

# **Sub tropical banana industry communications**

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Green PR

Project Number: BA08013

## **BA08013**

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**PROJECT NO: BA08013 (1 July 2010)**

## **Subtropical Banana Industry Communications**



### **FINAL REPORT**

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Purpose: This report summarises the activity for Subtropical Banana Industry Communications between February 2009 and 1 July 2010. Its purpose is to provide information on the project activities and the results of those activities.

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# 1. Summary

The subtropical banana growers represent the majority of growers in Australia, but grow only a small fraction of the crop. With the introduction of the national levy there was a commitment to improve communications among the subtropical growers, who felt that they no longer had a voice in industry and to get more information to them to aid their farming practices and to ensure their longer term viability.

A major element in the industry development project was the appointment of a communications officer to use a variety of communications tools, following an audit of growers and other stakeholders, to reinvigorate communications among subtropical growers. They included:

- a bi-monthly printed newsletter, mailed to growers and other stakeholders (8)
- alternate bimonthly e-newsletter to the same (8)
- the development of a series of fact sheets to encourage best practice in their farming (8)
- dedicated web pages for the subtropical sector
- attendance at regional grower meetings
- support and promotion of projects such as the National Banana Bunchy Top Project and the Subtropical Market Development Workshops
- promotion of media opportunities

A survey was conducted among growers and other stakeholders in May 2010, which revealed that growers were overwhelmingly supportive of the subtropical communications initiatives with particular interest in the information being presented through the newsletter and other materials.

Grower success stories, research and marketing information all rated highly and were cited as topics of continuing interest.

It is recommended that specific subtropical communications be continued and it is noted that it is intended to continue in 2010 and 2011 under the auspices of the Australian Banana Growers Council in a broader communications exercise.

## **2. Introduction**

Subtropical banana growers are spread across wide geographical regions, with the majority either in the Coffs Harbour and far north coast regions of NSW, a solid group in Carnarvon servicing the Perth market and no more than 30 remaining in South East Queensland.

Over the past 30 years the industry declined on the east coast of Australia as the larger farms in Far North Queensland were able to grow on a large scale. Farms closed in subtropical areas and fruit now receives a lower price in most cases than that from FNQ.

There is a recognition in the industry that diversified growing regions are needed for banana production in Australia, and the new national levy provided a funding opportunity to support and encourage small growers in subtropical regions, many of whom have a negative attitude towards their future in the industry or their ability to market their product successfully or even grow more efficiently.

The communications industry development project resulted from the introduction of the national levy and was scoped to address grower concerns. A report prepared for the ABGC called Taking Stock and Setting Directions (TSSD) Report showed there was an absence, and therefore a need, for regular and effective communication on matters of relevance to producers.

### **Audit & Strategy**

The first stage of the project was to undertake a qualitative study of growers to examine what tools would be useful in the communications strategy, what would be useful to them in the operation of their farms and what were the other key issues that concerned them in the industry.

The Communications Audit was conducted among 38 stakeholders, half of whom were growers by telephone or by personal interview. It confirmed some of the activities originally proposed in the communications program, but lead to a restructuring of some activities.

The audit confirmed the findings of the TSSD Report that subtropical growers felt that there were no communications focussing on subtropical issues, an ongoing problem of no specific information for them and there was little opportunity to gain any information.

Feedback from the stakeholders interviewed confirmed the following objectives for communications:

- inclusive of all geographical areas – all regions needed to get value from communications
- inclusive of growers
- inclusive of other stakeholders – people like wholesalers wanted more information
- practical and relevant information
- timely and easily understood

The outcomes of the Audit were then incorporated into a Communications Strategy for the subtropical sector, which effectively began in May 2009.

This strategy was developed to provide a plan to meet the objectives of the industry, with the budget constraints of the project. Fortunately, the project did allow for a comprehensive communications plan to be prepared then undertaken.

## **Key outcomes**

The activities are outlined in the following section but in summary, they included a printed newsletter which has provided the main avenue for communication and was chosen as a majority of growers were not equipped to receive an electronic version.

A review was undertaken of existing research materials and interviews conducted with research officers and they confirmed one of the findings of the audit – that very little had been undertaken in recent years that was of specific relevance to subtropical growers.

The project had originally suggested that a booklet of research be compiled for distribution to growers, but the review and audit findings led to the development of a series of best practice fact sheets, which summarised the latest information on a range of pests and diseases and growing topics.

Online communications have seen the development of dedicated web pages within the Australian Banana Growers Council website and all materials prepared as part of this project have been posted there.

A critical part of this project has been the direct contact with growers through their regional meetings and visits. The communications officer has attended all three regional association's quarterly meetings since project commencement. These have been instrumental in providing ongoing input for the newsletters and feedback from growers on key issues.

Involvement and promotion of key projects for the subtropical sector included the Banana Bunchy Top Virus National Project and the Subtropical Banana Market Development Workshops.

A major form of evaluation for the project was a grower and stakeholder survey reported in Evaluation and this showed a very positive response to the activities and direction of the communications.

With a strong emphasis on direct contact with growers this also enabled feedback from them, which has been very positive.

This subtropical banana industry communications project has been a very worthwhile one for the industry and very timely.

With the introduction of the national levy and the diminishing role of the NSW Banana Industry Committee, there was a feeling among subtropical growers that they would be forgotten when the levy was fully in place and programs and projects were defined and implemented.

The Subtropical Communications project has been very important in allaying those fears, and in fact developing communications to a point that the subtropical sector had not seen before.

### **3. Method & Activities**

The Communications Strategy was designed to both listen and inform growers about topics of interest to them within the industry and provide information which would encourage best practice among them.

The methods agreed were to consult with growers at regional meetings and regional visits, gather information from ABGC that was of relevance to subtropical growers and use a variety of communications tools to present this information to growers and other stakeholders.

Fundamental to the methods was a commitment to keep information easy to read and understand, timely and relevant.

The project was managed by Neville Sloss of Green PR, who has had considerable experience working with industry groups in horticulture, mainly through the nursery and garden industry, and understood the communication needs of growers across a diverse region and with different needs.

#### **3.1 Direct contact with subtropical growers.**

This activity was designed to provide an opportunity for growers to advise on what issues concerned them and what information they would appreciate to help them in the industry.

During the life of the project, the communications officer:

- attended five regional quarterly meetings in the three active grower associations in NSW
- made a three day visit to the Carnarvon district in WA to meet with growers
- visited SE Qld growers over two days to consult and gather stories for the newsletter
- attended the biannual Australian Banana Industry Congress, to meet growers and report back on issues of subtropical interest.

These occasions provided opportunity to gather stories for the newsletters. When attending regional meetings, a day was spent in each region conducting interviews and meeting growers and other stakeholders.

#### **3.2 Bi-monthly newsletter ‘Subtropics Banana News’**

The original intention of the project was to issue a monthly electronic newsletter to inform growers, but at the audit stage it was discovered that only a minority of growers had email facilities and that a printed newsletter was by far the preferred option.

The bi-monthly publication has covered the range of topics suggested through the audit and it has been prepared to provide a balance of stories across research topics and geographical areas, taking into account the needs of the growers.

The content for each edition was considered with reference back to the audit which indicated that growers were interested in research issues, examples of good or innovative practice, marketing and market news and other industry news.

The newsletter was four pages in the first edition which became eight pages in subsequent editions, printed in colour and mailed out to growers and other stakeholders. The editions follow in the Appendices. Eight editions were produced during the course of the project.

Collecting stories for the newsletter has been a key opportunity for the communications officer to meet growers and hear of their concerns and their suggestions. While in the field, these occasions have provided opportunities to take photographs for the newsletter as well.

### **3.3 Email newsletter ‘Subtropical Snapshot’**

Originally it was thought that a monthly e-news would be suitable as the main form of communication with subtropical growers. The audit and an analysis and update of the database showed that many growers did not have or provide an email address for communications.

Less than 30% of growers provided an email address, so this meant that it could not be the major form of communication, however in order to present topical information and to encourage growers to get ‘online’ a bimonthly e-news was produced in the alternate months to the printed newsletter.

Seven editions were produced and feedback from growers was positive about the format and the content. Approximately 20 new email addresses were collected during the life of the project.

### **3.4 Research & Best Practice Guides**

As previously stated the review of existing literature revealed very little new research in recent years, but also that there was little information which summarised the latest thinking on key topics of interest to growers.

Instead of a booklet, the suggestion of the audit was accepted to produce a series of best practice fact sheets that could be produced and dispatched over time, rather than present ‘all at once’ to growers.

The support of Industry and Investment NSW was enlisted to develop content of the Best Practice Guide fact sheets. Growers provided input to the priority issues they wished to receive information about to assist them in their businesses.

The sheets produced were:

- Banana Bunchy Top Virus
- Nutrition Part 1 & 2
- Panama disease
- Flying Foxes in bananas
- Climate Change and Subtropical bananas
- Irrigating bananas Part 1
- Beetle Borer

Other topics have been identified and it is expected that others will arise when raised by growers. The sheets have been mailed out to all growers with the newsletters and also posted on the website.

### **3.5 Subtropical website/pages**

The audit revealed that growers did not wish to see a separate subtropical website but to have any information be part of the general ABGC website.

Working with ABGC staff, dedicated pages were set up so that all information could be put online, including specific information about the subtropical regions.

The subtropical pages have all editions of the printed newsletter, the e-news and the best practice guide in downloadable form.

### **3.5 National Banana Bunchy Top Project**

This project began early in the life of the communications project and became one of the important communications issues for many growers.

Assistance was provided in the development of a brochure to assist inspectors in the field, regular update stories were featured in the newsletters and assistance was provided to the coordinator with publicity in the two key regions.

Publicity efforts resulted in good local media coverage in northern NSW and in SE Qld.

The communications officer also attended BBTV meetings.

### **3.6 Media**

The generation of any publicity was not a primary objective in this communications exercise, but there were several opportunities to work with the media during the life of the project.

Media releases were created and coverage generated ( see appendices) for:

- Effects on NSW market from supermarket demands
- Backyarder awareness of bunchy top
- Promotion of a soils field day

### **3.7 Subtropical Market Development Workshops**

The communications officer worked with HAL and the ABGC to organise and promote two workshops to look at market development opportunities for the subtropical sector.

These were held in Coffs Harbour and Tweed Heads and attracted 27 and 17 people respectively.

Overall the workshop facilitator was pleased with input. The grower attendance at the Coffs Harbour workshop was far more than ever attend regional association meetings, which was an indication of the interest among growers. The inputs and outcomes of the workshops are well summarised in the report prepared by facilitator, Tristan Kitchener.

## **4. Evaluation**

At the outset of the project it was intended to have a subtropical management committee to which the project reported, but this committee was not established due to other priorities of ABGC.

Neville Sloss maintained a close liaison with the office of the ABGC working closely with the then CEO Tony Heidrich and Jann Bonsall. He also reported to regional meetings.

Anecdotal feedback from meetings was very positive about the newsletters and the topics being covered in them.

### **4.1 Stakeholder Survey**

A questionnaire was distributed to all stakeholders as an insert in the April/May Newsletter and 34 responses were received (plus one more after the report was written)

There were 27 growers (two of whom were wholesalers as well) one wholesaler and six others including researchers. More than two thirds of respondents were over 45 and nearly one third over 60 years old. Of the grower respondents there was a good regional cross- section with five from WA , two from South East Queensland, seven from northern NSW, 10 from Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga and three from Nambucca district.

Key findings included:

- Both Australian Bananas and Subtropics Banana News were seen as the best places for information among growers, and the next was - other growers
- It seems that the frequency of the newsletter is about right - 19 people said every 2 months was best, while five said every three months and six said every month
- Readers wanted more research, general industry news and stories about other growers
- Currently the most popular articles are about growers stories, regional news and Bunchy Top Project
- While three people said it needed improvement, 29 said subtropical communications was either excellent (6) or good (19)
- 22 said that the ABGC was a good or medium source of information
- 25 found the research and best practice sheets a good or medium source of information
- 21 respondents were members of local grower associations
- 25 out of the 34 have access to the internet and email (I have only 30% of growers overall who have supplied an email address)



There were a variety of comments offered through the survey. Here are some of them.

*What other topics would you like covered in Subtropics Banana News?*

Projection of supply peaks / soil health news / fertilizer programming / international R & D / How good growers survive and thrive / GM benefits for disease resistance / more on Lady Fingers / more on Bunchy Top / more on market pricing / advice from top growers / successful niche marketing project updates would be useful

*Any comments on the Fact Sheets?*

NSW bias / difficult to reach a balance between readability and technical content  
Soil health would be worthwhile / any more to come?

*What value do you get out of regional meetings?*

Have done since 15! / stay in touch locally / catch up with other growers / to keep up to date / always have been involved / gather information / good to pick up useful info  
To make legislative and industry development relevant to local industry

*If you are not in a regional association, why not?*

Nothing in SE Qld / industry is reactive not proactive / not enough time

*Please comment on the future of the banana industry in your region*

Future limited to fewer committed growers / not enough help available to produce top quality fruit / ABGC is not providing enough support / ABGC/HAL is not providing any practical assistance to WA industry / subtropical growers are ageing – need more young farmers / low grower returns and big supermarket margins / SE Qld has enormous potential – should just get on with it and stop trying to compete with FNQ / markets for genuine subtropical fruit

*Pleased share any other comments you would like to make*

Need more field days / unique innovation including marketing is needed/needs to be more support for WA industry eg R & D post harvest, management, marketing to ensure geographical diversity / a highly successful project, would be good to combine tropics and subtropics into one newsletter and have different sections

## **Summary**

A key result of the survey (detailed results are in Appendices) was that 29 respondents rated good or excellent, subtropical industry communications generally in providing the information they required.

When asked “*Are there any services the Subtropical Communications Officer does not currently provide that you would like to see provided*”, only two respondents replied with ‘forecasts or trends in production’ and ‘closer links with ABGC and promote value of ABGC membership to growers’.

At the May meetings of the regional associations in NSW, when advised that the project would be coming to an end in June, growers were concerned that the communications role would not continue, and indicated their support for the news that the ABGC would be committing to ensure an ongoing role.

## 5. Implications

This project has been a unique one from a number of aspects.

First it has not been industry wide, as it has targeted growers within the banana industry defined by their geographical location primarily in the subtropical regions, but also defined by the size of their farms.

No growers in the subtropical regions operate farms of the size found in far North Queensland, so the industry needs for this group are quite different to the large scale growers to the north.

Many of the growers are border line in terms of their viability and the pressure of the marketplace. An indication of the changing banana industry could be seen in the database update in 2009 which showed more than 100 growers in NSW had dropped out of the industry in five years – that was about 20% of growers.

It has also been unique in that the historical position had resulted in the need for communications of the subtropical sector. The diminished value of the NSW BIC meant that growers in that state were not receiving information, banana production in SE Qld has dropped back to only a few growers, while the WA growers were doing ‘their own thing’.

The introduction of the national levy and the associated voting for that stirred the industry and there is a strong core of growers interested in their future in the industry. There is also a recognition at a national level that diversification of growing areas is vital to the banana industry.

The key learnings of this project can be summarised as:

- have lines of communication direct with growers through their local associations or groups
- consult with them on what kind of information they want or need to help them in their business
- share stories and information in the most accessible ways – they may not be the most modern
- invite feedback and input into communications activities
- feature success stories from other growers to provide real life examples of better business practices

For the Subtropical Banana Industry there are many challenges to its viability and future growth, such as domination of the marketplace by large scale growers and major supermarket exclusion. Specifically within the communications framework the following table highlights the key attributes and issues for the industry.

Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To instil a positive attitude among growers for the future</li> <li>• To get information to growers about improved practices so they can farm more efficiently and productively</li> <li>• To encourage more growers to participate in their industry through associations and other activities</li> </ul>
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To build existing regional associations to become strong regional voices for the subtropical banana industry</li> <li>• Ideas to take the market development forward for the subtropical sector following the workshops</li> </ul>
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solid core of interested growers attending regional meetings and participating</li> <li>• Communication channels now established to get information to growers</li> </ul>
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A big majority who do not attend meetings, do not share their views, thoughts or practices</li> <li>• A wide geographical spread and a wide range of issues for the different states' growers</li> </ul>

With an effective communications program in place it will greatly assist the banana industry in meeting Strategy 3.2 of Objective 3 of the Strategic Plan for 2009 -2014, that is to *“improve two-way communication and knowledge transfer to underpin better industry and business decision and improve stakeholder confidence in the industry.”*

## **6. Recommendations**

This industry communications exercise has proven to be worthwhile at a time when the subtropical growers were hesitant and uncertain about their future under the new National Levy.

The audit revealed their concerns and their interests and the grower survey and anecdotal feedback during the course of the project showed that growers felt more involved in their industry and more positive about their future.

The key recommendations to result from this project are:

### **6.1. Continue the communications officer role**

Direct contact with growers is vital in maintaining and building interest in their industry and getting information through to growers.

### **6.2. Continue key communications activities**

The printed bi-monthly newsletter should be continued and its priorities guided by the survey and other stakeholder feedback.

The Best Practice Guide fact sheets be continued in response to growers' needs.

Greater encouragement should be given to growers to go online so that other forms of communications will be accessible to them.

### **6.3. Increase positive media opportunities.**

These will help build the profile of the subtropical sector which in turn will instil some more confidence among growers.

Identify local good news stories, publicise research outcomes and promote the subtropical sector at a local level.

### **6.4. Support any market development opportunities**

Communication of market development opportunities is critical to their success and that of the growers. Communications should be innovative where possible to engage growers in the possibilities that might be created.

These recommendations could easily apply to other horticultural industries, but what has become apparent during the 16 months of this project, is that direct contact with growers is vital in any communications process.

Talking face to face is acknowledged and welcomed by growers and provides the best opportunity to learn from them and assess where the industry needs are in terms of research and development, and market and marketing support.

## **7. Acknowledgements**

The following people have been contributors to the development and/or on going delivery of this project and the author wishes to acknowledge their contribution:

Tony Heidrich, former CEO of ABGC  
Jann Bonsall, executive assistant, ABGC  
Robert Pierce, President, Tweed Brunswick Growers Association  
Ron Gray, President, Coffs Harbour/ Woolgoolga Growers Association  
Stephen Spear, President, Nambucca District Growers Association  
David Peasley, Coordinator, Banana Bunchy Top Virus National Project  
Mark Hickey & Jeremy Bright, I & I NSW  
Nicky Singh, former President, ABGC  
Peter Molenaar, board member ABGC  
Doriana Mangili, Sweeter Banana Coop, WA  
David Chenu, National Marketing Manager for Banana Industry, HAL  
Jonathan Eccles, CEO ABGC  
Participants in the Communications Audit  
Respondents to the Subtropical Stakeholder Communications Survey

## **8. Bibliography**

**Taking Stock and Setting Directions (TSSD) Report,**  
ABGC 2008

**Australian Bananas 2009 – 2014 Strategic Plan,**  
Kiri-ganai Research Pty Ltd for ABGC & HAL, 2009

**Subtropical Market Development Workshops Report**  
T. Kitchener for HAL, 2010.

**Appendices follow but are listed here in summary.**

**Appendix 1. Communications Audit**

**Appendix 2. Communications Strategy**

**Appendix 3. E-News Subtropical Snapshot links**

**May '09** <http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?id=491594&u=23526>  
**July '09** <http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?id=523609&u=23526>  
**September '09** <http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?id=555431&u=23526>  
**November '09** <http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?id=594683&u=23526>  
**January '10** <http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?id=620628&u=23526>  
**March '10** <http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?id=650836&u=23526>  
**May '10** <http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?id=650836&u=23526>

**Appendix 4. Subtropics Banana News**

- a. Edition 1
- b. Edition 2
- c. Edition 3
- d. Edition 4
- e. Edition 5
- f. Edition 6
- g. Edition 7
- h. Edition 8

**Appendix 5. Best Practice Guide**

- a. Banana Bunchy Top Virus
- b. Nutrition Part 1 & 2
- c. Panama disease
- d. Flying Foxes in bananas
- e. Climate Change and Subtropical bananas
- f. Irrigating bananas Part 1
- g. Beetle Borer

**Appendix 5. Media clips**

## **Appendix 1**

# **SUB-TROPICAL Banana Industry Communications BA 08013**

## **Communications Audit Report March 2009.**

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## APPENDIX

- 1. Detailed results**
- 2. Interviewee list**
- 3. Questionnaire**



# 1. Overview

This audit has been the first activity for Neville Sloss in the IDO Communications role for the Subtropical Banana Growers sector.

The audit has been a qualitative exercise, designed to grasp the issues and get input from growers and other stakeholders as to their needs and wants.

It will play a significant role in directing the structure and make up of the Communications strategy (due 6 April) which will be implemented for the remainder of 2009.

