiatives such as the Australian Citrus News, ACG website, Citrus Growing Manual, Communications Manager role, ACG Annual Conferences and National Citrus Liaison Meeting.

During the lifetime of the CT05009 CITTgroups Australia project:

- The main topics at CITTgroups Australia activities were:
 - Drought and Irrigation Management
 - Pruning
 - Pests and Diseases
 - Nutrition
 - Irrigation / Fertigation
 - Communication (of projects)
 - Fruit size and crop load
 - Spraying and Chemicals
 - Phenology
 - Varieties
 - Orchard Management

The CITTgroups Australia project links directly to the citrus industry advisory committee (IAC) Strategic Plan through Outcome 5. Market information and research results applied by the citrus industry. However, because of the variety and complexity of information delivered by the CITTgroups Australia project, all IAC outcomes are dealt with throughout the range of grower activities.

These groups are considered, throughout the citrus industry, to be effective in facilitating the communication of research and development outcomes and in bringing about change in production practices on-farm (Yencken 1997, Bessen 1999).

In 2007, a request for an extension to the project was submitted to Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) to enable the Industry Development Needs Assessment to be undertaken as per HAL requirements. HAL subsequently advised that the current project would end on 30 May 2008 and that a 'new project' will be put into place to cover the extension period to 30 June 2009.

Below: A very successful CITTgroup activity – Riverina delegates organised a bus tour for a more detailed understanding of the Snowy Hydro Scheme in February 2008.



Introduction

The CITTgroups Australia project this report refers to has been carried out for three years, the complete program has now been conducted in Australia for 25 years.

CITTgroups Australia was first introduced to Australian citrus growers in the Riverland region of South Australia in 1987 by David Ingerson after recognising the need for grower driven groups that discussed common problems and helped one another.

The concept was that the groups be informal, small and that they meet regularly or on an 'as needs' basis, in non threatening surroundings that encourage free discussion between growers on any problems or successes they have in any aspect of growing their business (Feutrell 1999).

The success of the initial Riverland groups lead to an expansion of the program into the Murray Valley and Riverina growing areas.

In 1993 a national CITTgroups Australia Coordinator was appointed with national levy program funding who worked primarily in the Riverland, Murray Valley, and Riverina areas with occasional meetings in Coastal NSW, Queensland, NT and WA.

From 1995 the CITTgroups Australia program developed further with the appointment of part-time regional coordinators in Riverland, Murray Valley, Riverina, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

In 1998 the National Coordinator position was lost when the incumbent took a position elsewhere. Australian Citrus Growers (ACG) has since provided national administrative support to the program.

During 2003 NSW Northern and Central Coast also joined CITTgroups Australia with a part time regional coordinator and contact.

During 2007 there was some turnover of CITTgroup coordinators, with new appointments being made in the Riverina, Queensland and Murray Valley.

The Coordinator in the Northern Territory gave notice of resignation in October 2007, and this position has not yet been filled.

The representative in the NSW North Coast also resigned in 2007, and yet to be replaced.

During March 2008, the Riverina CITTgroup coordinator gave notice of resignation, and the position has been temporarily filled in the interim by the Executive Officer of Riverina Citrus, whom is currently in the process of recruiting.

In 2007, ACG submitted a request to Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) for an extension to the current CITTgroups project, which was due to be completed 30 May 2008, to enable the requirement by HAL for an industry development needs assessment to be undertaken.

ACG received confirmation from HAL in early 2008 that the request for extension was granted (subject to receipt and signing of agreement). Due to administration reasons, however, it will be identified as a new project, "CT07056 CITTgroups Australia 2008 – 2009 (continuation of CT05009)". This new project is to commence 1 July 2008 (first milestone) with additional milestones/payments due 1 August 2008; 31 December 2008 and 31 May 2009 (Final Report milestone).

Currently the CITTgroups Australia project is conducted in the Riverland, Murray Valley, Riverina, NSW Central Coast, Queensland, and Western Australia.



Above: Growers inspect a citrus orchard during a CITTgroup activity in Queensland in May 2007

Technology transfer

The CITTgroups Australia program is intended to deliver technology transfer in a group setting with a one-on-one advantage. International and local researchers, extension officers and commercial providers are invited to present research, production and marketing information.

The program is integrated with other citrus industry communication strategies, coordinators contribute to the Australian Citrus News (ACN), ACG website, regional newsletters and websites, media releases, ACG annual conferences, and the communications network.

CITTgroups Australia activities are advertised via email, fax, websites, regional newsletters, Australian Citrus News, SMS text, radio, television and local newspapers. Activities are often followed up with articles to newsletters and local media, and reported to citrus organisations. This part of information extension through the project is important to ensure technology transfer is achieved through a variety of mediums.

