

**Facilitating the Development of the
Queensland Apple Industry
(AP05005 continued..)**

Alex Livingstone
Growcom

Project Number: AP08027

AP08027

This report is published by Horticulture Australia Ltd to pass on information concerning horticultural research and development undertaken for the apple and pear industry.

The research contained in this report was funded by Horticulture Australia Ltd with the financial support of Growcom.

All expressions of opinion are not to be regarded as expressing the opinion of Horticulture Australia Ltd or any authority of the Australian Government.

The Company and the Australian Government accept no responsibility for any of the opinions or the accuracy of the information contained in this report and readers should rely upon their own enquiries in making decisions concerning their own interests.

ISBN 0 7341 2776 6

Published and distributed by:
Horticulture Australia Ltd
Level 7
179 Elizabeth Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Telephone: (02) 8295 2300
Fax: (02) 8295 2399

© Copyright 2011



Horticulture Australia

AP08027

Facilitating the Development of the
Queensland Apple Industry

30 September 2011

Alex Livingstone
Growcom

AP08027

Facilitating the Development of the Queensland Apple Industry

Project Leader: Alex Livingstone
Chief Executive Officer
68 Anderson Street
Fortitude Valley QLD 4006
Phone: 07 3620 3844
Email: alivingstone@growcom.com.au

Project Purpose: This project aimed to continue to improve communication within the Queensland apple industry.

Funding Source: Horticulture Australia Ltd
Growcom

Date of Report: 30 September 2011

Disclaimer: *“Any recommendations contained in this publication do not necessarily represent current HAL policy. No person should act on the basis of the contents of this publication, whether as to matters of fact or opinion or other content, without first obtaining specific, independent professional advice in respect of the matters set out in this publication”.*

Table of Contents

1. Summary	3
2. Introduction	4
3. Method	6
4. Activities	8
5. Evaluation	10
6. Implication	11
7. Recommendations	12
8. Acknowledgments	13
9. Bibliography	14
10. Appendices	15

1. Summary

In this project we aimed to improve communication within the Queensland apple industry through the continued employment of an Industry Development Officer (IDO). Activities included promotion of apples via the Stanthorpe apple campaign; production of a monthly newsletter, sending of ad hoc information to growers as important issues arose, organisation of workshops and assisting local grower groups.

The main activities undertaken throughout the project included:

- Development of an industry strategic plan
- Increasing industry cohesion, unity and knowledge by involving growers in key decisions
- Increasing communication within industry
- Attending and arranging industry meetings
- Facilitating increased involvement by the Stanthorpe Apple Committee in industry matters
- Helping to coordinate industry consultation for key industry issues such as biosecurity,

The key outcomes from the project included the promotion of apples through Diabetes Australia where we displayed and handed out different varieties of apples and promotional fliers also the Royal Queensland Ekka where we had a large display with thousands of people passing by daily for 2 weeks.

This project to date has greatly benefited industry in many ways including:

- More united grower groups and more informed stakeholders. This was facilitated through local grower meetings and more direct involvement from the Stanthorpe Apple Committee, APAL and Growcom.
- A more proactive and independent industry through ongoing support from the Stanthorpe Apple Committee, Growcom and APAL.
- A more well-informed industry through exposure to experienced speakers at grower meetings relating to industry issues and a diverse and flexible communication strategy by the State representative body, Growcom. This communication strategy can be seen at Appendix 1 and includes the use of a variety of media.
- A stronger sense of industry direction and cohesion. The local Stanthorpe Apple Committee has become more involved in local industry issues and has helped to facilitate more direct contact with the National Peak Industry Body (Apple and Pear Australia (APAL)) and the State Representative Body Growcom.