It involved interviewing 38 people, either in person or over the telephone, following a set questionnaire developed in association with ABGC. They included four growers from WA, four from SE Qld, 11 from NSW regions, six wholesalers, three retailers, five researchers and five others associated with the industry. (see Appendix 2)

Many people will see some findings to be as expected – and that's fine - they reinforce activities already envisaged for the communications strategy for the subtropical sector.

Other findings will redirect our planning so that the communications program can be as effective as possible considering the issues and limitations within the sector, and the limitations of budget.

Overall the results confirm that consideration and consultation are required to make sure that tools such as a website and a research booklet are appropriate and play a useful role for growers and other stakeholders.

This report presents a summary of the key findings, a summary of each question's responses drawn from the detailed results in the appendix and highlights the issues which need to be taken into account in the preparation of the communications strategy.

It also recommends what tools and how these tools can be made most effective in making sure that communications are improved across all stakeholder groups involved in the industry.

What is also apparent from the research is that there are a number of underlying issues which need to be considered and action taken if any communications program is to be successful. It doesn't offer solutions to these – it raises them for the industry to address if it is possible. I hope that it will help the industry realise that a communications program is hollow without any positive actions shown by the industry itself.

In the words of one participant in advising what the industry needs to be, this report tries to be 'concise, targeted and succinct'.

It was also an important exercise in preparing me for the task ahead. I certainly feel more knowledgeable about the industry, its problems and its needs now. Finally I would like to thank all those who participated in the survey – all comments were valuable in the production of this audit document.

## 2. Summary of key findings

The audit produced the following keys findings:

- There has been little specific information circulating that relates specifically to sub tropical banana growers – this was noted by all groups
- Currently there are no effective mechanisms for getting any information out
- Growers want information about the latest research, disease issues, general industry news and about markets and marketing
- Other stakeholders want this information as well
- Issues such as social news, international news and employee issues don't rate as highly with growers, or other stakeholders
- While growers are divided on organic practices, others think organics are important
- Growers are divided on the need for business planning needs
- Environmental issues are of growing concern and need to be covered in communications
- A newsletter is seen to be a good source for this information
- As many want a printed newsletter as they who want an emailed newsletter and some want both!
- The frequency of the newsletter was questioned, with many thinking that monthly was too frequent
- The concept of a website is supported, but what will it contain? Linking it or making it a subset of the ABGC's website was also considered to be important by several
- A research booklet also gained support but raised questions – what will it contain and will it be relevant? A hard copy version s preferred, but a significant number wanted it to be on the website.
- Emails are used by the majority of growers, but not a part of everyday working life for several interviewed.
- There is support for more media about subtropical but what sort of stories?

- The majority see problems in communications, ranging from diversity of regional needs to the apathy of growers
- The issues of unity and one organisation for promoting subtropical issues were cited by several
- Field days are considered by growers and others as being a great opportunity for communications
- Growers think wholesalers and retailers need more subtropical information and they agree
- There's strong support for renewed consumer marketing of the benefits of sub-tropical bananas, qualified by wholesalers and retailers who say quality and consistency has to improve before that.

### **3. Audit structure**

#### **3.1 Review of existing communications**

A first meeting was held on 16 February with Tony Heidrich Executive Officer of Australian Banana Growers Council (ABGC) to gather background and be briefed on the industry.

A first draft questionnaire was discussed and a variety of publications provided to be reviewed.

It is fair to say that a review of existing communications for the subtropical sector was accomplished in a short time, as there is very little that has been specifically done for the subtropical sector in the past by and for the industry as a whole. A communications review was conducted by ABGC across the industry and this audit confirms some of its findings.

As the industry has been divided by geographical locations, different tools have been used in each area.

The majority of subtropical Western Australian growers with their Sweeter Banana Co-op have generated their own success by targeting the logical major market, Perth, which is a remote market for the FNQ producers. The well defined geographical region around Carnarvon has also allowed a good working group of growers to develop their own successful marketing campaigns through the co-op and to their credit, gain prices that their product deserves.

Obviously with a tight knit group, communications are excellent, but we do need to bear in mind the other growers in the region who have chosen not to be part of the co-op and also pay their levies which are funding the national communications program.

The situation is not as good in SE Queensland where the number of growers has steadily decreased and regional groups do not even meet any more. Those interviewed appear to work alone with little outside industry information, occasionally getting information from neighbour growers or Australian Bananas magazine, apart from their DPI.

In NSW, the role of Bananas NSW has diminished over the years as the number of growers has also steadily decreased. It has been the primary source of information with its activities and nowadays its twice yearly Banana Bulletin is its only formal line of communication.

Regional associations still exist in NSW, but it seems with limited participation by growers.

In summary, little exists in the form of formal communication channels for the sub-tropical sector as a whole. The challenge will be to define and implement communications that are meaningful and useful to the sector as a whole.

Overall a set of information has been obtained which will be extremely useful in the development of the communications strategy for the subtropical banana grower sector.

## **2.2 Survey - interviews with growers & stakeholders**

A questionnaire was finalised and a list of interviewees was drawn up to provide a cross section of views, not only from growers but from wholesalers, retailers, researchers and other stakeholders.

The breakup of categories was:

Growers – WA – 4; SE Qld - 4; NSW/North Coast – 5; NSW/Coffs/Woolgoolga – 5 and NSW Nambucca – 1.

Wholesalers - 4 city; 2 regional

Retailers – 3 (major)

Researchers/DPI – Qld – 2; WA – 1; NSW – 2

Other stakeholders – 5

A full list of those interviewed is in Appendix 2.

The interviews were conducted from 26 February through to 20 March. 15 interviews were conducted in person and 22 interviews over the telephone.

Being centrally located on the north coast of NSW, I was able to visit several growers in the region as well as Bob Campbell from Bananas NSW, and made a two day trip to the Coffs region to interview growers there.

Everyone was willing to be involved and offer their views to assist in the audit.

The audit conducted was a qualitative study – that is it was intended to illicit responses and tap into the feelings and views of the participants, rather than get simple answers to questions.

While the figures are hopefully reflective of the subtropical sector as a whole, statistically they cannot be taken as an industry wide review.

As the interviews progressed it was found that some questions produced similar responses and others were not applicable to certain groups.

## 4. Summary of audit findings

### 4.1 Existing communications

As mentioned in 3.1, the review of existing communications, the findings there were supported by the comments from participants.

Questions 1 & 3 – *what kind of information do you receive and how specifically relevant to the subtropical sector* - produced similar responses so are grouped in the results, but clearly they showed that very little focuses on subtropical and what communications there are, are minimal. Typical of the responses was:

- *nothing focuses on subtropical*
- *an ongoing problem-no information*
- *occasional information from news clippings.*

Over 70% (27 out of 38) said they received no or very little information on subtropical issues. Only 3 people said yes they got information and only one of them was a grower.

Question 2 – *How do you receive any information?* – found that people did receive or collect a variety of industry information, but not much overall.

Most information is generally gathered from direct contact with other growers or department people, with people conducting their own research when needed.

It confirmed that the Australian Bananas magazine provides a useful information source for industry wide information, as well as the Qld newsletter produced by IDO Matt Whittle. The Banana Bulletin in NSW was cited several times by NSW growers, but it was not commended as a good source of information, particularly with its frequency being only twice a year.

In this question the first of several references to field days came up – it seems that field days once played an important role in communications for growers, as well as an opportunity for direct contact with DPI staff.

Some comments included:

- *local knowledge comes from direct contact and sometimes meetings*
- *interaction with other committee members;*
- *from salespeople;*
- *Aust Bananas doesn't give us the right info; and*
- *field days for growers used to be good.*

### 3.2 What kind of information?

Question 4 – *Do you think there is a need to get more information relevant to the sub-tropical sector* – produced a conclusive yes. 74% (28) said yes, while it was interesting to note that 5 said *probably* and 4 said *no*, six of them being growers.

The comments were strongly in favour of more information, growers saying:

- *there is always a need to get more information;*
- *ideas from other growers such as innovation and nutrition; and*
- *yes, but the format is critical.*

Other grower comments included:

- *I don't know whether we need it? and*
- *maybe some more, but there's not too many things we don't know.*

Importantly retailers and wholesalers were strongly in support of more information (7 out of 8) with comments including:

- *more information so we can make informed decisions*
- *product attributes should be promoted*
- *most definitely and it is not divisive of the industry; and*
- *should keep in front of us.*

Other comments included:

- *need to get a lot more information about what will be happening under national levies*
- *for two things – what is being done for ST growers in the levy and links into national communications*
- *need info on bunchy top program; and*
- *absolutely!*

Question 5 – *what kind of information would you like to receive?* - was presented as a score card for various topics and other suggestions were also invited.

Topics were rated out of 5 with 5 being very important and 1 the least.

For growers, new research findings, general industry news, market and marketing information, and production techniques were rated most important. Next were association news, employee information and environmental issues. They were divided on two issues - business planning and organic practices and least important were international and social news.

When all the groups were taken into account the trends were similar, but showed a stronger support for environmental issues, association news and business planning.

The results summary shows the figures in detail but the following are some key observations from the results. (One retailer declined to score)

	<b>Growers</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>General industry news</b>	70% of growers rated it 4 or 5	All but one rated it 3,4 or 5	60% rated this 4 or 5 92% rated 3, 4 or 5.
<b>New research findings</b>	15 growers (79%) rated this 5	50% of retailers & wholesalers rated this 2 or 3	60% rated this 4 or 5 90% rated 3, 4 or 5
<b>Disease alerts</b>	17 growers rated it 5 2 growers rated it 1	83% rated this 4 or 5	87% rated this 4 or 5
<b>Market information</b>	14 growers rated this 4 or 5	4 or 5 for all wholesalers	73% rated this 4 or 5
<b>Social news</b>	12 growers rated it 2 or 1	No one rated it 4 or 5	65% rated it 2 or 1, while 35 rated it 3 or 4
<b>Association meeting reports</b>	Majority of growers rated it 2, 3 or 4 (80%)	Similar level of interest shown	73% rated it 4 or 5
<b>Marketing support</b>	16 growers rated it 4 or 5	6 Retailers and wholesalers rated it 5 or 4	76% rated it 4 or 5
<b>Employee issues</b>	Moderately important 12 growers 3 or 4, but 5 growers 2 or 1	Not a strong issue for these	30% rated it 1 or 2 60% rated it 3 or 4
<b>International news</b>	79% rated it 1, 2 or 3	Moderately interesting to these	Not one score for 5 60% rated it 3 or 4 22% rated it 1
<b>Production techniques</b>	68% rated it 4 or 5	72% rated it 4 or 5	70 rated it 4 or 5
<b>Business planning</b>	Divided between important and not! 9 growers 4 or 5 8 growers 1 or 2	Others all scored 4 or 5	57% rated it 4 or 5 27% rated it 1 or 2
<b>Organic practices</b>	Half of growers (9) rated it 3, others evenly divided for 1 or 5	No wholesaler rated it 4 or 5 No researcher rated it 1 or 2	Strong middle ground – 46% rated it 3
<b>Environmental issues</b>	All rated it 3 or above	Strong support shown	76% rated 4 or 5

It seemed that the list of topics covered most issues that the participants thought were worth communicating. Other specific suggestions included: *quality assurance, political issues, weed control, HAL levy expenditure; crop forecasting; removing costs from the supply chain, alternative ways of controlling pests and diseases.*



### 3.3 Newsletter

One of the proposed communications tools is a newsletter for the subtropical sector and this was discussed with our participants. The program had intended the newsletter to be a monthly publication, but in discussions several people raised the necessity for it every month. Part way through the survey, participants were asked about frequency and those comments are recorded at the top of the table in the results.

Overall, the traditional vs. technology were quite evenly matched with 30 people saying yes or maybe to a printed publication and 34 saying yes or maybe to an email version. (Some people said yes to both, most who said yes to email said no to printed.)

The figures suggest that there is still a strong core of people who prefer a printed newsletter, even among those who have access to and use email regularly. This is for growers and other stakeholders as well.

Regarding frequency, of those who offered an opinion, 11 said quarterly rather than monthly, 4 said bi-monthly and only 2 said monthly.

The issue of a newsletter raised many comments and questions which will need to be taken into account when production begins. These included:

- *Is it going to be relevant?*
- *will they read it?*
- *an email is more convenient*
- *email will save costs*
- *a hard copy I can file and read at another time*
- *always better to have a copy to sit down and read when it suits*
- *people take more notice of a printed newsletter*
- *maybe- its all dependent on scope and content*
- *in the early stages more frequently as so much uncertainty*
- *a hard copy I can put in the bin, an email I can read easy.*

**The division between print and web versions supports early intentions in the communications strategy to produce both to maximise the reach. A balance between the two and their frequency will be considered in developing final recommendations.**

### 3.4 Website

There was strong support (76%) for the concept of a website covering sub-tropical issues among the participants, but a significant number were concerned about the content and the relevance of the material on the website.

What was also interesting was that six people, including four growers said yes, but qualified that by stating the website should be part of ABGC's main website. Their comments included:

- *logical it is a subset of ABGC;*
- *cautiously yes, but should be part of ABGC; and*
- *just make it a section of ABGC's*
- *no, ABGC's is enough*

The feelings of others who said yes about this are unknown, but it is possible that other 'yes' respondents would have agreed.

Among those who said no, 3 of the 4 were growers and people who did not use electronic communications.

Given the strong support for a website, there are a range of issues which the participants put forward regarding content:

- *can we get market prices on a daily basis?*
- *It should have an organic section*
- *Case studies should be presented*
- *Should have each pest and disease with descriptions and photos, plus detailed advice for the right treatment.*

There was a strong feeling among supporters that a website would be an easy and useful reference point:

- *yes it is then easy to get information quickly*
- *way of the future a toll for information*
- *I don't know what would be relevant, but it is somewhere I could go for information*

**The comments will prove very useful when it comes to developing the tool in the communications strategy. It will be important to take into account the usefulness of possible material and the ability to link to additional information. Importantly it must be relevant to subtropical, or it will be dismissed by our target audiences.**

### 3.5 Research booklet

Like the website concept, there was 87% support for it (22 yes), but with a significant additional number (11) being ‘maybes’.

Few were against the concept (4) but there was an overall concern from the ‘maybes’ and the ‘yes’ vote that the booklet needed to be relevant, practical and new in the sense that it was not duplicating what was already in the industry arena.

Like the newsletter, there were mixed views on a format, with 19 for a hard copy version, 4 for disk and 14 for it to be accessible on the web. (There were some who indicated two formats).

Key comments included:

- *it would be good to get the best for a best practice style manual*
- *as long it is not too expensive to produce*
- *usefulness will depend on type of information*
- *needs to cover advances in production techniques*
- *case studies will be good*
- *combine the best of everything that is available*
- *feedback is needed – topics, how big is it, what is new?*
- *Should feature new things – we cannot wait for proof if the idea is worthwhile*
- *Advances in production techniques*
- *Not sure of demand for it?*
- *Changing practices how it was and how to do it better now*
- *There are enough booklets available for the Dept of Ag (NSW)*

**If research booklet is to be part of the communications strategy it will be critical to carefully decide upon content and format so that it provides a useful tool.**

### 3.6 Meetings & associations

Question 7 addressed the information gained from regional associations, while question 8 asked about attendance and value in attending regional association meetings. Once again regional variances skewed responses.

For question 7, 10 growers said yes they did, while 8 said no they didn’t get enough information from their regional association. This was influenced by the fact that in SE Qld the associations have all but shut down through lack of numbers while the Co-op which is essentially the WA regional association is very active.

In NSW the associations are still operating but a disproportionate number of the yes growers were in fact in executive positions of their regional associations so therefore they were quite involved.

For question 8, the figures were also skewed by regional circumstances, with 11 growers going to meetings and 8 not. Other stakeholders generally didn’t get information from regional associations, but 6 of them did attend meetings from time to time.

Comments among growers included:

- *only a few go these days*
- *not enough participation to make them worthwhile*
- *no group meetings here anymore!*

Comments among the others included:

- *very useful to catch up with the locals*
- *no but happy to come*
- *yes, when invited*
- *a good source of information*

It seemed from my discussions that regional meetings had lost their importance as a forum for information and sharing information for a variety of factors. In SE Qld, a major decrease in the number of growers is seen as the major reason; while in NSW there is limited attendance at quarterly meetings.

While the communications role is not to organise these meetings, it may well be that help can be offered to make them play a more important role in communications, by assisting with guest speakers or other activities to attract the 'rank and file' growers.

### **3.7 Electronic communication**

It was useful to get a gauge on the level of electronic communications being used (apart from the telephone!).

It showed that the majority of growers -16 out of the 19 sampled - have an email or access to one, and none have a website, which is to be expected due to the wholesale nature of their business.

Everyone else had an active email address, and almost all checked it on a daily basis. This was useful information to know if we intend to utilise the email system for the dissemination of information throughout the course of the year.

### **3.8 Media**

Questions 12 & 13 related to media – *would you like to see more in the news about subtropical bananas* and *do you recall anything in the media over the last 12 months?*

As expected no one said no they wouldn't, but of the growers 12 said yes and 7 said maybe. Of the others 14 said yes and 4 said maybe.

It was surprising the number of maybes but they were concerned more about the negative reporting that occurs with the media.

Some of the comments were:

- *all positive stories will help us*
- *certainly worth trying*
- *only to a point – unless industry is committed*
- *not sure – potentially divisive*
- *that we are a cleaner industry than before*

For the question 13, 65% of growers said they could recall some stories about the industry, but for the other groups, 65% could not recall any subtropical news.

I believe that much of the news is not defined into tropical or subtropical so this result does not provide any meaningful information.

### **3.9 Communication problems**

Question 11 asked the participants what they thought were the major problems confronting the communication program in getting to growers and other stakeholders. Most people were able to identify at least one problem!

Among the grower key comments were:

- *getting a program that suits all areas – quite different circumstances across country*
- *a lack of regular IDO presence for us in the West*
- *wholesalers do not want to know us & don't tell us much*
- *lots of smaller growers who are hands-on and will not take time out of their comfort zone*
- *Making information relevant – new ideas*
- *Growers are non-readers – need a diversity of info sources to reach them*
- *People want to preserve the old system and not change*
- *Grower cynicism – there is a need for growers to get used to the new system*
- *Need to get specific information for each group, as well as shared info*
- *Changing the culture is the biggest issue in NSW*

Overall there was a feeling among growers that making communications relevant was going to be the challenge, and finding sufficient information to do that was the next.

There was also a feeling that grower apathy/cynicism or disinterest will be other hurdles to be overcome. Several NSW growers referred to past marketing promotions which had been unsuccessful saying they would make any efforts to engender interest harder.

Among the comments from other groups, it was interesting to note that wholesalers looked beyond the communication program to the key issues which will affect its effectiveness. They cited disunity among growers, quality standards and reluctance to change as all major problems, which should be seen as sign that a collective unified approach is necessary from the start, but along with that has to be improved standards.

Other important comments included:

- *getting the information correct and being timely*
- *too many growers involved*
- *lack of technology*
- *reluctance to change*
- *getting growers to know what they can and cannot put in a box – raising the standards!*
- *There is no level of unity among growers*
- *Quality is critical and not always there*
- *hard to measure if information is getting to people*
- *getting it out not the problem – read and consumed is*
- *need to be concise, targeted & succinct*
- *getting growers to take an active interest in the industry – divisions remain!*
- *decline in industries and regional associations*

This question raised many issues which the industry itself will need to address as we move into the communication program. Hopefully through the program issues can be highlighted and help to stimulate action.

### **3.10 Communication suggestions**

There were a variety of suggestions put forward by the participants, many of which can be incorporated into the communications program ahead or are already being considered.

Key comments from growers included:

- *have a banana conference in WA*
- *remember regions' different needs*
- *keep us up to date on diseases such as fusarium in lady fingers*
- *more info on the congress – very few of us attend*
- *field days are really useful, important issues – face to face is best*
- *how to tackle bats and Woolworths! Actually should look closely at bat problem, it is bigger than most people think*
- *feature growers doing good things*
- *they should encourage growers to produce quality!*
- *Bunchy top will need strong promotion*
- *More important things than bunchy top*

Key comments from the other participants are listed in the results summary but here are some which raise issues related not just to communications but what the industry communicates:

- *develop a single message and promote point of difference*
- *ST growers need to rebadge themselves*
- *Develop common themes and set up common (higher) standards*
- *Promote size does matter – smaller the better*
- *One organisation for subtropical management and promotion*
- *promote the advantages of the levy and St growers have become part of a national industry*
- *field days and networking are great ways for educating growers*
- *get the industry to move to co-op more*
- *focus on any issues which directly affect their businesses*
- *marketing is needed to push the price up a bit*

A conclusion that can be drawn from the answers provided is that the subtropical industry needs to re-energise itself and tackle the bigger issues otherwise any communications will be wasted.