CITTgroups Australia coordinators conduct bimonthly teleconferences and an annual face-to-face meeting. These meetings allow the coordinators to be updated on regional activities, seasonal information, industry issues and an avenue to provide input into industry solutions. This is an essential part of the project in ensuring the coordinators have an opportunity to exchange information and ideas as well as contributing to the running of the project.

Right: A demonstration of orchard spray machinery at a CITTgroups Australia meeting on a Western Australian orchard in 2006.



Activities

Various activities take place at CITTgroups Australia meetings, these are coordinated regionally and occasionally regions get together to hold meetings.

Activities:

Presentations – held on farms, government departments, regional organisation offices or research centres

Informal meetings and group discussions

Field walks

Bus tours / farm tours

Market visits

Processor visits

Packing shed visits

Forums

Conferences

Group discussions

CITTgroups Australia activities are aimed to provide a safe learning environment that growers can easily access, gain information, and provides an opportunity for input into the industry.



Left: WA citrus growers inspect a property at Moora in WA during a recent CITTgroups Australia tour.

Strategy and methodology

Each region has a part-time coordinator funded through the national levy program and supported by regional agencies. The role of the coordinator is to organise meetings, provide information, coordinate speakers, create regional CITTgroups Australia plans and contribute to the national CITTgroups Australia plan.

The meetings take place in various locations as required. Activities also vary according to the needs of the local growers, from presentations to farm tours and conferences to research centre visits.

The operation of the CITTgroups Australia program varies slightly between regions but generally follow the above model. The exception is the Central Burnett region (Gayndah and Munduberra) in Queensland, where local growers requested that the resource be used to provide organisational and secretarial support to the Central Burnett Horticultural Committee, which acts as a local research and development (R&D) committee rather than a technology transfer forum.

A CITTgroups Australia national coordinator, based in ACG, collects and collates activity reports and budgets, organises bimonthly coordinator teleconferences, and reports to the funding body HAL.

One of the contributing success factors in the project is the networking between coordinators and conducting an open communication policy between regions.

The CITTgroups Australia program is a critical component of the citrus industry's communication strategy and complements other communication initiatives such as the Australian Citrus News, ACG website, Citrus Growing Manual, Communications Manager role, ACG Annual Conferences and National Citrus Liaison Meeting.

Objective

By providing national resources to the CITTgroups Australia project the industry aims to promote the adoption of new technologies and the uptake of research and development (R&D) outcomes through improved communication between growers and also between regional and national citrus industry personnel.

Structure

ACG manages the project nationally, through the ACG Communications Manager, and reports to HAL:

- National Coordinator: collects and distributes activity reports, organises teleconferences and annual meetings for the coordinators, reports milestones to HAL, develops the national plan, collates reviews and completes final report, collates information and submits proposal
- Finance & Project Manager: collects and distributes funding to regional coordinators, reports on financials

Part-time regional coordinators direct the project regionally, reports to ACG:

- Organise regional activities: meetings, presentations and study tours
- Manage regional budgets and plans.
- Complete activity reports and regional evaluations
- Contribute to national teleconferences and annual meeting
- Contribute articles regarding CITTgroups Australia activities to *Australian Citrus News* (ACN)

Riverland

Position combined with industry development officer (IDO) in regional grower organisation, Citrus Growers of South Australia, 1.5 days per week.

Murray Valley

Position combined with IDO in statutory board, Murray Valley Citrus Board, 2 days per week.

Riverina

Position combined with IDO role in statutory board, and then later with the Executive Officer role in Riverina Citrus, 1.5 days per week.

NSW Central and North Coast

The NSW Coastal position is combined with the extension officer role in NSW Department of Primary Industries, which is an in-kind contribution of 0.8 days per week. The North Coast commenced with a local contact organising regional activities at 0.3 days per week, however from 2006 there has been no Coordinator responsible for this district. The NSW Central coast Coordinator has attempted to service this area, but has found it extremely difficult due to geographical challenges.

Queensland

At the commencement of this project, the position in Queensland was held by a consultant employed by state horticulture body, Growcom, at 1.25 days per week. In 2007, the position was then taken over by Queensland Citrus Growers at 1.25 days per week.

Northern Territory

Originally this position was combined with the extension officer in NT Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development at 0.75 days per week. In October 2007, the Coordinator for this region resigned, and to date there has been no replacement. There has therefore been no budget submitted for the region in 2008-09 due to lack of activity.

Western Australia

Position combined with IDO position in grower organisation, WA Fruit Growers Association Citrus Council and extension officer in WA Dept of Agriculture, 1 day per week.