2. Introduction

The Queensland apple industry is based in Stanthorpe. This region is one of the coldest in the state and thus is suitable for growing pome fruit which require a certain number of 'chill hours'. In 2007 there were approximately 67 growers in the region ranging from some of the most efficient and largest in Australia, to smaller hobby farmers. These orchardists grow most mainstream varieties of apples including (in order of harvest) Gala, Red Delicious, Granny Smiths, Fuji, Cripps Pink (otherwise known as Pink LadysTM) and Sundowners. Many of these growers also have varying percentages of their farm converted for stonefruit production.

The Queensland industry has invested heavily in advanced cultivation techniques, hail netting, grading, packing facilities and drip reticulation systems and has increased yields from 13.5 tonnes per hectare to 45 tonnes per hectare in the last 20 years. While all growers focus predominately on the fresh market, juice grade fruit is usually transported to the Golden Circle cannery for processing.

Apple and Pear Australia Ltd (APAL) is the national body for pome fruit. APAL liaises quite closely with all state bodies and funds much of the research and development work currently being undertaken. The Applethorpe based research station of the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F) is also a major asset to the industry. Some of the research originating from this station has been ground breaking and its findings have been adopted across the world in some cases. Stanthorpe growers are extremely fortunate to have such a wealth of knowledge and experience nearby.

The Queensland apple industry is shrinking in grower numbers due in part to growers seeking retirement and increasing input pressures. However in regard to overall tonnage and tree numbers, production has remained steady. This is due to the remaining growers expanding their orchards, becoming more efficient and planting higher orchard densities. The growing base is extremely knowledgeable with in some cases four generations of experience behind the current orchardist.

Growcom first began to work with the Queensland apple industry through an IDO during project AP03021 – Assisting the Development of the Queensland Apple Industry which commenced in January 2004 and concluded in May 2005.

This project was undertaken to continue to improve communication within the Queensland apple industry by continuing the employment of an Industry Development Officer (IDO). Activities included; production of a monthly newsletter, sending of ad hoc information to growers as important issues arose, organisation of workshops and assisting local grower groups. High priority areas of action for the IDO included the need for orchard modification, water use efficiency and environmental sustainability.

The significance of this project to industry was that with the IDO as a resource the growers could more efficiently feed their issues into the state and national representative bodies. This ensured more effective two way communication and grower engagement at all levels. The IDO was also able to facilitate more direct grower interaction with other stakeholders on a range of topics including succession planning, Industrial Relations, financial planning and orchard improvement/intensification.

AgFirst, a world leading Consultancy Company from New Zealand provided consult services for the project. The main drivers of this project were to lower orchard production costs per kilogram of fruit, to increase the percentage of premium fruit harvested and to bring Australian orchardists up to international competitiveness in domestic and export markets. As a part of this program, regular regional grower meetings were held with guest speakers from all over the world. The IDO was responsible for helping to coordinate these meetings and to ensure grower attendance.

The IDO also helped with the rollout of an Orchard Biosecurity Manual for the apple and pear industry by ensuring high levels of grower engagement from Stanthorpe.

The IDO worked closely with local grower organisations such as the Stanthorpe Apple Committee. This group consisted of five growers from the Stanthorpe area. The group met regularly with the IDO being responsible for coordinating these meetings. A range of topics were covered during these sessions such as crop levels, bio security, water management and national industry issues.

3. Method

The Queensland apple industry used the services of an IDO to facilitate industry development.

The project was managed by a Steering Committee consisting of the five growers from the Stanthorpe Apple Committee: Ugo Tomasel, Daniel Nicoletti, Arames Volpato, Wayne Thomas, Memo Mattiazzi and a Growcom representative.

Over the course of the project the IDO developed a practical communication strategy to ensure effective extension activities and to also to coordinate grower meetings.

The IDO reviewed and maintained an industry database. Current contact information ensured effective and timely communications on a variety of issues including meeting dates and other key industry issues. .

A priority role for the IDO was to keep the Steering Committee and the Stanthorpe Apple Committee informed of arising issues. This group was a key contact for industry stakeholders and it was vital that the growers be able to make informed judgments. In doing this the IDO helped, facilitated meetings with service providers and researchers and helped to communicate the results of these activities to the wider industry.