**The role of the communication strategy in getting the industry focussed and active will need to be considered in the activities which will be planned.**

### 3.11 Grower comments

Growers were asked if they thought wholesalers and retailers needed to get more subtropical specific information and 70% said yes.

The main messages that they think should be told are about the flavour and the attractiveness of the ST fruit, particularly its size.

Some comments included:

- *the benefits, sweetness and healthier as less sprays are used than in FNQ*
- *they wont take much notice of anything*
- *yes, but not sure what?*
- *can tell them plenty, but bashing our heads against a brick wall*
- *need useful info – market research about taste and quality to show them*
- *They should be stocking both ST and FNQ bananas for variety*
- *Need to get wholesalers on board with the message that the quality of the fruit doesn't depend on the skin*
- *Taste/flavour is the key message and that we cannot produce long lines*
- *Bananas under 200gm are favoured, but consumers cannot choose*
- *Concentrate on local areas and not major wholesalers & retailers*
- *Remind them they need us every now and then!*
- *need to wait until what comes out of marketing review*
- *channel consumer research to them*

A similar number of growers thought that it was important to communicate with researchers and government departments, while almost all were supportive of communicating more with consumers.

The need to educate consumers was a strong point, but one person reminded us 'not until we can do a unified promotion'.

**I believe the comments vindicate the need for the marketing role to help define the selling points and the opportunities for subtropical fruit marketing.**

### 3.12 Wholesaler & retailer comments

8 out of 9 wholesalers and retailers say they want more information from the subtropical banana growers, even if many growers think they don't.

From their comments though it is clear that they want more than just information, they want to know about:

- *consistency, quality and supply*
- *what's planned in marketing support*
- *what market research backs up any plans*
- *organic- yes, other varieties from ST would be welcomed*
- *relationships critical*
- *open, honest and timely information*

They all agree that more information needs to go to consumers. Their comments included:

- *definitely, need to promote the points of difference*

- *more so in major markets, locally need to educate consumers*
- *need to build consumer support*
- *they buy with their eyes, so need to improve the look and shelf life*
- *yes!! Active communication of ST benefits, WA a good example of how it can be done*

### **3.13 Researcher/gov comments**

There were a limited number of participants in this group, but it was interesting to note that 3 out of 5 don't know if growers are up to date with research, perhaps showing the lack of communication within the industry.

Biosecurity was a common point when it came to issues they think growers should be concerned about, as well as pest and disease management. Other comments included:

- *quality control, bunchy top still significant, marketing issues more so*
- *disease management and dealing with exotic diseases*
- *finding new ways to market ST bananas and make them distinctive*
- *need to get a greater range of varieties – look to Asian ones*

The researchers also volunteered these opinions on what and how information could be better presented to industry. They included:

- *face to face is best*
- *levy spend is most topical now, not so much research*
- *growers have to become involved and put some energy back into the industry*
- *Field days work well*
- *Get involved with good growers and lead by example*
- *Field days are excellent ways for getting information out*

**It will be important to tap into the work being done by the researchers where it is relevant to subtropical growers and present it in a simple easy to understand format in our communications program.**



## 5. Communications recommendations

This audit will provide a valuable resource in the development of the communications strategy which has already begun, and in fact some activities are already underway.

From the information, the following objectives will be taken into account. The strategy will be:

- Inclusive of geographical needs – all regions need to get value from the communications
- Inclusive of growers – the majority of growers need to be reached
- Inclusive of other stakeholders – information about the subtropical industry needs to get to wholesalers, retailers, researchers and consumers
- Relevant to these groups – it is important that information is practical and useful, as well as being easily understood
- Timely in that all stakeholders see any information being current.

The audit has also helped confirm specific tools in our strategy, as well as help define them.

The strategy will include a variety of tools including:

- Newsletter, in both printed and email form, either concurrently or alternately, but both conveying useful and timely information. ( First printed newsletter planned for April distribution)
- The use of email to bring updates or information to the attention of all stakeholders
- The development of an up to date database including email addresses where possible ( currently underway)
- The development of web pages specifically within the ABGC website, but accessible directly by subtropical growers.
- Content of the website will be developed in conjunction with key industry representatives
- The website will be set up to record the use by growers and others so that we can measure its use.
- A research booklet will be further discussed with key industry representatives to agree its objectives, content and format and whether it is achievable within existing budgets
- Direct contact with growers through a presence at regional meetings
- Input into regional meetings to assist in making them of more interest to growers
- Encouraging more field days where possible and promoting them to growers and stakeholders
- The promotion of any outcomes from the Marketing project soon to get underway.
- Identifying opportunities to produce industry news releases on items of relevance and distribute to media in regions

An overriding recommendation from this audit is the need for a unified industry and voice to represent it and I believe it is important for a member of Project Management Committee, or a board nominee to be developed as the voice of the subtropical industry. This will greatly assist in taking messages to all stakeholders.

**The audit also highlights the need for the whole of the subtropical industry to work together to achieve greater market success and raises the question how will this be done?**

## APPENDIX

### 1. Detailed results

#### Sub-Tropical Banana Growers Communications Audit Questionnaire

##### SUMMARY SHEET

*1& 3. What kind of information do you receive about the sub tropical banana industry? Do you receive any information specifically relevant to the sub tropical banana sector? (these questions were similar so results were grouped)*

##### Total survey

No information	13
Not much/very little information	14
Some information	8
Yes, I get information	3

##### Growers

	WA	Qld	NSW	Total	
None		1	2	2	5
Not much		1	2	5	8
Some		2	-	3	5
Yes I do		-	-	1	1

##### Key comments:

- nothing focuses on sub tropical
- a lot of stuff for north Queensland growers that's all
- not too many things we don't know!
- Need to get market information
- Only thing is chemical product info sheets which can be questionable
- The BIC has virtually stopped its newsletter, hasn't it?

Wholesalers	None	5	Not much	1	Some	-	Yes	-
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##### Key comments:

- An ongoing problem – no information
- none

Retailers	None	2	Not much	1	Some	-	Yes	-
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##### Key comments:

- nothing specifically
- just Aust Bananas magazine

Researchers	None	1	Not much	1	Some	2	Yes	1
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Key comments:

- very little

Others	None	-	Not much	4	Some	1	Yes	1
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Key comments:

- Occasional news piece from clippings
- email advice from DAFF
- pick up from media – nothing formal
- majority of information coming from retail outlets, suppliers

2. How do you receive this – e.g. meetings, direct contact with colleagues, via your national, state or local associations, industry specific publications such as Australian Bananas magazine or Banana Bulletin, websites?

### Total survey

Australian Bananas Magazine	17
Banana Bulletin/Growcom(Qld)	14
Direct Contact	23
Own research	20

Growers

	WA	Qld	NSW	Total	
Aust Bananas		1	2	6	9
BB/ Growcom		Na	4	5	9
Direct Contact		3	2	7	12
Own research		3	-	5	8

Key comments:

- field days for growers used to be good
- regular Growcom newsletter is good
- Australian Bananas doesn't give us info
- Local knowledge comes from direct contact and sometimes meetings

Wholesalers	AB	3	BB	1	Direct contact	3	Own research	2
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Key comments:

- used to get Banana Bulletin but not any more
- get it from the growers when I deal with them

Retailers	AB	1	BB	-	Direct contact	2	Own research	2
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Key comments:

- through phone calls and relationships with growers
- through growers and invitation to congress
- daily clips from Craig

Researchers      AB      1      BB      2      Direct contact      3      Own research      3

Key comments

- people, direct contact, David Peasley
- interaction with other committee members
- casual dealings with growers

Others

AB      3      BB      2      Direct contact      3      Own research      5

Key comments:

- trawling DPI website
- from salespeople
- from media monitoring

4. *Do you think there is a need to get more information relevant to the sub-tropical banana sector?*

### Total survey

**No**                      **4**  
**Probably**            **5**  
**Some**                 **1**  
**Yes**                    **28**

### Growers

	WA	Qld	NSW	Total	
No		-	1	2	3
Probably		1	-	2	3
Some		-	1	-	1
Yes I do		2	2	7	11

Key comments:

- research and development is important if it is directly relevant to ST
- always a need!
- Don't know whether we need it?
- Maybe more , but there's not too many things we don't know
- Yes, but the format is critical
- Not really
- Ideas from other growers such as innovation and nutrition

Wholesalers      No      1      Probably      1      Some -      Yes      4

Key comments:

- don't feel I need the contact
- yes – it is an ongoing problem
- most definitely and its not divisive of industry

Retailers              No      -      Probably      -      Some -      Yes      3

Key comments:

- more information so we can make informed decisions

- product attributes should be promoted
- should keep in front of us

Researchers      No      -      Probably      -      Some      -      Yes      5

Key comments:

- yes, nice to have an opportunity to interact with growers and their needs
- absolutely!
- Need to get a lot more information about what will be happening under national levies

Others              No      -      Probably      1      Some      -      Yes      5

Key comments:

- for two things, what is being done for ST growers and links into national communications
- need to leverage levy and get a return for ST growers
- about bunchy top and rotation program

5. *What kind of information would you like to receive and suggestions.*

The scores were out of five, five being if most importance, 1 – not important. The figure for each is an average for the group

		Growers				Wslrs	Rtlrs	Rschr	Others	Total
		WA	Qld	NSW	totl					
General industry news	5	1	2	4	7	1	1	-	3	12
	4	2	1	3	6	1	-	2	1	10
	3	-	1	3	4	4	-	3	1	12
	2	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	2
	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
New research findings	5	4	3	8	15	2	-	1	3	20
	4	-	-	1	1	1	-	3	1	6
	3	-	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	7
	2	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	2
	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	1
Disease alerts	5	3	2	8	13	3	1	4	3	24
	4	-	2	2	4	2	-	1	1	8
	3	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	2
	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
	1	1	-	1	2	-	-	-	1	1
Market information	5	-	2	6	8	4	1	-	4	17
	4	3	-	3	6	2	1	-	1	10
	3	1	2	1	4	-	-	4	-	8
	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	1
Social news	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	4	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	-	2
	3	2	2	1	5	1	-	2	3	11
	2	-	2	1	3	2	-	-	1	6
	1	2	-	7	9	3	2	3	1	18
Association meeting reports	5	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	1
	4	1	-	5	6	2	-	1	3	12
	3	2	2	3	7	3	-	3	2	15
	2	-	1	1	2	1	1	1	-	5
	1	1	1	1	3	-	1	-	-	4
Marketing support	5	1	2	8	11	3	1	-	4	19
	4	3	-	2	5	2	-	1	1	9
	3	-	1	1	2	1	1	1	-	5
	2	-	1	-	1	-	-	2	-	3
	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

		Growers				Wslrs	Rtlrs	Rschrs	Others	Total
		WA	Qld	NSW	totl					
HR/OH&S/etc information	5	-	1	1	2	-	-	-	1	3
	4	3	1	4	8	-	-	1	1	10
	3	-	1	3	4	2	-	1	3	10
	2	-	-	2	2	2	-	-	-	4
	1	1	1	1	3	-	2	1	-	6
International news	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	4	1	-	3	4	1	-	3	1	9
	3	2	2	2	6	3	-	1	3	13
	2	-	2	3	5	-	1	1	-	7
	1	1	-	3	4	2	1	-	1	8
Production techniques	5	2	1	3	6	1	-	1	2	10
	4	1	2	4	7	3	-	3	3	16
	3	1	-	2	3	2	-	1	-	6
	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	2
	1	-	1	2	3	-	-	-	-	3
Business planning	5	-	2	1	3	3	-	2	1	9
	4	2	1	3	6	1	1	-	4	12
	3	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	2
	2	-	-	5	5	-	-	1	-	6
	1	2	1	-	3	-	-	1	-	4
Organic practices	5	1	-	2	3	-	-	1	-	4
	4	1	-	2	3	-	1	1	1	6
	3	2	3	4	9	3	-	3	2	17
	2	-	-	1	1	1	1	-	1	4
	1	-	1	2	3	2	-	-	-	5
Environmental issues	5	4	1	1	6	2	1	1	2	12
	4	-	2	5	7	2	-	2	2	13
	3	-	1	2	3	1	1	1	-	6
	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	2
	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

#### Other suggestions:

Production methods for best volume of production; more about our carbon footprint advantage; farm run-off; quality assurance; climate change; political issues; sustainable practices; weed control; HAL levy expenditure; carbon accounting; industry improvements; strategic marketing; crop forecasting; controlling pests; combating the import threat; removing costs from the supply chain; amount of area planted with bananas, source properties where we can do samples; alternative ways of controlling pests and disease; financial costings in production and understanding this input; impacts of price rises on margins and budgeting exercises

6. What do you think of these proposed communications tools we are intending to use.....( some people nominated yes to both post and email as well as different formats for a research booklet, some people declined to answer some questions hence numbers do not always add up to total number of respondents)

	Growers	Wholesalers	Retailers	Researchers	Others	Overall
<b>Newsletter</b>						
-frequency						
Monthly		(email)1			1	2
Bimonthly	1		1	1	2	4
quarterly	5	2	1	2	1	11
Posted –						
Maybe	2	1	-	2	1	6
yes	13	2	2	3	4	24
No	4	3	1	-	-	8
Emailed						
Maybe	4	-	-	1	-	5
Yes	13	4	3	4	5	29
No	1	2	-	-	-	3
<b>Website</b>						
Maybe	2	2	1	-	-	5
Yes	10	3	2	5	2	22
Yes, part of					-	-
ABGC	4	-	-	-	2	6
No	3	-	-	-	1	4
<b>Research Booklet</b>						
Maybe	6	-	1	1	3	11
Yes	12	4	-	4	2	22
No	1	2	1	-	-	4
<b>Hard copy</b>						
<b>Disk</b>	13	2	-	2	2	19
<b>On Web</b>	1	1	-	1	1	4
	8	1	-	3	2	14

Newsletter comments:

- is it going to be relevant?
- a hard copy I can file and read at another time
- email is preferable for a quick read
- I get thousands of emails so a hard copy is probably better
- email will save costs
- always better to have a copy to sit down and read
- don't have broadband, so hard copy better
- A hard copy I can put in the bin, an email I can read easy
- an email is more convenient
- printed copy is of limited value, while an email is easily stored
- people take more notice of printed version



- maybe just when we have something new –depends upon how much is going on
- use emails for special bulletins, not newsletter
- dependent on scope and content
- more inclined to read printed version
- will they read it?? Smaller business people don't have time
- email is good speed of receipt and can be sent around
- printed one is easier to read
- early stages more frequently as so much uncertainty

#### Website comments:

- as long as it has an organic section
- just make it a section of the ABGC site
- no ABGC site is sufficient
- yes, but don't have computer myself
- maybe, will be interesting to see responses
- should be part of a national ABGC one
- not interested!
- Cautiously yes, should be part of ABGC
- Yes, it is then easy to get to information quickly
- Can we get info on market prices on a daily basis?
- Logical it is a subset of ABGC website
- Should have each pest and disease with descriptions and photos, plus detailed advice for the right treatment on web and in booklet
- Good idea as a destination to get information
- Way of the future – another tool to provide information
- I don't know what would be relevant but it is somewhere I could go for information
- Links to DPI would be excellent

#### Research booklet comments and inputs:

- so much work has been duplicated over the years – would be good to get the best for a best practice style manual
- good luck!
- Growers should have to buy a copy to cover costs
- Needs to address organic needs or not interested
- QDPI already have one don't they
- As long as it is not too expensive to produce
- Should have case studies for production issues
- Usefulness will depend upon type of info
- Should feature new things and we cannot wait for proof if the idea is worthwhile
- Handy hints to stop disease spread
- There are enough booklet available from the Dept of Ag (NSW)
- Combine the best of everything that's available
- Needs to have updated info on panama and flying fox management
- Changing practices – how it was and how to do it better now
- Not sure of demand, maybe?
- Advances in production techniques
- Case studies provide back up

- Feedback needed – topics, how big is it, what is new?
- Should cover plant protection, aspects of nutrition, role of irrigation
- Peer review important –should only contain valid data

7. Do you get enough information from regional group/association?

Growers -            Yes    10       No    8       N/A

Key comments:

- WA is different with our coop, good interest among members
- No group meetings any more here in SE Qld
- Not enough participation to make it worthwhile
- Only a few go these days

Wholesalers –    Yes    1       No    2       N/A    3

Key comments:

- up to the individual to participate
- not at all

Retailers –        Yes    -        No    -        N/A    3

Key comments:

- N/A

Researchers –    Yes    1       No    3       N/A    1

Key comments:

- no lines of communications
- a little but they don't send us much

Others –            Yes    2       No    3       N/A

Key comments:

- nothing, don't see any minutes
- no!

8. Do you attend meetings? If so do you find them valuable for gaining information?

Growers            Yes    11       No    8  
                         Yes    9       No    3

Wholesalers      Yes    1       No    5  
                         Yes    1       No    1

Retailers         Yes    -        No    3

Researchers      Yes    1       No    4  
                         Yes    1       No    -

Key Comments

- very useful to catch up with locals
- no but happy to come

Others	Yes	3	No	2
	Yes	3	No	-

Key comments:

- yes when invited
- a good source of information

9. Do you have an email address? Y / N Do you have a website Y / N

	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Growers		16	3	-	19
Wholesalers		5	-	4	1
Retailers		3	-	3	-
Researchers		5	-	2	3
Others		5	-	5	-

10. If you have an email address, do you use it for business? And how often do you check it?

	Yes	No	Daily or more	Less frequently	
Growers		15	3	13	3
Wholesalers		5	1	5	-
Retailers		3	-	3	-
Researchers		5	-	5	-
Others		4	1	5	-

11. What do you think are the major problems confronting us in getting information out among the industry including growers, retailers, wholesalers, etc?

Key comments

Growers:

- getting a program that suits all areas – quite different circumstances across country
- a lack of regular IDO presence for us in the West
- wholesalers do not want to know us & don't tell us much
- issues that are relevant
- lots of smaller growers who are hands-on and will not take time out of their comfort zone
- physical set up – finding email addresses and general apathy
- Sikhs & language not a problem – kids translate to parents, but involves only a handful
- Making information relevant – new ideas
- Growers are non-readers – need a diversity of info sources to reach them
- People want to preserve the old system and not change
- Finding good useful information to pass on
- Information which will help make a difference in their business
- Grower cynicism – there is a need for growers to get used to the new system

- Need to get specific information for each group, as well as shared info
- Changing the culture is the biggest issue in NSW

#### Wholesalers:

- too many growers involved
- lack of technology
- reluctance to change
- getting growers what they can and cannot put in a box – raising the standards!
- Getting people to act
- There is no level of unity among growers, need to communicate same
- Quality is critical and not always there

#### Retailers:

- don't see any problems if tools – emails, magazines, etc are used
- inundated with info from FNQ growers, at no point do we get anything from ST growers
- getting the information correct and being timely

#### Researchers:

- finding ways to engage people
- getting growers to take an active interest in the industry – divisions remain!
- Knowing target audiences
- Decline in industries and regional associations

#### Others:

- hard to measure if information is getting to people
- need reader feedback/surveys to gauge results
- expense – maybe get a sponsor for the newsletter?
- apathy of growers
- getting it out not the problem – read and consumed is
- need to be concise, targeted & succinct
- coming up with new and interesting material

*12. Would you like to see more in the news – eg local papers, radio, etc about the sub-tropical banana industry?*

	Yes	No	Maybe
Growers	12	-	7
Wholesalers	5	-	-
Retailers	2	-	1
Researchers	4	-	1
Others	3	-	2

## Key comments

### Growers:

- all positive stories will help us
- certainly worth trying
- yes, of course!
- Not a lot happening to report on
- That we are a cleaner industry than before
- Definitely to raise the profile of NSW product
- Yes, there's very little at present

### Wholesalers:

- certainly would help
- only negative and general most times

### Retailers:

- definitely

### Researchers:

- only to a point, unless industry is committed
- worthwhile increasing awareness

### Others:

- not sure – potentially divisive
- of course – issues and good news

## 13. Can you recall any stories on subtropical in the last year?

	Yes	No
Growers	9	5
Wholesalers	1	4
Retailers	-	1
Researchers	2	3
Others	3	2

## Key comments

### Growers:

- levies stories
- biggest bunch at Tweed
- imports, survival
- scepticism at grower value for money from levy

### Wholesalers:

- none

### Retailers:

- n/a

### Researchers:

- Philippines issue
- A huge bunch of bananas?

Others:

- release of dwarf lady finger variety

*14. Do you have any suggestions for improved communications?*

Key comments

Growers:

- have a banana conference in WA
- remember regions different needs
- keep us up to date on diseases such as fusarium in lady fingers
- emails are a good way for keeping in touch
- links to wages info in newsletters
- more info on the congress – very few of us attend
- marketing is needed to push the price up a bit
- field days are really useful, important issues – face to face is best
- how to tackle bats and Woolworths! Actually should look closely at bat problem, it is bigger than most people think
- educate consumers on the unique issues of ST bananas
- feature growers doing good things
- they should encourage growers to produce quality!
- Bunchy top will need strong promotion
- More important things than bunchy top
- Market reports updated on a regular basis?