Budgets

Regional CITTgroups Australia coordinators are allocated a budget to cover salary, operating and travel expenses. This budget differs between the coordinators depending on size of area, amount of growers and production and working situation.

Allocation of part-time 'days per week' have been based on tonnage amounts from the regional area, this budget covers salary, travel and operations.

Regional budgets for the duration of the CT05009 CITTgroups Australia project:

Riverland	\$123,579
Riverina	\$133,845
Murray Valley	\$142,487
NSW Central Coast	\$31,200
NSW North Coast	\$24,952
Queensland	\$128,959
Northern Territory	\$69,612
Western Australia	\$76,627

The national budget allows for:

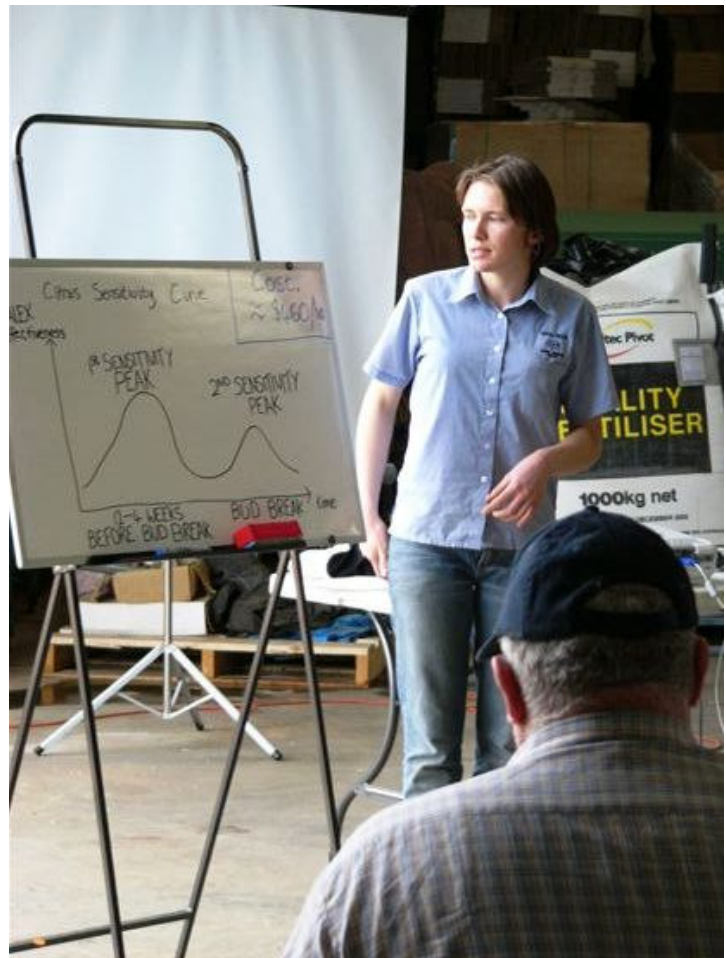
- National Coordinator travelling to visit all CITTgroups Australia regions
- Operating costs of national administration
- General training of coordinators
- Special projects which includes national planning, international guests, research national tours and publication printing
- Evaluation and development of project

National budget for the duration of the CT05009 CITTgroups Australia project:

Travel	\$18,000
Operating	\$19,800
Training	\$10,500
Other (special projects)	\$30,000
Evaluation	\$20,000
Total	\$98,300

Right:

Riverina citrus growers listen intently to a presentation on sensitivity peaks at a CITTgroup Australia activity in 2006.



Communication and Reporting

Communication between the coordinators is extremely important as identified in the Bessen report (1999). This communication provides networking opportunities, planning, and is imperative in the coordination of presentations by specialist speakers, particularly international visitors, around the regions. To facilitate such communication, bi-monthly national teleconferences are held to provide a venue for coordinators to report activities and discuss upcoming opportunities and issues.

The Coordinators and National Coordinator (ACG Communication Manager) are resourced to meet in person at least once per year. An annual face-to-face meeting is held in a citrus growing region, this meeting also provides an opportunity for coordinators to gain an insight into the different growing regions and to discuss issues and solutions.

When possible, the Coordinators also take advantage of other industry events to meet as a group, such as the ACG Annual Conference, National Citrus Liaison Meeting, National Citrus Field Day, Breeding and Evaluation Meeting or other meetings.

The Coordinators are required to submit activity reports and six monthly expense reports to allow the preparation of milestone reports by the National Coordinator.

CITTgroups Australia activities are reported on through regional publications as each Coordinator sees fit. These include: CGSA News, Cit Rep (MVCB), Riverina Citnews, Coastal Fruitgrowers' Newsletter, WA Fruitgrowers News, and NTHA News. Each Coordinator is also requested to provide reports on CITTgroups Australia activities in their region for the *Australian Citrus News*.