The IDO was also heavily involved in Queensland promotional activities.

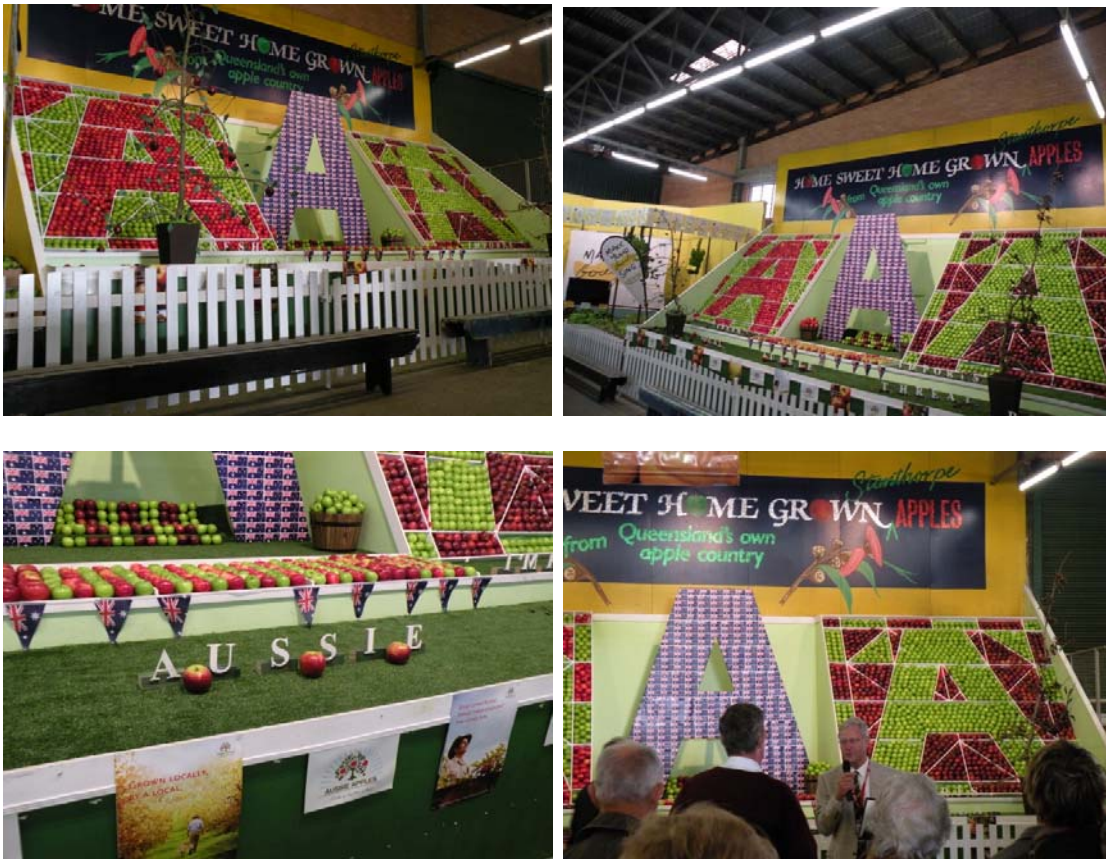
- EXPOsing Diabetes Australia, Logan 18 June 2011