Wholesalers:

- develop a single message and promote point of difference
- invite wholesalers to a meeting
- important for growers and wholesalers to keep lines of communication open –both sides fall down
- ST growers need to rebadge themselves
- Develop common themes and set up common standards
- Promote size does matter – smaller the better

Retailers:

- One organisation for subtropical management and promotion
- Open forums are always good
- Utilise the subtropical seasonal ‘window of opportunity’
- Market research is important

Researchers:

- newsletter is important
- promote the advantages of the levy and St growers have become part of a national industry
- field days and networking are great ways for educating growers

Others:

- utilise email data base and improve regular communications
- promote consistency of product
- get the industry to move to co-op more
- focus on any issues which directly affect their businesses

*15. Do you have any other comments about the proposed communications?*

This question proved to be irrelevant, as virtually no one interviewed was aware of what communications activities were proposed. Perhaps this in itself highlights the lack of good communications with the sector?

## **Additional questions**

### **Growers and others**

*Do you think that the wholesalers and retailers need to get more sub-tropical specific information from the industry?*

	Yes	No
Growers	12	5
Others	5	-

*What do you think we need to be telling them?*

Key comments:

- the benefits, sweetness and healthier as less sprays are used than in FNQ
- about our good enviro practice in terms of growing and therefore no environmental footprint
- they wont take much notice of anything
- not so much wholesalers, retailers need to be educated first
- yes, but not sure what?
- can tell them plenty, but bashing our heads against a brick wall
- need useful info – market research about taste and quality to show them
- They should be stocking both ST and FNQ bananas for variety
- Need to get wholesalers on board with the message that the quality of the fruit doesn't depend on the skin
- Taste/flavour is the key message and that we cannot produce long lines
- Bananas under 200gm are favoured, but consumers cannot choose
- Concentrate on local areas and not major wholesalers & retailers
- Remind them they need us every now and then!
- That we can produce good quality fruit for 8 months on par or better than FNQ's

- verbal communications are most important
- keep them all informed
- need to wait until what comes out of marketing review
- channel consumer research to them
- need to take into account commercial realities

*Do you think we need to communicate more with other stakeholders – eg government departments, peak industry bodies? And if so, about what?*

	Yes	No
Growers	12	4
Others	5	-

Key comments:

- if we educate retailer, wholesalers and consumers, its not necessary
- not seen a DPI person for three years!
- Have to , they are part of the chain
- Yes, but it is the Executive officer's role
- Make sure they get our newsletter

*What about consumers?*

	Yes	No
Growers	15	1
Others	5	-

Key comments:

- must do it
- about the taste, but will they take much notice??
- Need to educate them that the look is not most important – it's the taste that matters
- Buy local our product is produced close to them
- Done it before – they want our bananas
- Issues based and raise the profile
- Yes, sell local
- Remind them of the much better flavour
- Not until we can do a unified promotion then – better tasting because they're slower growing and have more sugars
- Smaller fruit for smaller shops!
- Channel market research through communications role

## **Wholesalers & retailer questions**

*Do you, wholesalers and retailers, need to get more sub-tropical specific information from the industry?*

	Yes	No
Wholesalers	5	1
Retailers	3	-



*What do you want to get from STB industry?*

Comments:

- Consistency in quality most important
- Don't need much – more info about production
- What's planned on the marketing front
- quality, consistency and supply
- want to know what is being done to close the gap between ST and FNQ fruit
- market research is important
- organic- yes, other varieties from ST would be welcomed
- want to know that work is starting now to protect Aust market from imports
- relationships critical
- open, honest and timely information

*Do you think we need to communicate more with other stakeholders – eg government departments? And if so, about what?*

Most answered 'not applicable to them'

*What about consumers?*

	Yes	No
Wholesalers	6	-
Retailers	3	-

Comments:

- definitely, need to promote the points of difference
- more so in major markets, locally need to *educate* consumers
- need to build consumer support
- It's all about size and taste
- yes, greatest attribute is the flavour of ST bananas
- they buy with their eyes, so need to improve the look and shelf life
- yes!! Active communication of ST benefits, WA a good example of how it can be done
- yes, absolutely

### **Researcher questions**

*Do you feel that growers are up to date with the latest research?*

Yes 1      No 1      Don't know 3

Comments:

- Not sure of how much research is going on? Massive drying up of dollars available
- I get the impression they're not
- No major research since the 1990s

*What issues should be of concern to sub-tropical growers at present and into the future?*

Comments:

- potential pest and disease problems, biosecurity
- quality control, bunchy top still significant, marketing issues more so
- disease management and dealing with exotic diseases
- finding new ways to market ST bananas and make them distinctive
- need to get a greater range of varieties – look to Asian ones
- biosecurity is important, need to minimise spread of diseases – ‘come clean, go clean’

*What do you do to share in your information/research with growers?*

Comments:

- distance is an issue
- field days are valuable but they have been scaled back
- attend meetings and involvement with ABGC
- attend banana congress, produce articles for Aust Bananas
- DPI mailouts, not much else

*Do you have any suggestions on how we present that information to them?*

Comments:

- face to face is best
- levy spend is most topical now, not so much research
- growers have to become involved and put some energy back into the industry
- Field days work well
- Get involved with good growers and lead by example
- Field days are excellent ways for getting information out

## **2. Interviewee list**

### **Growers WA**

Tim Hyde  
Tom Day  
Doriana Mangili  
Chris Armstrong

### **SE Qld**

Kurt Lindsay  
Ray Nelson  
Joe Lyons  
Gavin Jowett

### **NSW – North Coast**

Peter Molenaar  
Jeff Larsson  
Trevor Black  
Barry Laing  
Graeme Disney

### **NSW - Woolgoolga/ Coffs**

Nicky Singh  
Jaz Benning  
Paramjeet Bhatti  
Ron Gray  
David Pike

### **NSW – Nambucca**

Steve Spear

### **Retailers**

John Grove – Woolworths  
Brad Gorman – Coles  
Gus Stellino – IGA

### **Wholesalers**

Peter Lahey  
– Bris Mkts (Bris, Qld)  
Garry Fattore  
– Costa Exchange (Syd, NSW)  
Harry Theoharous  
– Moraitis (Syd, NSW)  
John Mercer  
– Mercer Moraitis (Perth,WA)  
Andrew Davis  
– Golden Dawn (Coffs, NSW)  
Ian Simpson  
– Simpsons ( North Coast, NSW)

### **Researchers/Gov**

Mark Hickey, DPI NSW  
Alison Shields, DPI Qld  
Colin Handbury, Dept of Ag WA  
Dr Liz Aitken, Uni of Qld  
John Williams, DPI NSW

### **Others**

Matt Whittle, IDO Growcom  
Bob Campbell, Bananas NSW  
Jann O'Connor, ABGC  
Tony Heidrich, ABGC  
John Tyas, HAL

### 3. Questionnaire

#### Sub-Tropical Banana Growers Communications Audit Questionnaire

**Name:** ..... **Location:** ..... **Contact:** .....

*The purpose of this interview is to help formulate an effective communications program for sub-tropical banana growers and the industry for 2009. Your honest input will be helpful in assessing and enhancing our proposed communications activities.*

#### General questions

1. What kind of information do you receive about the sub tropical banana industry?
2. How do you receive this – eg meetings, direct contact with colleagues, via your national, state or local associations, industry specific publications such as Australian Bananas magazine or Banana Bulletin, websites?
3. Do you receive any information specifically relevant to the sub tropical banana sector?
4. Do you think there is a need to get more information relevant to the sub-tropical banana sector?
5. What kind of information would you like to receive and suggestions:

- ☐ general industry news
- ☐ new research findings
- ☐ disease alerts
- ☐ market information
- ☐ social news
- ☐ meeting reports
- ☐ marketing support
- ☐ HR or employer/ee information
- ☐ international news
- ☐ production techniques
- ☐ business planning
- ☐ organic practices
- ☐ other?

6. What do you think of these proposed communications tools we are intending to use.....
  - Monthly newsletter - *posted* to you - Yes / maybe / No and why?
  - Monthly newsletter – *emailed* to you - Yes/ Maybe /No and why
  - Website dedicated to the sub-tropical sector - Yes/ Maybe/ No and why?
  - A booklet containing both current and historical research relevant to the sub-tropical sector - Yes/ Maybe/ No and why?

What specifically would you like to see covered in this booklet?  
Would you like it in hard form, or as an 'electronic' booklet on disk?

7. Do you get enough information from your regional group/association?

8. Do you attend meetings? If so do you find them valuable for gaining information?
9. Do you have an email address? Y / N Do you have a website Y / N
10. If you have an email address, do you use it for business? And how often do you check it?
11. What do you think are the major problems confronting us in getting information out among the industry including growers, retailers, wholesalers, etc?
12. Would you like to see more in the news – eg local papers, radio, etc about the sub-tropical banana industry?
13. Can you recall any stories in the last year?
14. Do you have any suggestions for improved communications?
15. Do you have any other comments about the proposed communications?

#### **Grower questions**

- Do you think that the wholesalers and retailers need to get more sub-tropical specific information from the industry?
- What do you think we need to be telling them?
- Do you think we need to communicate more with other stakeholders – eg government departments, peak industry bodies? And if so, about what?
- What about consumers?

#### **Wholesalers & retailer questions**

- Do you need to get more sub-tropical specific information from the industry?
- What do you want to get from industry?
- Do you think we need to communicate more with other stakeholders – eg government departments? And if so, about what?
- What about consumers?

#### **Researchers/Gov representatives**

- Do you feel that growers are up to date with the latest research?
- What issues should be of concern to sub-tropical growers at present and into the future?
- What do you do to share in your information/research with growers?

## **Appendix 2.**

# **SUB-TROPICAL Banana Industry Communications BA 08013**

## **Communications Strategy April 2009.**

Prepared by:

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## 1. Recommendations at a glance

- **Printed Newsletter**

Produced every two months, A4 size, 4 or 8 pages, folded to the DL mailing size to keep costs for postage at a minimum. Suggested working title is **“The Subtropics Banana News”**, with the first edition out late in April.

- **E-News**

An alternate communication is planned to come out every other month. Titled **‘Subtropical Banana Snapshot’** it will be an email newsletter in news brief form, with links to fuller articles or material where available.

- **Website**

Subtropical website will be linked into the main ABGC site which is currently being redesigned. Home page with background, state pages, industry page requiring password with sub pages, and allowance for future consumer pages.

- **Research ‘booklet’**

Best practice guide covering: research – pest and diseases; production techniques; environmental issues; and organics. Facts sheets into ring bound folder. All information also posted on website.

- **Media**

Lift profile of industry through building media database, pro-active and reactive news releases and more media liaison.

- **Grower Liaison**

Update member database with email information, attend regional association meetings, and assist meeting to get guest speakers.

- **Field Days**

Promote May 20 Field Day on tissue culture at Alstonville Research Station and work with regions and researcher to present and promote at least one other in 2009.

- **E-Bulletins**

Electronic messages with any breaking news will be dispatched to growers or other stakeholders to keep them informed.

- **Industry spokesperson/s**

One national spokesperson in line with the comments about a unified approach for the industry. Work with regions to assist in improving media presentation.

- **Australian Bananas subtropical feature**

- **Promoting marketing outcomes**

Public relations will be able to play a role in taking messages and information to consumers, and other stakeholders.



## **2. Overview**

This communications strategy has been developed taking into account: the requirements under HAL project BA 08013 Subtropical Banana Industry Communications; my initial proposal; a review of existing materials; and the Communications Audit conducted with the industry during February and March. It has also been developed taking into account the budget available to the program.

In general it follows the initial thinking of the ABGC and HAL; it provides recommendations on the key communications tools, and adds others to complement those during the year.

As the year is already well underway it also acknowledges that there is a need for good communications 'early' in the program with work on the first newsletter already underway for dispatch later this month.

I consider this to be a working document, and one which will have some flexibility as the year progresses and the activities unfold.

## **3. Research**

The research conducted for this strategy was primarily the Communications Audit conducted in February and March with 38 growers and industry stakeholders.

The key findings influencing this strategy are:

- There has been little specific information circulating that relates specifically to sub tropical banana growers
- Currently there are no effective mechanisms for getting any information out
- Growers want information about the latest research, disease issues, general industry news and about markets and marketing, and so do other stakeholders
- Environmental issues are of growing concern and need to be covered in communications
- A newsletter is seen to be a good source for this information
- The concept of a website is supported, integration with the ABGC's website was suggested
- A research booklet gained support but raised questions – what will it contain and will it be relevant? A hard copy version is preferred, but a significant number wanted it to be on the website.
- There is support for more media about subtropical but what sort of stories?
- The majority see problems in communications, ranging from diversity of regional needs to the apathy of growers
- The issues of unity and one organisation for promoting subtropical issues were cited by several
- Field days are considered by growers and others as being a great opportunity for communications

- Growers think wholesalers and retailers need more subtropical information and they agree
- There's strong support for renewed consumer marketing of the benefits of subtropical bananas, qualified by wholesalers and retailers who say quality and consistency has to improve before that.

#### 4. Aim and Objectives

It is important to spell out the aims and objectives of the communications strategy so that all activities can be considered with them in mind. As well we can measure and assess its effectiveness against these at points during the program.

The aim of this program was not spelt out originally, but I believe that it can be summed up in the following:

***- To have a subtropical banana industry that is operating successfully in its marketplaces and is aware and acting upon the issues that make this possible.***

This is the goal of the industry and good communications can greatly assist in achieving this, but cannot be seen as the solution to achieve this. It is one part of the equation which must also take into account grower practices and marketing programs.

The objectives of the communication strategy in helping to achieve this aim include:

- To meet the industry need of an effective two way communication program on matters of relevance
- Build a sense of involvement and a viable future among subtropical banana growers
- Communicate useful information to growers about disease, research and measures that can be taken through a variety of communications tools
- Stress the importance of fruit quality and reliability of supply to grow and maintain consumer markets
- Improve communications between the growers, wholesalers and retailers
- Use case studies to achieve better practice among growers
- Support the marketing initiatives to be developed to support the sub-tropical banana sector.
- Show that their levy is being used to help them in their business in a variety of ways.
- To be inclusive of geographical needs – all regions need to get value from the communications
- Timely in that all stakeholders see any information being current.

#### 5. Target audiences

It is clear that our primary audience are the subtropical growers.

Secondary audiences are:

- wholesalers

- retailers
- researchers
- government departments
- politicians, local, state and federal
- media
- consumers

## **6. Key messages**

The following key messages are what I consider are important to highlight to the industry and its stakeholders, but do require agreement and commitment from the growers to be believed by the various target audiences.

- The subtropical banana industry is striving for best practice in all aspects of its operations
- The subtropical banana industry is striving for greater recognition of the quality of the fruit it has to offer to the marketplace and therefore a better price for its product
- The subtropical banana industry is interested in new research, production techniques and any other advances that will make it more productive and competitive in the marketplace.
- The industry levy is being used effectively to improve the communications within the industry as well as the professionalism of the industry

Any key messages which come out of the marketing project will be adopted for any communications that are undertaken for consumers.

## **7. Tools and Activities**

These are the mechanisms that will be used to implement the communications strategy. While they are recommendations, it is recommended that our program retains a degree of flexibility so that new opportunities can be utilised when they arise.

### **7.1 Printed Newsletter**

Over 50% of people in the recent audit wanted to have a printed newsletter and I believe this can be the primary avenue of communication through the coming year.

It is intended to publish the newsletter every two months, as there was a significant number of respondents who questioned the need for it to be monthly, and second, the amount of information available to use every month is questionable. It will be A4 size, 4 or 8 pages depending upon the amount of news available, folded to the DL mailing size to keep costs for postage at a minimum.

Its quality will not be of that of 'Australian Bananas', but it will be in colour and will use a lighter paper stock. A suggested working title is **"The Subtropics Banana News"**, and that a response exercise for a new name will be conducted through the first edition to stimulate grower interest.

The content will be designed to cover the spectrum of topics that the audit showed were of importance to the growers who are our primary audience.

A matrix for the topics will be established so that over the year the variety and extent of coverage for each topic can be noted and this will form part of the final report for the communications program.

The newsletter will aim to meet the following needs:

- simple English so that all growers can note its contents
- timely and topical as much as possible for a bi-monthly publication
- photographs where possible to illustrate stories

The first edition to come out in late April is currently underway and through the term of the contract another four editions will be produced, June, August, October and December.

## **7.2 E-News**

An alternate communication is planned to come out in the month that the newsletter is not produced. This will be an email newsletter titled **'Subtropical Banana Snapshot'** with topical information in a news brief form, with links to fuller articles or material where available.

It will be in an electronic newsletter form rather than as a pdf style document like the Qld Growcom newsletter, and will be individually addressed to each grower.

As all the growers are not using email, it will be important for key stories to be repeated and detailed in the printed newsletter as well.

It is intended to strongly promote the E-news to growers in the printed newsletter to encourage them to join the electronic age.

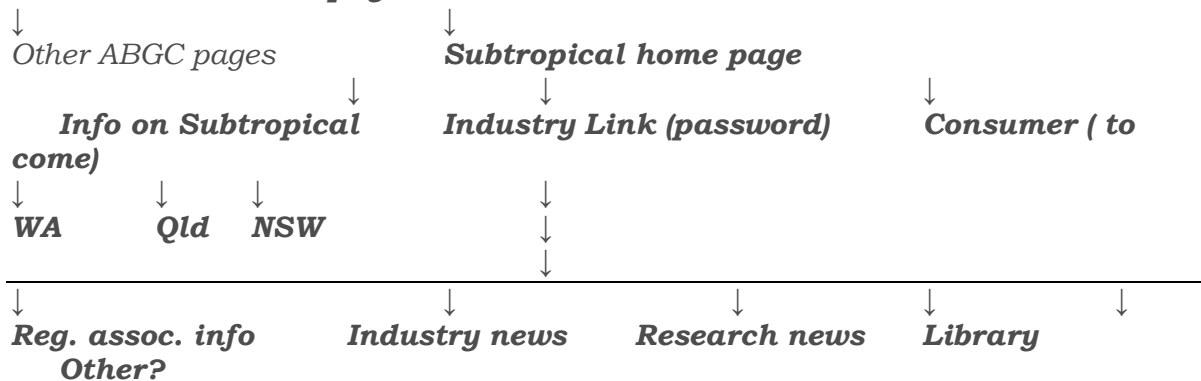
I believe that, depending upon future contracts and as more growers move on to email, that the E-news should go out every month, and the printed newsletter would move to a quarterly publication, covering issues in more detail.

### 7.3 Website

Many growers are keen on the website concept, but there is a high degree of questioning about what it should contain. In addition several people questioned the need for a separate site from ABGC main site, saying it could be divisive for the industry which is a valid point.

In light of the audit findings, it is recommended that the Subtropical website be linked into the main ABGC site which is currently being redesigned. The content of the website needs to be developed and at this stage the following pages are suggested:

#### **ABGC Website home page**



- 'home' page. This will describe what makes up the subtropical banana industry. It is envisaged that from this, people will be directed to either industry or consumer information, with the consumer pages being free-standing with information about the benefits of subtropical fruit, buying tips and possibly recipes (depending upon what the marketing project reveals is worthwhile.)
- State pages which provides an overview and brief history of the subtropical industry in WA, Qld and NSW
- Industry page – this will require a simple password to enter so that we can track usage. It will contain key contacts for each of the regional associations and links to the minutes of their last meetings, as well as advance notice of upcoming ones and any other relevant events.
- Industry news – any news that is relevant and may include repeats of main news from ABGC where the information is important. This area will be where topics such as production techniques, disease alerts, and other issues identified as important will be covered
- Sub-tropical research – What's news? A summary of the latest research and links to the full papers or report where possible.

The above pages will be the first to go online with other pages to follow when information is prepared or can be sourced. The others would include:

- Subtropical Industry 'library'. This will aim to duplicate the material that is provided in the printed booklet as outlined in 7.4 and as well provide clear

links to relevant research published by other organisations such as DPIs and Universities.

- *Market Information* – weekly updates of major market prices and supply and crop forecasting where possible.
- *Employer information* – using links to state awards and other requirements
- *Growing organically?*

#### **7.4 Research ‘booklet’**

Like the website concept, there was strong support for ‘it’ but some uncertainty about what it should be in terms of content and format. An overall concern was that it needed to be relevant, practical and new in the sense that it was not duplicating what was already in the industry arena.

Like the newsletter, there were mixed views on a format, suggesting that a printed version with information also accessible on the web would satisfy the majority.