Left: Steven Falivene from the NSW DPI presents at a Murray Valley CITTgroup Australia activity in Dareton, NSW in July 2007.



Left: Coastal NSW CITTgroup Australia Coordinator Sandra Hardy with growers at a CITTgroup activity in 2006.

CT05009 Review - CITTgroups Australia

The review of project CT05009 has been deferred as this will be done as part of the Industry Needs Development which will be now conducted by HAL in late 2008.

Due to administration reasons, the project is now identified as "CT07056 CITTgroups Australia 2008 – 2009 (continuation of CT05009)", which will commence as of 1 July. The review however will encompass the project CT05009.



Above: In a well attended CITTgroup activity in August 2007, a representative from the local water authority speaks to concerned citrus growers about water allocation and storage levels in the Murray Valley area.

CITTgroups Australia Coordinators Annual Face to Face Meeting – May 2008

CITTgroups Australia coordinators met in Mildura, Victoria, on the 30th May 2008 to discuss the outcomes and information from the project to date, current issues and developed solutions, as well as the CITTgroup Australia project ongoing.

As well as providing seasonal updates of each region, and an update on current and future activities that are planned, the following topics were discussed:

- Regional Budgets – All coordinators to review regional funding and day per week allocation, consider travel, operation and salary. They are to submit the budget for this project in its entirety, covering four years, with short explanation. ACG will continue to coordinate with HAL with regards to milestones and payments. ACG will also liaise with HAL with regards to the initial payment for the commencement of the new project CT07056.
- Planning – Coordinators will submit regional plans for the 12 months. They will also discuss and seek international expertise to be utilised throughout the regions, (as the budget permits), and then follow up with regional knowledge.
- ACG coordination – ongoing communication required to ensure project information is delivered to coordinators adequately.
- Attendance – A need to highlight the benefits for growers to attend meetings, rather than the features of the day. Promote CITTgroups Australia in a positive light. Highlight in final report that CITTgroups Australia is one extension tool and not meant to solve all communication issues, works in with other communication strategies.
- Learning levels – There is a role to play for more advanced activities in some regions, however this is a regional issue and will be dealt with as such.
- Commercial providers – Liaise with commercial providers to encourage attendance and information delivery.
- Evaluation – Coordinators currently evaluate meetings where appropriate, to assist with the major evaluation at the end of the new project. Need to revisit the coordinators' evaluation information requirements that are supplied to ACG, as this is quite often overlooked within the regions.
- Activities – All citrus industry personnel are encouraged to contact regional coordinators on regional issues and suggestions/ideas for future meetings.
- Reporting Requirements – reminder for reporting responsibilities from the regions. New CITTgroup Coordinator representing Queensland has been instructed separately via both ACG and QCG as to the CITTgroup Coordinator kits.
- Irrigation / Water update – group was briefed on the water situation in each region, as well as some activities that were carried out to accommodate the grower's desire for water

planning and management sessions. Murray Valley held a successful activity in early 2008 that is now being looked at for replication in other regions.

- The Riverland CITTgroup Coordinator is involved with a HAL funded Irrigation Project, and updated the group on the support that all region's growers will have through this project. This support and advice is provided to the growers on a range of topics during the drought, including both financial and emotional support.
- Site visits at both the NSW DPI Research Station, and the AusCitrus site, both in Dareton.



The national CITTgroup Coordinators visit the NSW DPI research station (top) and the AusCitrus site in Dareton (below), NSW during their annual face to face meeting in May 2008.



Discussion and Recommendations

The future of the CITTgroups Australia program lies in its ability to appeal to and meet the needs of growers. Its strength lies in its current flexibility in that it can operate differently in each region, allowing it to respond to growers' needs under differing growing conditions, marketing requirements, local industry structures and grower profiles.



Left: Orchard Tour in Harvey, Western Australia for a CITTgroup activity on weed control and mulch in May 2008

The CT05009 project was completed on 30 May 2008, with a successful extension granted from HAL for further funding. This extension will be classified as a new project, and the longevity of the project ongoing will be dependent on the results of the HAL Industry Development Needs Assessment.

The current drought, which has kept water management as the most prevalent issue for growers over the past couple of years, has impacted CITTgroup activities in terms of both interest and frequency. There has certainly been a drop in attendees to activities regionally that was not water specific. Nevertheless, CITTgroups Australia continues to be an essential part of the citrus industry's communication strategy, linking with all other communication tools and avenues, as well as providing a sound support network for citrus growers in the regions.

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