- Diabetes Australia "National Diabetes Week, Brisbane City 10 – 16 July 2011



- Royal Queensland EKKKA, Brisbane 11-20 August 2011



4. Activities

Activity	Output	Outcome
Industry communications plan	Information, processes & tools to communicate activities, events, issues, outcomes & opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular emails, faxes and a monthly newsletter 	Increased industry knowledge & awareness amongst stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved industry engagement & participation in project activities • Increased feedback & interest in industry issues & opportunities
Facilitating regular Stanthorpe Apple Committee meetings	Facilitated contact between industry leaders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact between industry researchers & leaders • Contact between service providers & leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved communication flow & unity within stakeholders • Presentation of information in a interactive & informative manner
Training & group facilitation	Promotion of Freshcare training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of Forklift assessments • Coordination of regional grower meetings • Grower meetings on biosecurity matters 	Improved grower knowledge of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced industry leadership & representative capabilities • Industry empowered to take control of their own businesses
Facilitation of industry response	Facilitation & documentation of industry feedback on relevant issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representation of regional needs & views at a national level 	Improved opportunities for stakeholder consultation on key industry issues & developments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced industry representation due to more timely & meaningful feedback
Industry representation	Industry representation & participation at key events & meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication of industry issues & project activities to a wider audience • Network development 	Industry engagement in broader issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved responsiveness to wider industry threats & opportunities • Increased knowledge of industry issues & project activities generated amongst others • Increased IDO knowledge of industry stakeholders, issues, activities & opportunities for cooperative partnerships

Industry database maintenance	<p>Updated grower contact information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated production information 	<p>Effective communication channels to growers & stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful participation in industry events & activities • Accurate industry profile to be communicated to relevant bodies • Accurate representation of industry
Maintenance of research & government linkages	<p>Contact with research staff & government personal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receipt of key government agency communications 	<p>Participated in research project planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective & efficient technology transfer of current industry & government funded projects • Improved responsiveness to legislative change
Maintenance of industry information resources	<p>Maintenance of communication channels & announcement of relevant research articles</p>	<p>Improved access to information on technical research outside the current industry network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of valuable new information resources to industry
Industry promotion	<p>Helped with the organisation of a stall at the local 2011 Stanthorpe Show</p> <p>Displayed an apple stand at Diabetes Expo 18/06/2011</p> <p>Helped with the National Diabetes week with the supply of apples and promotional material 29/06/2011</p> <p>Participated in the Brisbane Ekka, Large display of apples with a message about international imports and the promotion of the new Aussie Apple Campaign</p>	<p>Resulting in a more informed public</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More grower involvement in activities â allowing growers to take more initiative & to create promotional opportunities

5. Evaluation

The success comes down participation from the growers and the support from Growcom and Apple and Pear Australia (APAL).

A key tool is information, this increased industry knowledge & awareness regarding activities, events, issues, outcomes and opportunities which was distributed by the Apple IDO via regular emails, faxes and a monthly newsletter.

Media coverage achieved by public relations strategies for Stanthorpe apples was good, and the media was positive about the stories presented in regards to the Stanthorpe apple season.

Furthermore, the on ground activities aided by Diabetes Australia Queensland have helped to reinforce the national campaign messages and the regional media Growcom generated. These activities helped to reach a wide demographic including Brisbane school children, some of the next generation of apple consumers and purchasers.

The Brisbane Royal Show display is one of the key notes for the Stanthorpe apple campaign. Over 300 000 viewed the display and had the opportunity to learn more about apple production in Queensland. The Biosecurity message regarding imports were used in this display and was a draw card for the public. This exercise was to let the public know of one of the big issues facing our industry today and to educate the public about apples growing in Stanthorpe.

6. Implications

There are significant changes and challenges ahead of the industry; for example imports, biosecurity threats and rising input costs. There is a strong need for continuous information exchange and leadership development.

The positives and negatives within the industry are numerous. As the key decision makers (Growcom and the Stanthorpe Apple Committee) are very aware of their own strengths and limitations and the challenges industry faces. The group and the IDO have worked to constructively communicate this information to the wider growing base with the goal of uniting everyone. One of the most ongoing issues to date has been the Import of Chinese and New Zealand apples and the threat of foreign pest and diseases.

Industry can only benefit from the strong network it currently has in place. By being more aware of their threats and opportunities growers can make more informed decisions regarding their future. The industry can utilise the information and support base generated during project AP08027 in the future.