As to what it contained, there was concern about ‘research’ with a variety of comments about it covering advances in production techniques, it should feature best practice and it should feature case studies.

I believe the research booklet could in fact be a broader industry guide with sections covering:

- research – pest and diseases
- production techniques
- environmental issues
- organics

I recommend that these be in the form of fact sheets, which can be updated when new information comes to hand. Additional sheets can be added as new topics are addressed.

Growers will be provided with an A4 ring bound folder with the information. This is currently being costed, but it is envisaged that growers will need to carry the cost of postage if they require a hard copy. All the information will be posted on the website to keep production costs down.

In this form, it is likely to exceed the budget allocated, but it is expected that the newsletter costs will be reduced so budget can be moved to cover this. A detailed costing is currently underway.

#### **7.5 Media**

If the profile of the industry is lifted, then I would think grower spirits will lift as well. While many criticise the wholesale market for not recognising the industry or its products, if we can create a more positive media profile for the industry this will also help in the marketplace.

### **7.5.1 Media Database**

An important tool will be that of a media database covering the regions' media and any useful industry media as well. This will be initially created using my access to the national Gees media guide.

It will be added to when new contacts are made and become a resource of the industry.

### **7.5.2 News Releases**

#### **Pro-active**

I recommend that opportunities are identified when there is good news about the industry and news releases are prepared and distributed to the appropriate media. Occasions could include crop news and new research findings.

#### **Reactive**

When the industry is impacted by bad weather or other issues, news releases will be prepared in conjunction with ABGC and distributed where appropriate.

### **7.5.3 Media liaison**

As Communications officer for the industry, it will also be the role to provide assistance to the media for any interviews with key growers for comment. Releases will have my name for contact and over time I think that we will find that media will utilise the connection to get information when required.

## **7.6 Grower Liaison**

### **7.6.1 Database**

The updating of the database is already underway to try and capture email addresses and any updates on other grower information. I will be working to have other categories to cover our stakeholders on the database including wholesalers, retailers, and others.

### **7.6.2 Regional meetings**

#### **Attendance**

The need to improve communications with and gather information from the regions was identified in the brief, but the audit revealed that it is likely to be the best mechanism to work with the growers.

In the strategy it is proposed, as generally in line with the brief, to visit regional meetings during the contract period. The first visits in NSW and Qld will be conducted in May and June, a visit to WA in July and then return visits to the NSW meetings in the second half of the year.

#### ***Assistance with guest speakers***

Some of the researchers interviewed for the audit expressed an interest in addressing regional meetings. I believe that I can work with the regional groups to assist in arranging guest speakers and promoting them to their members.

#### **7.6.3 Field Days**

The value of field days was highlighted by several growers and other stakeholders in providing new information and networking opportunities. One is being planned for May 20 at the Alstonville Research Station and I will work with the DPI NSW to promote this widely to growers.

I will also liaise with regional associations to assist them in organising any they think would be worthwhile and promoting them to members, for example the dwarf lady finger trials would be of interest to growers across the regions.

#### **7.6.4 E-Bulletins**

Electronic messages with any breaking news will be dispatched to growers or other stakeholders to keep them informed. These might be in relation to disease alerts, market supply disruptions, etc. This would be done using the email database.

### **7.7 Industry spokesperson/s**

It is important that the industry be seen more strongly in the marketplace. With the news releases for any reason, it will be important to have a grower spokespersons representing the growers.

I recommend ideally we have one national spokesperson in line with the comments about a unified approach from the Audit. This person could be an appointment from the Project Management Committee, or a board representative who will be our principal spokesperson when it comes to subtropical affairs.

In addition I would work with the regional chairs to assist in any media comments, and also provide some media training to them in order to present as well as possible.

### **7.8 Australian Bananas subtropical feature**

It was proposed in the original brief to produce a lift-out for Australian Bananas. I think that with the newsletter taking information to the growers, such a lift-out could be a middle spread of rewrites of the main stories from the newsletter and a round up of what is happening with the communications program for wider industry awareness.

### **7.9 Promoting marketing outcomes**

If the industry decides upon any marketing initiatives, public relations will be able to play a role in taking messages and information to consumers, and other stakeholders.

It is impossible to outline any activity until that work is done, then a program of activities can be prepared.



## 8. Subtropical Banana Growers Communications Strategy timetable

ACTIVITY	2009	→											2010
	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
Communications Audit completed			•										
Communications Strategy completed				•									
Newsletter			•										
- concept format				√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
- write & design				•		•		•		•		•	
- print & distribute													
E News –Subtropical Banana Snapshot													
- concept format					√		√		√		√		√
- prepare copy, edit					√		√		√		√		√
- dispatch					•		•		•		•		•
Research Review			√	√	√								
Research findings publication													
- consultation			√	√									
- prepare drafts				√	√	√							
- edit and approve					√	√	√	√					
- design and print							√	•					
- web edition								•					
- additional sheets											√	√	
Website													
- prepare concept				√									
- initial design				√									
- prepare content					√	√							
- design and draft					√	√							
- agree and launch						√	√	•					
Australian Bananas feature					√	•					√	•	
Grower meetings/congress				√	√	√	√			√	√	√	
Data base													
- establish			√	√									
- update			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
Media spokesperson/s				√									
- identify					√	√							
- training													
News releases	When required throughout the year for specific issues												
Field Days					•		?				?		
E Bulletins	When required throughout the year for specific issues												
Promoting marketing opportunities	When required throughout the year for specific issues												
Evaluation and review					√	√			√	√		√	√
- grower survey											√		
Project & milestone reports						•				•		√	•

## 9. Evaluation and Review

The measurement of any communications strategy is limited when the available budget needs to be spent on the program rather than its measurement.

However within the structure of this program, it will be evaluated by the following tools:

- **Newsletter.** A reader survey will be conducted in the October edition to seek feedback from the readers. This survey will address issues such as content, relevance, format, etc. as well as the wider communications program response to date.
- **E news.** The software used for its distribution provides statistics on opening rates, page visits, any click throughs, etc so a technical measurement of its readership can be produced. In addition, the printed survey will be available online with the November edition to maximise our feedback on the program's content, relevance and usefulness
- **Website.** By having password access to 'member' pages we will be able to get information on the use of those pages for our report, as well as general statistics on visits etc to the other pages. This will be particularly of interest for the research and industry pages.
- **News releases.** Monitoring of media will be done with the assistance of ABGC and the growers to assess the use and reach of any news releases. (No media monitoring service will be engaged)
- **Field Days.** Attendance at the days and anecdotal comments from attendees will provide a useful mechanism to report on these.
- **Association meetings.** A measure of the success of the communications program will be an increase in attendance at regional meetings during the year, compared with 2008.

At the milestones in the project and for the project committee meetings, reports on these tools will be included.

In the final report to HAL and the ABGC in January 2010, all these measures will be reported on along with the activity program's feedback.

## Appendix 3

### Stakeholder survey results

## Subtropical Banana Industry Communications Feedback Survey – May 2010

Total number of replies: 34

#### 1. Industry Sector

Grower 27  
 Wholesaler 1 ( 2 growers were also wholesalers)  
 Retailer -  
 Researcher 6  
 Other .....  
 Location (State & region)  
 WA 5 SEQ 2  
 NSW Tweed/Rich 7 Coffs/Wool 10  
 Nambucca 3 Other - 6

2. What is your age? 18-29 1 30-44 8 45-59 14  
 60-74 8 75+ 1

3. How many years have you been in the industry? 0-5 5 6-10 2 11-15 2 16-20 3  
 20-30 7 31 + 14

#### 4. Please score or tick the various forms of communications in the table below.

Source of Information	Value of information	How Often? (tick one)			
	Score: 3 good, 2 medium, 1 little value	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Australian Bananas ( twice a year from ABGC)	3 - 23 2 - 6 1 - 1	16	5	1	1
Subtropics Banana News (every 2 <sup>nd</sup> month)	3 - 25 2 - 6 1 - 1	16	7	1	1
Subtropics Snapshot (e-news every 2 <sup>nd</sup> month)	3 - 19 2 - 7 1 - 3	10	9	3	2
Research& Best Practice Fact Sheets (incl newsletter)	3 - 15 2 - 10 1 - 4	12	5	3	2
Regional group	3 - 10 2 - 8 1 - 4	4	12	4	3
Regional group meetings	3 -11 2 -10	5	10	4	3

Source of Information	Value of information	How Often? (tick one)			
	1 - 4				
State growers' associations	3 - 5 2 - 11 1 - 6	5	8	3	4
State Gov. depts./officers	3 - 7 2 - 10 1 - 4	5	6	5	5
ABGC generally	3 - 11 2 - 11 1 - 2	7	11		3
ABGC website	3 - 7 2 - 7 1 - 8	6	3	7	5
Field days	3 - 11 2 - 9 1 - 5	5	8	5	4
Other growers	3 - 19 2 - 6 1 - 1	14	6	2	2
Training Courses	3 - 3 2 - 13 1 - 8	2	8	7	5
Other websites	3 - 5 2 - 6 1 - 9	4	10	4	4
Books & other publications	3 - 9 2 - 9 1 - 5	7	9	2	4
Other? Please name below	3 2 1				

5. If you read the Subtropics Banana News, what articles do you read?

Regional News	Always	23
	Usually	7
	Sometimes	2
	Rarely	-
	Never	-
ABGC News	Always	17
	Usually	11
	Sometimes	3
	Rarely	-
	Never	1
Marketing news	Always	19
	Usually	6
	Sometimes	3
	Rarely	2
	Never	1

<b>Bunchy Top Update</b>	Always	22
	Usually	3
	Sometimes	3
	Rarely	3
	Never	2
<b>Grower articles</b>	Always	24
	Usually	6
	Sometimes	1
	Rarely	1
	Never	1
<b>Research news</b>	Always	19
	Usually	9
	Sometime	5
	Rarely	-
	Never	-
<b>Environmental stories</b>	Always	17
	Usually	8
	Sometimes	5
	Rarely	3
	Never	-
<b>International news</b>	Always	16
	Usually	8
	Sometimes	5
	Rarely	2
	Never	2
<b>Editorial</b>	Always	18
	Usually	9
	Sometimes	3
	Rarely	3
	Never	2

#### Comments

Best since the demise of the BGF Bulletin

I skim through – find most interesting and read

Short relevant articles – good reading

Good size so doesn't take to read it in one go

#### 6.List any articles of particular interest to you in recent issues.

Regional round-ups / WA growers / soldier fly story / IPM in WA  
 Indian growers / R & D stories / off label permits / covered trial in WA  
 Irrigation story / marketing news

## 7. What would you like to see more of in the Subtropics Banana News?

Industry news	Yes	24	/ sometimes	7	/ no	1
Market Information	Yes	20	/ sometimes	7	/ no	2
Grower Articles	Yes	26	/ sometimes	8	/ no	-
Environmental stories	Yes	13	/ sometimes	17	/ no	1
ABGC news	Yes	17	/ sometimes	12	/ no	3
Marketing articles	Yes	16	/ sometimes	11	/ no	2
Research news	Yes	25	/ sometimes	6	/ no	1

Comments

Some grower articles can be misleading

## 8. List any other topics you would like to see covered, or covered in more depth, in the News.

Projection of supply peaks / soil health news / fertilizer programming / international R & D  
How good growers survive and thrive / GM benefits for disease resistance / more on Lady Fingers /  
more on Bunchy Top / more on market pricing / advice from top growers / successful niche marketing  
project updates would be useful /

## 9. How often would you like to receive Subtropics Banana News (Currently distributed every 2 mths)

Every month	6	2 months	19		
3 Months	5	4 Months	1	6 months	1

## 10. How useful or informative did you find the Best Practice Guide Fact Sheets to date?

Bunchy Top	Very	15
	somewhat	9
	little	4
	not relevant to me	3
Nutrition 1 (soils)	Very	15
	somewhat	7
	little	5
	not relevant to me	3

<b>Panama Disease</b>	Very	14
	somewhat	9
	little	3
	not relevant to me	5
<b>Nutrition 2 (leaf analysis)</b>	Very	15
	somewhat	9
	little	4
	not relevant to me	2
<b>Flying foxes</b>	Very	11
	somewhat	9
	little	5
	not relevant to me	5
<b>Climate Extremes</b>	Very	9
	Somewhat	10
	little	7
	not relevant to me	5
<b>Irrigation</b>	Very	13
	somewhat	8
	little	2
	not relevant to me	9

#### Any comments on the Fact Sheets?

NSW bias / difficult to reach a balance between readability and technical content  
Soil health would be worthwhile / any more to come?

11. Do you have access to the internet? Yes 25  
No 3  
Dial up Broadband 22

12. Do you currently receive the bimonthly e-newsletter – Subtropical Snapshot? Yes 19  
No 11

EMAIL ADDRESS??  
Provided.

#### 13. How would you rate the information in the e-newsletter?

Excellent 6 Good 10 Average 1  
Needs Improvement 1 Poor -

#### 14. Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the e-news?

Are objectives different from printed newsletter? / keep relevant to current news meeting outcomes etc

#### 15. How would you rate Subtropical Industry Communications generally in providing the information you require?

Excellent 9 Good 20  
Average 1 Needs Improvement 3 Poor -  
Comments

Whole marketing needs attention / plenty of good useful information

16. Are there any services the Subtropical Communications Officer does not currently provide that you would like to see provided?

Forecasts or trends in production

Closer links with ABGC and promote value of ABGC membership to growers

17. Are you a member of your local grower association?

Yes 21

No 11

18. If YES, do you attend meetings? Yes 19 No – why not? 11

19. If YES, why?

Have done since 15! / stay in touch locally / catch up with other growers / to keep up to date

Always have been involved / gather information / good to pick up useful info

To make legislative and industry development relevant to local industry

20. Why are you NOT a member or participate in your local grower association?

Nothing in SE Qld / industry is reactive not proactive / not enough time /

21. Please rate your level of confidence in the future of the banana industry in your region.

Region: NSW Tweed/Brunswick 4 Richmond 1 Coffs Harbour/Woolgoolga 6 Nambucca District 2

WA Carnarvon 4 Qld SE Qld 2

Very High 1 High 10 Average 4

Low 8 Very Low 2

Comments

Future limited to fewer committed growers / not enough help available to produce top quality fruit

ABGC is not providing enough support / ABGC/HAL is not providing any practical assistance to WA

industry / subtropical growers are ageing – need more young farmers / low grower returns and big

supermarket margins / SE Qld has enormous potential – should just get on with it and stop trying to

compete with FNQ / markets for genuine subtropical fruit

22. Please rate your level of confidence in the future of the Australian Banana Industry.

Very High 3 High 14

Average 7 Low 2 Very Low 1

Comments

Good management and strong industry body / Australia yes, NSW no! / depends on import applications

23. Please share any other comments you would like to make here about communications in the subtropical banana industry.

Need more field days / unique innovation including marketing is needed /

Needs to be more support for WA industry eg R & D post harvest, management, marketing to ensure geographical diversity / a highly successful project – would be good to combine tropics and subtropics into one newsletter and have different sections



#### **Appendix 4. E-News Subtropical Snapshot links**

1.

<http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?id=491594&u=23526>

2.

<http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?id=523609&u=23526>

3.

<http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?id=555431&u=23526>

4.

<http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?id=594683&u=23526>

5.

<http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?id=620628&u=23526>

6.

<http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?id=650836&u=23526>

7.

<http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?id=650836&u=23526>

#### **Appendix 5. Subtropics Banana News – see following**

Editions 1 -8

#### **Appendix 6. Best Practice Guide – see following**

Banana Bunchy Top Virus

Nutrition Part 1 & 2

Panama disease

Flying Foxes in bananas

Climate Change and Subtropical bananas

Irrigating bananas Part 1

Beetle Borer

#### **Appendix 5. Media clips – see following**

# THE SUBTROPICS BANANA NEWS

this issue

June Congress –what's in for you P.2

Field Day on tissue culture coming up P.2

Around the regions P.3

Your levy at work P.4

## Welcome to The Subtropics Banana News

This is the first edition of a new, regular newsletter for Australia's subtropical banana industry. It is scheduled to come out every two months and over the year will bring you news on a variety of issues from new research to production techniques, from market information to marketing news.

Every other month there will be an electronic newsletter dispatched by email with snapshots and links to provide more detailed information on topics of interest, so if you want to get the best out of the new communications program, get on board the email train! We have been updating our database of subtropical growers but if you haven't heard from Emma, please let me know of your email details.

I also welcome contributions for the newsletter – it is intended to be a two way communications opportunity. A 'letter to the editor', an interesting case study or a piece of local news along with a photo – all will be welcomed!

Please contact me,  
Neville Sloss, at  
neville@greenpr.com.au,  
or phone 0414562010.  
Best wishes

Neville



## Communications audit provides direction

The first task in the new Communications project for Subtropical Bananas was a survey to hear what growers and others in the industry had to say, so that a wide range of views could be taken into account in preparing the program ahead.

The findings have been utilised to produce a communications strategy, with this newsletter being one of the first initiatives.

Growers (19) from all subtropical regions, six wholesalers, three retailers and 10 others from research, associations and organisations took part in interviews.

"Some of the findings confirmed what we already knew – for example that very little information specifically for subtropical growers is available and circulated – and strengthened the need for a communications program," said ABGC CEO, Tony Heidrich.

"The study did highlight what information growers want and what other stakeholders want too."

The latest research, disease issues, general industry news and markets and marketing information were rated highly by growers, as well as other stakeholders.

Among the other key findings of the report were:

- Environmental issues are of growing concern and need to be covered in communications
- Some think organic is very important, others not at all
- Issues such as international and social news and employee matters don't rate that highly with growers
- There will be a need for information specific to different regions, because they are so different.
- Growers think that wholesalers and retailers need more subtropical information and they agree too!

Looking at the possible tools in the communications program, people thought that:

- A newsletter is seen as a good source of information
- As many wanted a printed newsletter as those who want an emailed newsletter and some want both!
- Direct contact is seen as important and field days were cited as good communications opportunities
- A website is supported, but should be linked to the ABGC site
- A research booklet could be useful – but what will it contain?
- There's strong support for renewed consumer marketing among growers, qualified by wholesalers and retailers who say improved quality and consistency must come first.

"I found there is a strong interest in getting information and despite the us and them attitude which exists among some to the Far North Queensland growers, there is a desire for the subtropics to stand up and build its position in the marketplace," said Communications Industry Development Officer, Neville Sloss.

"The West Australian example has shown that greater success is possible and sharing of information all round will build knowledge, confidence and opportunities."

A detailed Communications Audit report has been prepared and is available by emailing [neville@greenpr.com.au](mailto:neville@greenpr.com.au)

Above- two of the participants in the communications audit, Peter Molenaar from the Brunswick region and Jas Benning (Woolgoolga)



Know-how for Horticulture™

# Your levy at work

For the subtropical banana industry three core issues were identified in the Taking Stock & Setting Directions Report and work has begun. Funding is being provided through the national banana levy via Horticulture Australia Ltd and matched funds from the Australian Government.



## <sup>1</sup> Bunchy Top

Funding has been approved by HAL for a national Banana Bunchy Top Virus (BBTV) management program which was identified as a priority pest to be managed under the national levy funded banana plant protection program.

The initial three year project is part of a 10 year plan to eradicate BBTV from the Australian mainland. A suite of management tools will be used to identify infected plants early and contain the disease to known affected areas whilst reducing the overall level of disease within these areas.

The technical and regulatory framework required to underpin the subsequent eradication effort will be developed in parallel to the running of the initial three year management program.

"This project will deliver the resources and methodological framework necessary to increase surveillance in both New South Wales and South East Queensland to levels considered necessary to significantly reduce the overall level of disease in affected areas with a view to its eventual eradication," said ABGC CEO Tony Heidrich.

"We will be working to ensure that all stakeholders are sufficiently informed about the program, its objectives and progress."

As this program is rolled out we will keep you informed in future editions of The Subtropics Banana News

## <sup>2</sup> Marketing

A Canberra based consultancy with wide experience in the horticulture industries has just been appointed to investigate market development opportunities for the subtropical sector.

It is Inovact Consulting which will be aiming to:

- identify and prioritise market development opportunities across subtropical products
- engage stakeholders through the supply chain to build an understanding of market development challenges,
- balance the enthusiasm to begin promotional effort with the need to ensure the product is effectively meeting demand; and
- support the wider industry marketing plan that will be developed after this project is completed.

Leading the project will be Jack Archer, Senior Consultant, who has recently helped to develop a food service marketing strategy for Avocados Australia. The team will be due to report to industry by the end of July.

## <sup>3</sup> Communications

Neville Sloss of Green PR was appointed to the position of subtropical banana industry communications officer in February.



Neville, who is based on the far north coast of New South Wales, has over 30 years' experience in public relations and journalism. His pr experience has been across industry sectors for large and small companies, for not-for-profit organisations and government departments and programs at all levels.

"I moved to the Northern Rivers five years ago and purchased a property that once was a working banana farm, so I have an added interest! I have enjoyed my work with sectors of the horticulture and irrigation industries and this project is a natural extension of my professional experience," says Neville.

The CEO of the ABGC Mr Tony Heidrich, in welcoming Neville's appointment said the importance of effective communication to industry development cannot be underestimated.

"We are confident that more effective communications will assist in better practice for the industry and deliver real value for sub tropical producers," says Tony.

The Banana Times... Subtropical News & Views... maybe..The Bunch Bulletin??

Do you have a better name for our newsletter? Suggestions are invited and a mystery prize will be provided for the winning suggestion.

Email your suggested name to [neville@greenpr.com.au](mailto:neville@greenpr.com.au) or post to 902 Teven Road, Teven 2477.

Entries due by 29 May – judges decision final!



## Alstonville tissue culture establishment field day

The NSW DPI is hosting a Field Day at the Alstonville Research Station on Wednesday 20 May to look at their tissue culture establishment field trials.

Between October 2008 and early January 2009 there were four plantings to assess the size of the plants and the planting time in the season, and how well they have established in the field since then. It is also hoped that a trip to a nearby grower will be included in the day's program.

At time of print, details of the day were not finalised, but these will be available at the regional meetings being held prior to the event, or by phoning Peter Newley direct on (02) 66503111



One of the participants in the communications audit, Ron Gray (Woolgoolga)

## Around the regions



Part of the Alstonville trials in mid-January



Floodwaters at Coffs - photo: Leanne Gray

### Around the regions

The new Communications IDO, Neville Sloss, will be attending regional association meetings and visiting regions to meet with growers and outline communications plans over the next three months.

#### Nambucca

- Coming up
  - Association meeting, Tuesday May 5, 6pm at Nambucca Hotel, Macksville.
- Details contact: Peter 65681908

#### Coffs Harbour /Woolgoolga

- Coming up
  - Association meeting, Wednesday May 6, 6pm at Coffs Harbour Catholic Club.
- Details contact: Michelle 6652 5633

- Coffs Harbour Show, 15-17 May
- Entries close on May 14 for the classes, including an expanded Lady Finger section. The bananas section has been a traditional part of the Show for many years with the 'Banana Cup' going to the best bunch and increased prizes on offer in 2009. More information: David Pike, 0414554997

#### Richmond

- No meeting scheduled at time of printing. More information, phone Georgette (02) 66886265

#### Tweed Brunswick

- Coming up - Association meeting, Wednesday 13 May at Murwillumbah Cricket Club, phone Graeme for details (07) 55909426.

#### SE Queensland

- No meetings scheduled at time of printing.

### WA

- Stay tuned for news about an ABC Landline program looking at water efficiency in the Carnarvon district and featuring some of the local banana growers and Dorian Mangili from the Sweeter Banana Co-Op.
- Auditing has just begun for environmental accreditation for all banana growers in the Co-Op. The program has got funding through the federal Caring for our Country program – more about it in the next issue.
- Coming up - The Carnarvon Growers Association Field Day, Thursday 7 May 1-5pm with bbq afterwards. Growers including banana growers will get a chance to speak to major suppliers, Department of Agriculture and FarmSafe representatives, as well as see the latest products available in irrigation, packaging and chemicals.

### Floods cause infrastructure damage along east coast.

The big news of the last month has been the massive amount of rain falling along the coast of NSW. Some towns reported up to 600mm of rain in less than 24 hours at the height of the flooding and the areas of Nambucca, Coffs Harbour and Bellingen were declared natural disaster zones.

On banana plantations, the rains caused flooding around Nambucca and infrastructure damage in the Coffs Harbour region, but only 25km north at Woolgoolga they were largely spared.

Nicky Singh at Coffs said service roads had been badly eroded and there had been some lands slips but with little disruption to production, Stephen Spear at Nambucca reported that damage was minimal and the plants held up very well, and Ron Gray at Woolgoolga said it just hadn't stopped raining for over two weeks, with occasional big falls.

# June Banana Congress

## what's in it for you?



Every two years the Australian Banana Industry holds the Congress providing an opportunity to hear about the latest research, find out about industry happenings and network with your peers.

"Congress is bringing together a fantastic range of speakers including researchers, innovators, marketers, financial and global commentators to provide all those involved in our industry with an opportunity to relate, update, and celebrate bananas," says ABGC chair Nicky Singh.

So what is in it for subtropical growers? Speakers with topics like 'Marketing Magic', 'Cool chain management', 'Packaging changes, trends and the future', 'Can silicon play a role in reducing Fusarium Wilt in banana?', 'Enhancing our Clean and Green production systems with bacteria' will all have something to offer subtropical growers.

Importantly, it is a chance to catch up with other growers and speak to trade exhibitors and researchers at the one location. Maybe some of your nagging questions could be answered? The 8th Australian Banana Industry Congress is on June 4-6 at Conrad Jupiters on the Gold Coast. Registration brochures are on [www.abgc.org.au](http://www.abgc.org.au) or information from 07 3254 0522 or [bananacongress@acclaimsemm.com.au](mailto:bananacongress@acclaimsemm.com.au)

If you pick up one good idea at the Banana Congress it will be worth attending and chances of that are better than winning in the casino!

## Banana news briefs

- Well known horticulturalist, Arthur Akehurst, has retired after 39 years with the NSW DPI. Arthur is well known to most NSW growers – he had been based at Murwillumbah since 1994 from where he led the DPI's banana team, continuing to work with growers on new technologies, best practices and disease control. Prior to that had been based at Macksville for 20 years where he first built up his strong and effective relationships with banana growers.



Thanks for your efforts over the years, Arthur and best wishes for your future.

- A workshop organised by Qld DPI & F has just been held looking at fusarium wilt and issues such as plant, soil and biosecurity management. David Peasley was representing ABGC at the workshop – a report on this in our next issue.

- ABGC has a new website – check it out at [www.abgc.org.au](http://www.abgc.org.au) - looks good and has plenty of information for all growers. In the months ahead, it will have a dedicated sub-tropical section added, as requested by members.

- 80 cartons of bananas were supplied by Golden Dawn for the participants in the Port Macquarie Triathlon held in April. When you compare it to an apple, the banana has four times the protein, twice the carbohydrate, three times the phosphorus, five times the vitamin A and iron, and twice the other vitamins and minerals. The perfect energy food for serious and not so serious athletes!

- In March inspectors in the US port of Gulfport discovered a tiny hitchhiking pest in a shipment of bananas from Columbia, which they said could have caused big problems to agriculture in the United States. The small, hairy, wormy-looking creature was identified as *Faustinus rhombifer* Champion (Curculionidae), an insect which feeds on vegetation, stems and leaves "of a multitude of plants." The entire banana shipment was sent back.\*

## Are you ready for FarmReady?

Learn better farm practices in NSW with the help of FarmReady reimbursement grants through the NSW DPI.

These grants provide up to \$1500 to cover approved training activities, with up to another \$500 being available for associated costs such as travel.

Approved courses aim to improve the capacity of primary producers to adapt to climate change and increase their self-reliance and preparedness.

For more information, Simone Fuller at NSW DPI, ph 1800 628422, email [simone.fullar@dpi.nsw.gov.au](mailto:simone.fullar@dpi.nsw.gov.au) or visit the website – [www.farmready.gov.au](http://www.farmready.gov.au)



One of the participants in the communications audit, Jeff Larsson (Lismore)



# THE SUBTROPICS BANANA NEWS

this issue

- Smoothies launch in WA P.2
- New Marketing campaign P.3
- Congress wrap up P.4
- New Biosecurity Manual P.6

## Editor's Say

We have made it to the second edition and now I know much more about the banana industry and those people within it, than I knew before! I have attended three regional grower meetings, attended the Banana Congress and met many in the industry.

My honest observations? There are dedicated growers out there, there are strong views among growers and there appears to be many who never have an input into their industry. Perhaps in the past there have been good reasons, but I think good banana growers have much to look forward to in the years ahead.

All is being done to research, develop and market this industry and all being accelerated by the new national levy. The stories in this edition highlight that.

Having been to regional meetings and heard of the changes particularly in NSW and SE Queensland to the industry itself, I believe it is now more important than ever that regional grower associations 'work'.

While Nambucca had a good turn out, I was disappointed at how few growers made the effort to get along to the quarterly meetings for Coffs and the Tweed.

Your regional associations provide you with the opportunity to have a say in the industry's future, and as witnessed by the WA efforts, they can also provide an avenue in which localised promotions can be mounted.

I will be going back to the next round of regional meetings and taking a trip across to WA before the next edition—I hope I will meet more of you, particularly younger growers.

In the meantime, if you have any questions, comments or complaints please don't hesitate to contact me, Neville Sloss, at [neville@greenpr.com.au](mailto:neville@greenpr.com.au), or phone 0414562010. Best wishes

Neville



## New Bunchy Top Program underway

The levy funded National Banana Bunchy Top Virus Management Program Began on July 1 and industry leaders have already met so they can hit the ground running.

Well known horticultural consultant David Peasley has been appointed Coordinator for New South Wales and attending the first meeting were ABGC Chairman Nicky Singh, CEO Tony Heidrich, Board member Peter Molenaar and Trevor Black, Chair of the BIC in NSW.

Dr John Thomas, senior virologist with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries prepared a major review on which the program has been based.

Nicky Singh told the meeting that the ABGC is dedicated to the eradication of the virus in Australia and while this is an initial three year program, there is a 10 year plan to achieve this goal, with full support from the ABGC for the program.

The two part time detectors, Grant East and Wayne Shoobridge will be continuing their roles, and hopefully increasing their hours as the program develops.

"Our first meeting went well and we will be changing the way we work in finding and eradicating the virus," reports David.

More frequent inspections are planned and the detectors will be looking around, as well as in, plantations.

"We have devised an inspection schedule and program based upon the up to date science on the virus. We believe if we can find the virus symptoms within the last two emerged leaves of a plant, we can stop the spread of it by aphids."

Under the new program, 'bullrings' will no longer be used around affected plants, except in extreme circumstances.

"Research tells us that the five metre circle around a plant is not effective in stopping the virus spread, so I am sure that growers will be happy with this change," says David.

David says they will be looking at technology to help them in the data collection and are talking with Munrosoft about utilizing their new product to assist (see separate story).

The program will also utilize aerial surveillance to find possible infected plants in scrub or forest areas. By using GPS, the sites can be plotted and then accessed on the ground to destroy the plants.

The three year program is being funded through Horticulture Australia Limited and has priority pest status. The initial three year project is part of a 10 year plan to eradicate BBTV from the Australian mainland.

The technical and regulatory framework required to underpin the subsequent eradication effort will be developed in parallel to the running of the initial three year management program.

Bunchy Top remains a significant problem in northern NSW and SE Qld for growers.

For South East Queensland, the program will be managed by the Qld Primary Industries.

Photo this page:

After the first meeting for the bunchy top virus program, (l to r) Grant East (Bunchy Top Detector), Wayne Shoobridge (Bunchy Top Detector), David Peasley (Program Coordinator), Dr John Thomas (Virologist, QDPI&F), Tony Heidrich (CEO, ABGC), Trevor Black (Chair, Bananas NSW), Peter Molenaar (ABGC Board Member) and Nicky Singh (Chair, ABGC).



Know-how for Horticulture™

# Smoothie bananas hit the shelves in WA

The bright new  
**Smoothies**  
packaging



The Sweeter Banana Co-Op in Carnarvon has had a very successful launch of its new 'Smoothies' banana packs.

The "Smoothies Banana" has been developed in conjunction with Coles to give consumers a choice of WA bananas at two different price points.

"Because of our climate here in Carnarvon, we have hot summers and cool winter nights, strong sea breezes and low humidity, so we plant our bananas close together to create a micro-climate and protect against the elements. This results in the leaves rubbing on the bananas, and this tickling creates small brown marks on the skin. These marks are only skin deep and do not impact on the fruit inside at all," says Doriana Mangili who manages the marketing for the Sweeter Co-Op.

Coles have removed all other bagged bananas from Coles stores, and consumers can now be confident that when they buy a banana in a bag in Coles WA it is a Carnarvon Sweeter Banana.

"Our own consumer research has shown that consumers are not concerned with small skin markings when they know the fruit inside is perfect, so we are looking forward to seeing our customers reaction to this product on the shelves," says Doriana.



Minister for Agriculture Terry Redman, Catriona Nixon, Sweeter Banana Grower, Paul Neale, Fresh Produce Trading Manager - WA Coles Supermarkets, & the Big Banana.

The launch started with a full page advertorial in the Sunday Times Magazine, an in store launch by the Minister for Agriculture and a month long campaign in Coles with point of sale material, in-store taste demonstrations, recipe cards and posters.

In launching Smoothies, the WA Minister for Agriculture Terry Redman said, "I congratulate Sweeter Banana Co-operative for their innovative thinking and encourage consumers to look for the 'Buy West, Eat Best' logo when doing their shopping."

## Information in the hand

Unveiled at the Banana Congress was a new data system for banana growers, called 'Patch Spy'.

It has been developed by Scott Munro, son of WA banana growers Bruce and Darrell Munro.

A barcode tag is attached to each tree within the patch and a handheld scanning device is used to record events within the life of the tree and its bunch. Tagging, trashing, desuckering and de-belling are some of the events which can be recorded. The system also allows for the tree's parent and the bunch's weight to be recorded.

The data collected is stored within a database hosted on the device and is transferred to a computer where all the history and information on the patch can be accessed.

This will greatly assist in all aspects of managing the patch, saving time and helping to forecast bunch harvesting.

One of the first to take up the technology is Scott's parents plantation at Carnarvon.

Darrell Munro told the ABC's 'Country Hour' in a recent report on Patch Spy, "We've got nearly 30 acres of bananas and walking up and down every row every week, sometimes you walk for ages and you might only get one bunch in one patch."

"So this will pinpoint where the bunches are that are ready, that will be huge," she said.

For more information on Patch Spy visit the website [www.patchspy.com](http://www.patchspy.com)



Scott Munro presented Patch Spy to the Banana Congress at the Indoor Field Day



# From the Eighth Banana Congress



A whole new world of promotion begins for Australian Bananas.

**'Make your body sing!'** That's the revised slogan for Australian bananas.

The new \$3 million campaign has changed the previous successful slogan of 'make those bodies sing' to directly encourage more people, young people in particular, to eat the ultimate snack food.

The banana is Australia's number one fruit and promoting its snack value means that it will go head to head in its promotion against packaged snack foods.



Now we will also see bananas heavily promoted as Australian and as nature's ultimate packaged snack in the three-year promotion campaign.

"We're really focusing on the 18 to 39-year-old age bracket who are not consuming as much as the mums with kids and older people," said Horticulture Australia's Domestic Marketing Manager David Chenu. "We'll be competing against biscuits, chips... but it's all about making bananas fashionable."

The message is on their key benefit, energy and the campaign aims to promote bananas as 'happy energy' with fun advertisements and promotions.



Tom Day from WA and HAL's David Chenu trying on the new Australian Bananas promotional caps

## So what is happening?

- Bananas are going to be promoted in a major television campaign in major cities and regional centres in August and September
- The "So you think you can dance?" show on the Ten Network reaching over one million viewers each episode will promote the fun and energy aspects of bananas through special promotions.
- You Tube Bananas Channel (ask your kids about You Tube! – part of the new media)
- An Australian Bananas website – 90% (5.8million) of our target market go online
- Major radio advertising in February and April next year
- Schools and other public relations activities
- Ongoing pr to promote the nutritional value of bananas using well known nutritionist Glenn Cardwell



Glenn Cardwell reminded the Congress of the value of bananas - high in carbs for energy and muscle fuel, low GI for sustained energy and mood, high in Vitamin B6 for brain function and mood, no fat or cholesterol for healthy weight, high in potassium for healthy blood pressure and heart.

ABGC Chairman Nicky Singh said the banana's strengths are that it is easy to eat on the go, it is nutritionally rich and healthy, and has fun, energy associations.

"Our aim is to make bananas the number one snack of choice by 2015 by positioning them within the positive energy space of the 'quick fix' snack territory," Mr Singh said.

With a successful campaign this translates to a much greater demand for bananas, Australian bananas, and will grow the industry for all growers across Australia.



In officially opening the New Technologies Fresh Direction congress, Governor-General Quentin Bryce AC declared her interest up front by saying: “I am mad about this remarkable fruit – the banana.”

### Snippets and snaps from the Congress

Ms Bryce said every morning after her walk through the beautiful grounds of Yarralumla she starts the day with an enormous bowl of banana and other fruits with two spoons of yoghurt.

“They give us vitamins and minerals we need – especially potassium, magnesium and folate – they are so good for us and for the economy.”

Over the two and a half days of the congress, more than 30 scientific and general interest sessions were held with speakers providing a wealth of knowledge for the delegates. More than 400 people attended with an encouraging number of younger growers participating as well. Unfortunately the contingent of subtropical growers was small, but the consensus among them, if they came for one day or the full length of the congress, was that it was very worthwhile.

The indoor field day proved popular with a wide range of products and services presented all in the one auditorium, while the congress also allowed for plenty of social networking as well. The dinners and the Ball were all well attended, with quality food and entertainment enjoyed by all.

A full report on the Congress will be in Australian Bananas, out soon, but in the meantime here are some snippets of information which were presented by some of the speakers at the congress.

- Dr Elizabeth Aitken told the congress that it was originally thought that fusarium wilt kills the cells, but it now appears that it acts to make the cells kill themselves. Her studies show that silicon could help in fusarium wilt resistance.
- Peter Allan from Visy reported that in the UK and Europe shelf ready packaging is still in demand, while in Japan pre-packaged is big, down to individually wrapped bananas.
- Neil Clark, farm consultant said the number one issue facing the horticulture industries across Australia was water use efficiencies.
- Donna Mogg from Growcom outlined the new provisions of ‘Fair Work Australia’ – the federal government’s scheme to replace federal awards, which will have a big impact on farms’ employee arrangements. (There will be an extended article on this in a future issue)
- Professor Robert Birch from the University of Qld reported that genetically modified crops have brought benefits to our society – a 72% reduction in herbicide use for corn, 46% reduction in insecticide use of cotton and an 80% reduction in human poisonings in developing countries where genetic crops have been introduced.
- Sharon Hammill for the Qld Dept of Primary Industries and Fisheries talked about a project which aims to identify beneficial bacteria that can help a banana plant to grow well or even better with reduced fertiliser inputs
- A transport forum discussed the role of different transport systems, road, rail and sea for taking bananas to market
- Keith Noble from Growcom reported on a banana waste project that is capturing the methane from banana waste to generate power. Each tonne of waste can generate enough electricity to power four or five houses



Peter Molenaar from Brunswick and Stephen Spear from Nambucca trying out the new Australian bananas stubby holders



Methane from Banana waste assists in powering this promotional vehicle from Growcom



Neville Sloss, Robert Pierce from the Tweed, Phil Bicknell from Coffs Harbour, and Peter Newley from NSW DPI



David Chenu from HAL, Nicky Singh and John Tyas Banana Industry Services Manager



ABGC's Jann Bonsall models the new promotional T shirt



Darrell and Bruce Munro, growers from Carnarvon



Brothers Bob (I) and Jas Benning with Nicky Singh

**“I went to most sessions and at every one I learnt something new”** Stephen Spear, grower Nambucca

# From the Eighth Banana Congress



## New guide to Farm biosecurity for banana growers

An important new publication was launched at the Congress for banana growers – a 'one-stop-shop' for information on how to prevent and stop the spread of pests and diseases that threaten farms and the industry.

It is the Farm Biosecurity Manual for the Banana Industry and it contains important information about good biosecurity practices such as spotting the industry's high priority pests and diseases, tips on farm hygiene, and how to ensure planting material is pest and disease free. It has been produced by Biosecurity Queensland and Plant Health Australia (PHA) and is available to all banana growers in Australia.

The Farm Biosecurity Manual for the Banana Industry will help farmers to fulfil this role by outlining farm management practices that can be incorporated into day-to-day operations.

CEO and executive director of Plant Health Australia, Mr Greg Fraser, said the Manual would be an important tool for Australian banana farmers.

"A revised National Banana Industry Biosecurity Plan, incorporating the latest scientific research and pest intelligence, is also about to be released.

"This industry blueprint, in combination with the practices outlined in the Farm Biosecurity Manual for the Banana Industry, gives the Australian banana industry a world-class biosecurity system," Mr. Fraser said.

A copy of the Manual can be obtained by going to [www.farmbiosecurity.com.au](http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au) and go to the manuals page to download and print.