The key learning from project AP08027 is that there needs to be continued investment in industry development. Given the significant challenges the industry faces into the future, it is vital that growers have as much support and information as possible. Future support must be flexible and focused and if this can be managed it will have great potential to alleviate significant industry hurdles and motivate critical industry progress. This support is vital if horticultural industries are to continue and prosper in the future.

7. Recommendations

As stated above project AP08027 designed to stabilise the industry and to create a lasting, workable framework for the future. Given the uncertain future the industry is facing, it is vital that the current support mechanisms be continued and improved if possible in line with potential developments and changes.

It is highly recommended that there be continued industry support. The purpose of continued support would be to advance the issues and to identify and engage in future opportunities. The project would be built on the foundation of prior industry development programs that have fostered a high level of industry experience and knowledge. This understanding and collective intent would be leveraged to implement targeted initiatives aimed at fostering specific positive changes and developments.

Continued industry support goals

1. Improved industry communication
2. Improved environmental performance of the QLD apple industry.
3. A more cohesive industry with improved knowledge of varietal performance, research outcomes and market place requirements.
4. The identification of issues throughout industry and the processes in place to develop strategies appropriate to address issues like these.
5. Improved information transfer to and from growers and other industry sectors about priorities, progress in meeting priorities and projects being conducted.
6. Informing and educating the public about apples and it's farmers.

Services delivered would target industry-level and business-level change that will directly enhance the competitiveness, initiative and leadership of the Queensland apple industry. Allowing growers to make informed decisions regarding their future is fundamentally necessary for industry to positively respond to increased import competitiveness, altered, biosecurity changes and rising input costs. The industry must move forward and to take ownership and responsibility for its future. The IDO must specifically be involved in helping industry to prepare for fundamental changes to their current operating environment.

8. Acknowledgements

The following people were significantly involved in the IDO project:

- Alex Livingston Growcom CEO
- Rachel Mackenzie Growcom Manager Advocacy & Policy
- Jim Collings Growcom Contracts Coordinator
- Natalie Bradey Communications and Design Officer
- Ugo Tomasel Queensland Apple Committee & Apple and Pear Australia Board Member
- Bruno Stefanon Queensland Apple Committee
- Daniel Nicoletti Queensland Apple Committee Chairman
- Memo Mattiazzi Queensland Apple Committee
- Dino Rizzato Queensland Apple Committee
- Luke Westley Marketing Manager - Apples & Pears | Horticulture Australia
- Stuart Gray Communications Manager – Apple and Pear Australia Limited

9. Bibliography

- Stanthorpe Apple Campaign

10. Appendices

Communication plan

One of the founding goals of project AP08027 was the development of a practical and relevant industry communication plan. Prior to this project there was no regular independent communication reaching all growers in the industry. It was thought that the communication plan should be a simple process accessible to all stakeholders. The communication must also obviously be two way to enable the IDO to act on issues both from the growing sector and directly involving it. Using these guides the following communication activities were implemented.

Channels	Communication Strategy
Newsletter	Monthly newsletter detailing current industry news and meeting notices. Columns from the Stanthorpe Apple Committee Chairman have at times been included in the newsletter. This was aimed at allowing more direct communication from that group.
Fax outs	Usually specific information such as meeting notices. This medium was particularly important in establishing direct, fast contact as many growers do not have email access.
Meetings & workshops	Regular meetings held both with the Stanthorpe Apple Committee. These meetings were designed to keep the growing sector informed and to encourage direct interaction.
Surveys	Industry and issue specific mechanisms used to collect direct feedback from growers. The results from these surveys were used to improve project facilitation.
Press	Articles provided regularly to Fruit and Vegetable News Monthly column in the national industry magazine the Australian Fruitgrower
Key linkages	Linkages are maintained with industry researchers and extension staff across Australia
Promotional activities	Involvement in promotional activities to communicate relevant industry news and benefits to the public