**Bunchy top:**  
one of the major problems facing some banana growers



Footnote to imports story: A deputation of growers met with the Federal Agriculture Minister, Mr Tony Burke, at a meeting organised by local grower David Tate in May. Mr Burke was visiting Coffs Harbour for the Annual Show. They took the opportunity to put the growers' point of view to him and it provided the first opportunity for Chairman Nicky Singh to meet with him since he had taken on the portfolio.

## Banana imports? – not likely, but keeping the pressure on

While Biosecurity Australia has said yes to banana imports, it appears that meeting the strict quarantine measures makes it too difficult for Philippines exporters.

Conditions are proving the Federal Government's policy permitting the importation of bananas from the Philippines does not mean that Philippine exporters have automatic and unfettered access to the Australian market, according to the Australian Banana Growers' Council.

ABGC imports spokesman Len Collins told more than 440 delegates at the Gold Coast banana congress last week that there was a world of difference between the Government's policy determination and the practical implementation of that policy.

"To gain access to the Australian market, a Philippines exporter will have to propose and then demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) the effectiveness of a multitude of quarantine measures under commercial conditions," Mr Collins said.

"Given the overwhelming pest and disease risks and the highly unlikely prospect of Philippine exporters being able to effectively reduce those pests and diseases to the extremely low levels required for imports to be permitted, one could be forgiven for asking why Biosecurity Australia did not just say no to imports.



"As the national quarantine regulator, it is Biosecurity Australia's job to establish how high the bar is set in order to meet Australia's acceptable level of protection – it does not presume to judge whether or not the Philippines will be able to jump over the bar."

Mr Collins said the banana industry remained committed to its four-pronged defence strategy involving legal, political, public awareness and scientific elements.

"Our battle has not ended with the conclusion of the formal IRA process and we will continue our campaign against imports on behalf of the Australian industry and consumers."

Len announced that he would be standing down from the role of Chair of the committee before the end of the year and that Patrick Leahy would take on the role.



## Soldier Fly concern

Soldier fly (*Hemeta illucens*) is regarded by many growers as a pest of increasing significance in the sub-tropics.

Dr Ruth Huwer, Research Entomologist from Alstonville explained at the recent field day that there is still a lot of unknowns with this pest, and even uncertainty over the species of fly which causes the problem.

The main issue with the pest is the burning of fruit skins from excretion used during egg-lays, which tends to happen around flowering stage. Growers have observed the problem is worst in the wet, warm months of January to April, and tend to be more severe in ladyfingers.

What we do know is that the adult fly shows a preference for yellow/green colours, the larvae hatch on the skin and then fall to the ground, and females have a preference for organic matter including decomposing fruit.



Some of the unknowns include the exact identity of the pest (two of the samples shown at the field day turned out not to be *Hermetia illucens*), what is the real economic impact on the Australian industry, and is there a practical cost effective way of monitoring and managing the fly?

## Bill Ussher Grants

In honour of banana grower and its former board member, Bill Ussher the Banana Coast Credit Union is offering its annual Bill Ussher Agricultural Grants, worth a total of \$11,000. The two awards are for education purposes. They are open to anyone in NSW and S.E. Queensland. For full details go to [www.bcu.com.au](http://www.bcu.com.au)

## Around the regions



### Nambucca

The May meeting was very well attended, with 16 people attending. Main issues of the evening were the imports situation, other ABGC issues, and the upcoming trials.

An interesting aside - general discussion revealed that growers thought green bunch covers were best for December/January fruit.

- Coming up - Association meeting, Tuesday August 4, 6pm at Nambucca Hotel, Macksville. Details contact: Peter 65681908

### Coffs Harbour /Woolgoolga

The Coffs Show was held in May and the Banana Cup for the best bunch of the show went to Mal Husna for his Cavendish bunch. Frank Sevier took the prize for best Lady Finger bunch.

- Coming up - Association meeting, Wednesday August 5, 6pm at Coffs Harbour Catholic Club. Details contact: Michelle 6652 5633

### Richmond

- No meeting scheduled at time of printing. More information, phone Georgette (02) 66886265

### Tweed Brunswick

- Coming up - Association meeting, Wednesday 12 August at Murwillumbah Cricket Club, phone Graeme for details (07) 55909426.

### SE Queensland

In mid July I am hoping to visit some of the growers in the Wamuran and Caboolture areas as no regular meetings are now held in the region.

Photos top: left to right

Dinner followed the meeting at Nambucca

The Coffs Woolgoolga meeting starts

### WA

I am off to visit Carnarvon in late July and look forward to meeting with growers, the Sweeter Coop and reporting more fully on WA in the next issue.

A special item on ABC's Landline was mentioned in the last edition. It appeared on Sunday June 7, focussing on efficient irrigation in Carnarvon and highlighting some banana growers' stories. If you missed it you can watch it on a computer at this address: [www.abc.net.au/landline](http://www.abc.net.au/landline) It is called 'Water Wise'.

### Sweeter Banana Co-Operative: The Environmentally Friendly Bunch!

The majority of banana growers in the Sweeter Banana Co-Op have now achieved Freshcare Environmental Accreditation.

A Caring for our Country Grant was applied for with the aim of developing an Environment Best Practice Manual and training of Growers in Environmentally Sustainable farming methods, developing on-farm environmental plans and formal accreditation under a recognised Environmental Program.

Plans are in place for a major launch of the accreditation in September as they will be the first group of growers in WA to become accredited under the Freshcare Environment

Grower Doriana Mangili said "We already knew that we were "good environmental growers" as we don't spray our bananas and use Integrated Pest Management, but it is a real achievement to formalise this and have Environmental plans for our farms. We have learnt so much over the past 12 months."

A full report will be in a future edition.

# Alstonville tissue culture establishment field day

The field day at the NSW DPI Centre for Tropical Horticulture at Alstonville in May allowed growers the chance to inspect the results of a time of planting using tissue culture trial, funded by the BIC and Horticulture Australia Ltd.

Project leader Peter Newley explained to growers present that the objective of the trial was to compare establishment of early season planted tissue culture plants with late season plantings, with traditional planting material from suckers used as a control. November planted tissue culture plants are held in the nursery for a shorter period, and therefore less expensive than larger ones planted in January.



The trial demonstrated that the early plantings establish better given favourable climatic conditions, producing larger plants that will bunch earlier than the later plantings. Off types can be more difficult to pick with smaller tissue culture plants, and good weed management is essential to eliminate competition for the young plants. However, disease free tissue culture gives more uniform time to bunching than suckers, with more even growth rates.

Production costs have been collected from the nursery, and the costs of producing each of the different sized plants has been compared. The smallest plants in the 2" tube cost \$3.91 each, the medium sized plants planted in December cost \$5.99 and the larger plants in the 90mm square tubes cost \$6.60. This compares with the previous standard 100mm round pot which cost \$6.75 each, and were never available in full consignments before Christmas. There will also be significant increases in freight and handling costs as the pot size increases.

Subsequent grower interviews have revealed that growers mostly choose to use tissue culture plants to introduce new varieties quickly and cleanly. Growers are generally happy with the results achieved from tissue culture, but do have a preference for plants delivered before Christmas.

## Priority pest and diseases

The field day also featured a presentation by Ruth Huwer, Research Entomologist on soldier flies (see separate story) and concluded with a rapid survey of growers attending of the major pest and disease issues impacting sub-tropical bananas. The ABGC is developing a banana plant health program, and this was seen as an opportunity to gather current views from growers on priority issues to feed into that program.

The major pest issues included flying foxes (value of deterrents in bananas), soldier fly, and development of an integrated approach to managing bunch pests. The disease issues raised included management of Panama disease (resistant varieties, use of soil based inhibitors, and the status of GM resistance) and fungicide resistance management for leaf diseases.

Other more general issues raised included alternatives to chemical fertilisers (improved nutrition programs, fertiliser cost calculators), harmonisation of pesticide permits between states, and improved communications through sharing of grower ideas and delivery of existing research using emails and the internet.

The field day concluded in time for growers to return to their farms and "batten down the hatches" in preparation for the gale force winds which hit the NSW north coast later that night. Extensive damage to several banana plantations resulted from the heavy rains and winds which gusted up to 140kms/hr.

Mark Hickey  
Industry leader (Tropical Horticulture)  
NSW DPI, Alstonville

## Subtropical banana growers hit hard by storms

Some banana growers in far north of New South Wales were hard hit by a major storm in May with some reporting losses of up to 30% of their crop due to the high winds.

Some growers in the region from the Tweed down to Ballina revealed that some plantations that were facing north or east bore the brunt of the storm with up to 50% of the plants being knocked down by the winds.

Chair of Bananas NSW, Trevor Black from Numulgi near Lismore said the storm hit at the worst time of the year.

"After an excellent growing season through summer and autumn, we have now lost many of those plants and with winter now here, growing back will be a slow process.

Lorraine Simpson from Uralba near Ballina also reported that it was the worst damage that two generations on the farm had ever experienced, with around 50% of one patch knocked down by the winds



The damage done to one of the Simpson's patches.

## Marketing Review soon

The marketing review for subtropical bananas is due for completion next month, so stand by for a report on its findings in the August News.

Canberra based consultancy Inovact Consulting is aiming to meet a variety of goals looking at market development opportunities, stakeholders involvement through the supply chain, to ensure supply will meet any demand created; as well as supporting the wider industry marketing plan.

## The Subtropics Banana News

The name stays – you all must like it as no one offered a better name. In fact no one offered another name at all!

The Subtropical Banana Snapshot E News – if you are not on email, you will not receive this alternate monthly electronic newsletter, designed to keep you up to date with topical news. If you don't have an email, perhaps someone in your family has one? Get online soon!



# THE SUBTROPICS BANANA NEWS

this issue

Chemical Permits p.2

Growing in the West p.4

BIC Review p.6

Around the Regions p.7

## Editorial

In late July I made the journey across to the other side of the continent to visit the Carnarvon region and how it was done in the west – grow bananas that is!

In three days I met a good cross section of growers and others, visited several farms, got a good idea of banana farming in Carnarvon, saw an interesting trial and even tasted some of the great local seafood.

This edition includes a report of my visit – as I have found as I have become more familiar with the subtropical industry, there is much to share among growers across borders, even though conditions and needs vary greatly.

I think the growers who are succeeding are the ones who accept the current market situation and look to the ways they can grow and market more efficiently.

With subtropical bananas currently making up only 10% of Australia's sales and a new marketing campaign just beginning, the subtropical sector has great opportunities to carve a larger slice of the market on both sides of Australia.

In WA with the push to 'Buy West Eat best', all growers have a chance to benefit by promoting this concept whether they are SBC bananas or other Carnarvon bananas.

Good reading!

Neville



## Trials under shade off to a good start

Growing under shade? Far too expensive you might think, but maybe not. That is the aim of a trial which began earlier this year at Carnarvon.

The WA Department of Agriculture at the Gascoyne Research Station has begun a trial looking at the performance of Cavendish bananas under shade cloth.

The climate in Carnarvon means that the plantations are subjected to strong prevailing winds as well as very cold nights in winter and very hot days in summer.

The shade cloth should provide protection from possible frosts and impacts from winter temperatures, as well as increasing day temperatures to assist in bunch growth.



Tom Day, Mike Littleley and Chris Schelfhout.

In summer the shade cloth does just that, provide shade, but importantly protection from the winds.

The Research station began the trial in February planting out tissue culture stock in two areas – one under cloth and one outside.



Chris and Tom discuss the performance of the plants outside, planted at the same time.

The trials were established by the Research Station Manager, Mike Littleley and are now under the direction of Chris Schelfhout, Project Manager for Gascoyne Horticulture Development.

Both plots are receiving best practice fertigation and are growing steadily with early signs indicating that the plants under shade cloth could be bunching and ready for picking some months earlier than those outside. Those under shade cloth were half as big again as those outside on inspection in late July.

"At \$40,000 to \$80,000 per hectare for covering it is expensive, but over the three year trial we will be able to see if the cost is more than offset by the potential increase in yields," says Chris.



Know-how for Horticulture™

# Environmental good practice

## Chemical Permits

Don't forget that the use of chemicals is subject to permits on banana farms and the following chart shows what chemicals are currently issued with permits relevant to the banana industry.

If you would like to download copies of the actual permits you can do so at:  
<http://www.apvma.gov.au/permits/permits.shtml>

BANANAS - CURRENT PERMITS		August 2009		
Permit number	Description	Date issued	Expiry date	Jurisdiction
PER8380	Glyphosate / Bananas / Destruction	14-Jun-05	30-Sep-09	all states
PER9100	NSW & Queensland banana plantations / Dimethoate & glyphosate / Banana aphid	9-Mar-06	1-Aug-16	NSW and QLD only
PER9409	Sulfur Dust / Banana Bunches / Mites	1-Oct-06	30-Sep-16	NSW and QLD only
PER9504	Rattoff Zinc Phosphine Bait Sachet / Banana Plantations / Roof or Black Rat and Mice (residue data required for renewal)	21-Nov-07	31-Mar-10	NSW, QLD, NT, WA only
PER10034	Tatodust / Banana Bunches / Deightoniella	7-Sep-07	31-Aug-10	NSW only.
PER10309	Dimethoate / Selected Fruit / Queensland Fruit Fly	1-Oct-07	30-Sep-10	NSW, QLD
PER10527	Prothiofos (Tokuthion EC) / Banana Plants / Banana Weevil Borer Control	25-Feb-08	31-Mar-13	QLD only
PER10534	Dimethoate (reduced rate) / Post harvest dipping and flood spraying / Queensland Fruit Fly	1-Apr-08	30-Apr-10	NSW only
PER10555	Fenthion, dimethoate, chlorpyrifos & maldison / Fruit fly outbreak & quarantine treatments	1-Apr-08	30-Apr-10	SA only
PER10578	Chlorpyrifos / Banana / Sugarcane bud moth, Banana scab moth & Banana rust thrips	5-May-09	30-Sep-13	QLD only
PER10700	Chlorpyrifos / Banana bunches / Caterpillars, Rust, thrips & mealy bugs	1-Jun-08	30-Sep-13	NSW only
PER10744	Nufarm Amicide/ Cavendish Bananas/ Destruction of Banana Suckers	1-Jun-08	30-Jun-13	NSW only
PER11016	Diesel Distillate / Banana / Removal of Unwanted Suckers	12-Nov-08	30-Nov-13	NSW only



The threatened grey-headed flying fox.

## Flying-foxes and damage to bananas

A Reminder to NSW Growers

Earlier in August the NSW Government released the final report of the independent Flying-fox Licensing Review Panel, established last year.

The report will provide input into the development of a new policy for managing the impact of flying-foxes on commercial fruit crops.

However, in the interim, licensing arrangements will be maintained. All flying fox species are protected in NSW and commercial fruit growers who intend to scare or shoot at these animals with firearms must apply to their local National Parks and Wildlife Area Office for a licence.

Licences to harm a limited number of flying foxes are issued to growers who can demonstrate damage to their crop. These licences are issued within 24 hrs of a property inspection by the local Parks and Wildlife ranger.

For further information or contact details for your local NSW National Parks and Wildlife Area Office please call (free call) 1300 361 967.

A copy of the review panel's report can be found at <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/threatenedspecies/Flyingfoxlicrev.htm>

In South East Queensland, as of 1 September 2008, the Qld Environmental Protection Agency ceased issuing damage mitigation permits for shooting flying foxes. As a result, any deterrent used for crop protection must be non-lethal.

## DO WE HAVE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS?

In alternate months the Subtropical Banana Snapshot – emailed newsletter goes out to growers and other industry stakeholders to keep you up to date with other industry news.

Are you getting it? If not, that means we do not have your email address! We have been working through the database to get information, but it is a time consuming job, especially when no one is home to answer the phone.

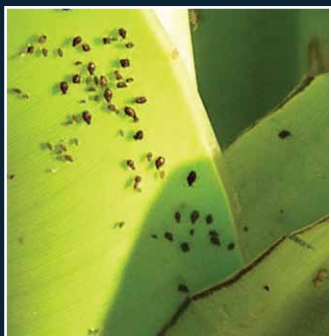
If you are connected please send an email to [neville@greenpr.com.au](mailto:neville@greenpr.com.au) and advise of your name and address at the same time. You will then be added to the data base for future editions.



## Controlling aphids

Research funding has been provided through the national levy for infected banana aphid eradication over the next 12 months. The research will be conducted at the Centre for Tropical Horticulture at Alstonville by NSW Industry and Innovation (which incorporates NSW DPI)

The eradication of infected banana aphids (*Pentalonia nigronervosa*) has long been the holygrail in the Australian banana Industry's fight against Banana Bunchy Top Virus (BBTV). Controlling the escape of aphids from diseased plants has previously been done using dimethoate (@12gai per plant) but this product is under threat of removal, and has banana growers looking for a suitable alternative.



Banana aphids in the throat of suckers at CTH expanding populations at present.

The chemicals to be tested in the field on tissue culture plants include the industry registered systemic insecticides imidacloprid (Confidor), and clothianidin (Shield), some unregistered options from Bayer, and thiamethoxam (Actara) in comparison with the standard dimethoate.

A parallel trial will be run in the glasshouse to test the difference in aphid activity and survivorship when the glyphosate injection has initiated the plant death, as opposed to the direct effect of the insecticide on a healthy plant and the aphid movement.

The trial plot has been established and the aphid infestation levels within the area are at 8% and the distribution will be assisted to ensure an even pest pressure before the treatments are applied.

## Bunchy Top fight underway across two states



The NSW BBTV National Project team (l to r) David Peasley coordinator and detectors Wayne Shoobridge and Grant East.



Edith Nicholls who will be looking after the Program in SE Qld.

## Bunchy Top Update at Tweed meeting

Unfortunately only a small group of growers at the quarterly Tweed meeting heard the very interesting presentations on the new Bunchy Top Virus National Program.

David Peasley outlined the plans and Dr John Thomas provided an insight into the new ways that the virus will be tackled and managed in the three year plan.

Dr Thomas said much of the research done 100 years ago still provided a solid base for managing bunchy top virus now and only in recent times had laboratory work provided further insights into the virus and its potential management.

The spread of the virus has been known to occur through transmission by aphids, but now much more is known about their lifecycle and from that, what possible control options can be considered.

"They are carriers for life once they have the virus and travel with the wind during their two month lifespan. Two thirds of infections are within 20 metres and virtually all are within 90 metres of the originally infected plant," Dr Thomas told the meeting.

The BBTV is also only found in living plants and will not remain dormant in dead plants, confirming the need to poison infected plants.

The program will include more frequent inspections and the use of systemic insecticides to kill the aphids before they leave an infected plant. Critical will be the timing of the insecticide to kill the aphids, before the poison kills the plant to destroy the virus.

Since the meeting David Peasley reports that a meeting has been held with the two detectors in Northern NSW, Wayne

Shoobridge and Grant East and they have documented all plantations in the region, especially those with reported cases of BBTV.

Also present were the new BBTV Biosecurity Officer from SE Qld, Edith Nicholls and Alison Shields Senior Biosecurity Officer from Qld Primary Industries and Fisheries to learn and share information.

## SE Qld's Bunchy Top program now underway

Taking on the role to implement the Bunchy Top Virus program in South East Queensland is Ms Edith Nicholls.

Ms. Nicholls, an honours graduate in agricultural science, will be responsible for the detection and control program in South East Queensland up to Bundaberg. She will be based at the department's Nambour office.

"The program will address the problem in commercial and peri-urban environments – we need to stamp out the virus not only in banana plantations, but also where it is found on hobby farms and backyards," said Ms. Nicholls.

The project is being funded by the national banana industry levy which is managed by Horticulture Australia Limited, with matched funding from the Australian Government. In Queensland the project is being managed by Qld. Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries for the Australian Banana Growers' Council.

# Growing in the West – a good mix of the ‘old timers’ and the ‘new comers’

The Gascoyne River, as it is most days, dry. Underneath though is where the water is drawn from, providing a steady source of water through the year from regulated bores. When it does get low, growers also buy water piped in from deeper aquifers by Gascoyne Water. General Manager of Gascoyne Water, Joe Rebola, says there are

plans to extend the pipeline and provide water to extend the irrigated area for horticulture. When it flows it really flows - just five kilometres up the river where the main road crosses the Gascoyne are the flood markings – several times floods have gone above the seven metre mark!

## The Days

Being the son of a banana farmer is a good start, but Tom Day had a good many adventures before he started growing bananas for a living.

He started in the transport business with Gascoyne Traders during which time he met his wife Margaret in Perth in 1965. Margaret moved to Carnarvon and in the following 20 plus years they had several businesses included a fuel depot and then in 1988 decided it was time to move on.

“That didn’t quite happen- we bought a pub in Carnarvon instead!” says Margaret.

After a couple of years in that role it was time for something less stressful, so they purchased a banana and tomato farm along the river and Tom returned to the life he had grown up with in Carnarvon.

“My dad Bert not only grew bananas but he was also the first manager of the Department of Agriculture Research station at Carnarvon as well.”

Tom has had a long history of service to the community and business, serving on the local shire for 15 years including several years as president. He was the first WA Board member of ABGC and one of the founders of the Sweeter Banana Co-op in Carnarvon.



Tom and Margaret Day.

Tom and Margaret’s farm is only 4.1 hectares but they average around 15,000 cartons a year from it.

“One of the main reasons we are still farming is the Co-op. If we had to run a packing shed as well as worry about all the other things that the Co-op does such as the transport, we’d be retired!”

“We estimate that it costs us around 70 cents a carton after we consider the marketing benefits of the Coop to have all the packing and transport done by it. It gives us time to look after the growing and have a lifestyle as well,” says Tom.

For Margaret who also works as a real estate agent in Carnarvon, that is probably a good thing!

## The Munros

Darrell and Bruce Munro are well known in the Carnarvon region, actively involved in the Sweeter Banana Co-op and looking after a 20 hectare (50 acre) property, probably the biggest banana farm in Carnarvon.

They harvest around 60 tonnes a year per hectare with the help of one of their sons Kane. Another son, Scott, while he now lives and works in Germany, is also having an input into the farm through his new Patch Spy system which was reported on in the last edition of STBN.

The obvious choice for the trialling of the new system was ‘mum and dad’s’ but Darrell is already convinced that Scott is on a winner and Patch Spy will be a great help in managing the farm.

“We are still working out new ways the system can help and advising Scott on what additions and changes will improve it.”

There is no doubt it is providing range of information which will assist in selecting bunches for cutting, monitoring performance and watching the growth of suckers to help in the selection process.

The Munros used to have a very successful tourist business with tours and morning and afternoon teas on offer, but closed that to concentrate on growing, looking after the farm and having some free time.

“We enjoyed it very much but after 13 years that was enough!” said Darryl.

The Munros were founding members of the Sweeter Banana Co-op and Darryl spends some time there every week there helping to run the operations.





Kane Munro taking another healthy bunch out of the patch to go to the Co-op.



Darrell Munro records information on the hand held Patch Spy unit.



Darryl Hardman with his Desert Sweet packaging.

## The Warrens

Relative newcomers to the industry are Debbie and Brad Warren. Living and working in Carnarvon, Debbie liked the rural life and saw a banana plantation for sale and suggested to Brad they buy it.

The answer was 'no', but she was persistent and when another came along she won him over. Brad is an accountant, but now only works part-time with all available other time being put into the farm. Debbie is also out there much more than most other mums could manage with four young children under seven!

"I love it, so much so that we put the little ones into day care so I can spend more time working on the farm."

Debbie told me that Brad was a workaholic but I think that both of them are considering what they have achieved.



Brad and Debbie Warren, in a quiet moment.

They bought the rundown farm five years ago and the first task was to renovate the home, but at the same time, planting new patches and knocking down old ones. They have over 12 hectares, have increased the plantings by 50% and have just cleared more ground to plant more.

To diversify a little they are also planting lemons and limes as well as planning to extend the small planting of paw paws on the farm.

"Our best banana patch at present is in ground which was previously used for vegetables."

They are members of the Sweeter Coop, but find in the quieter months, it pays for them to pack and sell their own direct to market.

"We pack our fruit into 750gm and 1 kilo packs and promote our product as Carnarvon fruit," said Debbie.

## The Hardmans

Next door to the Warrens is the property of Darryl and Cherelle Hardman who took up residence around the same time, about five years ago.

Initially members of the Sweeter Banana Co-op, they decided to go it alone and changed their approach to handling their fruit and their marketing.

They have now established the Desert Sweet brand and with the purchase of two Packfield picking trolley systems, they now dehand the bunches out in the patch.

"We find that because the bananas are dehandled well before they reach the packing shed, there is no sap leakage and they do not bleed into the bag and leave a stain."

They have two plantations and Darryl believes they already have economies of scale in the way they handle their fruit. In peak season they now employ up to 15 people picking and dehanding and in the shed packing.

The Desert Sweet brand has now been picked up by Mercer Mooney in the Perth marketplace and Darryl says other growers are coming on board under the Desert Sweet brand.

With Carnarvon product still only occupying 10% of the sales in that marketplace there should be room for growth for all brands from Carnarvon in Perth.



Bunches are cut and hung from the trolley system where hands are cut and put carefully into bins, ready for cleaning and packing in the shed.



Darryl's custom-made plough to break up old plants and dig in with the soil – very heavy duty!

# Review of NSW Banana Industry Act

A review of the Banana Industry Act 1987 aims to ensure value for growers' money, according to NSW Banana Industry Committee chair Trevor Black.

The review has been approved by the Minister following a request from industry, and Mr Scott Davenport, Chief Economist with Industry & Investment NSW, has been appointed to lead it.

Mr Davenport met recently with members of the BIC, which is constituted under the Act, to explain and discuss the review process.

"The meeting was the first step in an industry consultation process that will continue over the coming months, culminating in a final report and recommendations by the end of the year," he said.

Mr Black said the recent introduction of the national banana levy for research disease control and promotion had raised the question among growers about whether the existing state-based banana levy raised under the Banana Industry Act was still required.

"With the national levy arrangement now in place, it is an opportune time to review the Act," he said. "The aim is to check the need for dual levies and ensure value for growers' money.

"All options for the Act will be considered ranging from leaving it as is, modifying it to suit grower needs or repealing the Act."

"Further meetings with growers and representative bodies will take place and a draft report will be circulated to the BIC for comment in November."

Two grower meetings are already scheduled for September 8 at Murwillumbah Cricketers Club and September 9 at Coffs Harbour Catholic Club. Both meetings will run from 7pm to 9pm. Public submissions will also be welcomed, by September 30.

**For more information on the review process or the meetings, contact Trevor Black on 66282588 or Stewart Webster, I&I NSW, on (02) 6391 3453.**



(left to right) Mick Gentle (BIC Director), John Williams (Senior Regional Director DII & BIC Director), Trevor Black (BIC Chairman), Bob Campbell (CEO Bananas NSW), Stephen Spear (BIC Director), Ian Campbell (BIC Director), Scott Davenport (Chief Economist DII) & Peter Willis (BIC Director)

## Subtropical reigns supreme at EKKA

There was strong competition between growers on both sides of the Queensland New South Wales border at this year's Australian Banana Championship at the Royal Queensland Show (EKKA as it is commonly known), but Subtropical growers took home almost all of the prizes.

According to the judge David Peasley, the champion Cavendish bunch of Graeme Disney was a standout with exceptional weight, conformation and blemish free.

"The fruit from north Queensland was not up to the standard of that exhibited by the subtropical growers, who presented extremely impressive displays of Cavendish and Lady Fingers."

### LADY FINGERS:

CLASS 10. 1st, 2nd & 3rd	CHAMPION BUNCH LADYFINGER J & J Voisey	Murwillumbah NSW
SPECIAL PRIZE: 38kg	HEAVIEST BUNCH LADYFINGER J & J Voisey	Murwillumbah NSW
CLASS 11. 1st, 2nd & 3rd 358gr, 335gr, 327gr	HEAVIEST SINGLE LADYFINGER A & S Everest	Eungella NSW
CLASS 12. 1st 2nd	BEST HAND LADYFINGER A & S Everest J & J Voisey	Eungella NSW Murwillumbah NSW
CLASS 13. 1st 2nd	BEST CARTON LADYFINGER J & J Voisey A & S Everest	Murwillumbah NSW Eungella NSW

### GOLDFINGER VARIETY:

CLASS 18. 1st 2nd, & 3rd	CHAMPION BUNCH GOLDFINGER Kurt & Carly Lindsay Rob & Joanna Lindsay	Rocksberg Qld. Wamuran Qld.
SPECIAL PRIZE: 49kg	HEAVIEST BUNCH GOLDFINGER VARIETY Kurt & Carly Lindsay	Rocksberg Qld
CLASS 19. 1st, 2nd & 3rd 292gr, 281gr, 273gr	HEAVIEST SINGLE GOLDFINGER Rob & Joanna Lindsay	Wamuran Qld.
CLASS 20. 1st, 2nd & 3rd	BEST HAND GOLDFINGER Rob & Joanna Lindsay	Wamuran Qld.
CLASS 21 1st, 2nd & 3rd	BEST CARTON GOLDFINGER Kurt & Carly Lindsay	Rocksberg Qld.

### CAVENDISH VARIETY:

CLASS 14. 1st 2nd 3rd	No. 30 No. 170 No. 164	CHAMPION BUNCH CAVENDISH Graeme Disney Kurt & Carly Lindsay Rob & Joanna Lindsay	Piggabeen NSW Rocksberg Qld. Wamuran Qld.
SPECIAL PRIZE: 73kg		HEAVIEST BUNCH CAVENDISH VARIETY Graeme Disney	Piggabeen NSW
CLASS 15. 1st 397gr 2nd, & 3rd 380gr & 369gr		HEAVIEST SINGLE CAVENDISH A & S Everest Graeme Disney	Eungella NSW Piggabeen NSW
CLASS 16. 1st, & 2nd 3rd		BEST HAND CAVENDISH Graeme Disney JR & V Dickinson	Piggabeen NSW Cardwell NQ
CLASS 17. 1st & 2nd 3rd		BEST CARTON CAVENDISH A & S Everest JR & V Dickinson	Eungella NSW Cardwell NQ

### OTHER CHAMPIONS

SPECIAL PRIZE: 73kg Cavendish	CHAMPION BUNCH BANANAS - CLASSES 10,14 & 18 Graeme Disney	Piggabeen NSW
CLASS 22 Ducasse Variety.	CHAMPION BUNCH BANANAS - ANY OTHER VARIETY J & J Voisey	Murwillumbah NSW
<b>MOST SUCCESSFUL EXHIBITOR - CLASSES 10-21</b>		
1st	20 Points	A & S Everest
2nd	16 Points	Rob & Joanna Lindsay
3rd	12 Points	J & J Voisey



## NSW Subtropical banana industry needs?

New member of the NSW DPI North Coast horticulture team, Jeremy Bright is keen to identify the needs of the relevant banana growing districts...

"I realise the Australian banana industry has just done an exhaustive needs survey for the whole industry but generally with these types of exercises the local needs and issues are diluted and lost in the process to the bigger industry issues.

My aim is to get your industry needs from local points of view. I think the best way of doing this is to work with your individual groups as the regional meetings take place, around November.

At these meetings I intend to quickly get your thoughts and concerns relating to your banana enterprise and the local industry. It doesn't matter how trivial you may think the issue is. Chances are, if you have thought of raising it someone else probably has also.

Once we have the issues and concerns we can then prioritise them. It may be as simple as us looking up information for you or running some trials.

I want you as districts to be selfish and give me concerns regarding your district, operation and industry. The exercise should only take about 30 minutes and is valuable in that it points out to you, as a district, what is of concern.

It also helps me in understanding the issues of my new area and where best my efforts should be directed. So, before the next round of meetings I need you all to think about what issues you may want to suggest."



Jeremy Bright

## Around the regions



Business of the Year winners, Sweeter Banana Co-op members (l to r) Bruce Munro, Catrona Nixon, Bruce May, Margaret Day, Bryce Guthrie, Darrell Munro, Stephen Lyall, Blanche Walker, Linda Lyall, Doriana Mangili, Melissa Gibbings, Tim Hyde.

### Coffs Harbour/Woolgoolga

At the last meeting there was a strong feeling amongst those in attendance that the NSW BIC should be retained and not closed down, providing costs could be minimized and mention was made of Coles move to buy local and that it would benefit NSW growers.

- Coming up - Next meeting will be held at the Coffs Harbour Catholic Club on November 11, starting with a meal at 6pm. **Details contact Michelle 66525633.** It will be the AGM for the association so all growers welcome.

### Richmond

With only a few members in its region, the Richmond group has one meeting a year followed by a barbeque. This was held on Wednesday August 19.

### Tweed/Brunswick

The last meeting included a presentation on the new National Bunchy Top Virus project by David Peasley and an address by noted virologist Dr John Thomas (see separate story)

- Coming up - It was decided to change venue for the next meeting which will include the AGM. At time of printing it was to be held at the Murwillumbah Golf Club and include a subsidized meal. The date of the meeting is Wednesday November 18 – all growers in the district are urged to attend. **Details: Graeme, ph 0755909426.**

### SE Queensland

I didn't get there in July but will be visiting Nambour and the nearby districts at the start of September. Read all about it in the next edition!

### WA Carnarvon

As usual, never a dull moment reports the Sweeter Banana Co-op. They have been successful in winning the Best Business employing 16+ employees and "Business of the Year" at the Carnarvon Chamber of Commerce awards recently.

At the presentation dinner, the Gascoyne Development Commission's Tradestart Export Advisor, Ms Rebecca Tate said, "owned and operated by local growers, the Co-op's basic product is synonymous with Carnarvon."

"Over the last two years the Sweeter Banana Co-op has professionally moved forward with a new strategic plan, continued high level customer care and quality control, and comprehensive training and development programs for its growers.

"In particular a vigorous and focused approach is being taken to marketing, demonstrated by the successful launch of the Smoothies banana in Perth in June 2009. As a Co-operative they continue to provide positive economic benefits for the community and individual businesses," said Rebecca.



The Sweeter Banana Co-op had a presence at the recent Perth Good Food and Wine Show. 3300 smoothie samples and 6000 banana samples were given away over the weekend.

## Beer, barbeque and bugs

### WA grower meeting success

A general meeting of Carnarvon banana growers was organised to coincide with the visit to WA of the Subtropical Communications Officer Neville Sloss and provided an opportunity to share some insights into IPM practices to control common pests in the region.

Ivor Gaylard, General Manager of the Carnarvon Growers Association, organised the meeting and Ayesh Amarasinghe from the Association talked about the successes in using predator mites.

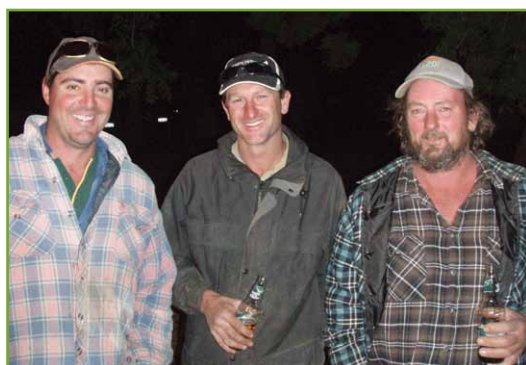
Ayesh advised that predator mites had

proven successful in controlling spotted and red spider mites, trichogramma wasps for sugarcane bud moth and that the green lacewing had proven successful against aphids and spotted mites.

Several growers advised that they had been using the beneficial insects with good success.

Neville told the meeting about the ongoing activity in the communications role and invited growers to provide feedback and input as the program continued.

A traditional sausage sizzle and cold beer or wine followed the presentations and allowed for good conversation among the 20 plus people who attended.



Chris Collins, Michael Gibbings and Graeme Barr.



Stephen Lyall, Phil Byron and Ivan Bilcich.



Marco Gaspar, Kevin Leahy and Darryl Hardman.



Some of the Carnarvon Growers Association team - Ivor Gaylard, Sarah Berson and Ayesh Amarasinghe.

## Deserving Award

Congratulations to Coffs Harbour grower David Pike who has been given an Australian Banana Industry Award at the last Congress.

David was recognised by his peers for his work with the banana industry, both locally and on a wider scale.

A third generation Coffs Harbour banana grower, David cut, packed and consigned his first case of bananas at the age of five, began farming with his father and his brother Robert in 1985. A serious injury requiring a shoulder reconstruction has kept him out of the plantation since February.

He has worked on catchment management, vegetation and water management committees; the Coffs Harbour effluent reuse technical task force; Coffs Harbour Bypass community focus group and the Banana Industry Review Recovery project, as well as working on the landmark Banana Industry Benchmarking project.

He was a member of the executive of the Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga Banana Growers Association for nine years, including five as president and has worked as a steward for the banana section of the Coffs Harbour Show since 1980.

Congratulations again to David and here's hoping that shoulder is right soon!



David Pike, recipient of a Australian Banana Industry Award.

## Grants for soil improvement in northern NSW

The Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority are offering small scale funding for growers including banana growers to implement best management practices in soil health.

Projects need to meet the Australian Government's 'Caring for our Country' target of improving land management to reduce risk of soil acidification, improve soil carbon or other improved soil management

The funding is provided on a dollar for dollar basis where landholder contributions can include provision of labour, materials or use of machinery. Up to \$5,000 is available per application/project.

For more information [www.northern.cma.nsw.gov.au](http://www.northern.cma.nsw.gov.au)



# THE SUBTROPICS BANANA NEWS

**this issue**

Nicky Singh steps down p.2

South East Queensland growers p.4

Bring out your drums! p.6

Australian Bananas promotion update p.7

## Editorial

Times are tough, but hey what's new!

I was pleased to listen to several growers in South East Queensland last month who all had plenty of problems past and present to deal with, but the common thing was that they were all getting on with their farms and 'giving it a go'.

From Merv Moorhead who is now aiming high with the help of professional input and achieving results, to Dianne West who is regaining her energy to make a success of banana growing once and for all.

From less than a year being associated with the industry, it seems to me that the growers succeeding are the ones thinking about their marketing as well as their growing.

They are not leaving it up to others to make decisions for them, nor are they letting the 'big boys' wear them down, but getting on with their own businesses and finding their place in the market.

The new marketing report provides further food for thought – importantly it identifies opportunities which suggest that with a positive attitude and a commitment to a quality product, business growth can be achieved.

*Neville*

Ps. NSW growers – don't forget to get along to your regional meetings coming up in November!



## Many subtropical growers are already supplying into local markets, but still offer potential growth

### Marketing opportunities are there...if...

Sub-tropical banana producers have the opportunity to develop profitable niches within the domestic market, says the "Opportunities to Grow the Domestic Market for Subtropical Bananas" Report just recently released.

But there are several 'ifs' mentioned in relation to quality, consistency and volume of supply. The report says these need to be improved and more effective marketing and supply chain partnerships are also needed.

The Report was commissioned by HAL and funded through the national banana R&D levy with matched funding from the Australian government.

The report, prepared by consultants Inovact, says the key opportunity for growth in the short to medium term is in expanding supply to premium independent food and produce retailers in capital city markets, particularly Brisbane and Sydney.

"These retailers are actively looking for ways to differentiate their product and are likely to be active supporters of market development if the industry can provide a consistent supply of quality product to their stores and assist with in-store marketing."

It suggests that the smaller volumes in this segment are achievable for the sub-tropical industry in the short-term.

"Consumers in these stores are also likely to be more open to new products and may be less price sensitive than regional and major supermarket shoppers. For the wider industry there are significant benefits as an initiative to grow the category and capture additional value from consumers.

Ultimately, market development is a commercially driven activity and the report proposes a product and marketing vision based on the key product attributes of sub-tropical bananas, matched with specific markets and improved supply chain relationships.

**Smaller size + Sweeter taste + Regionally grown.**  
= key product attributes for subtropical bananas

There are already a series of success stories that demonstrate how this vision can be made a reality in market.

"The question facing the industry is the level of resources and effort it can devote to this issue. A series of strategic approaches and next steps are needed to enable industry to make its next move."

*Next edition we will have a closer look at the options and recommendations put forward by the Report, or you can view it in full on the HAL website, [www.horticulture.com.au](http://www.horticulture.com.au)*



Know-how for Horticulture™

## Nicky Singh steps down

It's time for younger growers to get involved in their industry if they see their future in it, says outgoing chair of the ABGC Nicky Singh.

Nicky was at the helm during a period of significant change as the new national levy came into place after the change of constitution.

"The misinformation circulated about the new levy has been found to be unproven and it is time that some growers looked to positive outcomes that can be achieved, rather than be pessimistic all the time," says Nicky.

Nicky was Vice Chairman for five years before taking on the head position, and served as a director of BIC. All this came about from wanting to be involved in the industry.

"I didn't come in with much experience and I'm proud of the contribution that I have made to the banana industry. I would just like to see the industry more united for our future."

Nicky's wife, Mangit and children are happy to see more of him and he says he now has free time on weekends and shorter working days for a change!

"We might even have a holiday as well!"

CEO for the ABGC, Tony Heidrich, said Nicky has been a great supporter for a national industry.

"We all thank him for the huge amount of effort he put in to the national levy and subtropical growers are benefiting greatly from the package of initiatives that were part of this," said Tony.



Nicky Singh.

## PW Chew - It's a family affair

The family is the Bradshaws who are all involved – Greg, wife Dianne, son Mark and daughters, Ashley and Samantha.

Greg has been in the wholesale banana business for 30 years this October, first working in the family business PW Chew and then buying the business and involving his own family over the years. Chew is one of nine banana wholesalers in the Sydney



At Sydney Markets, (l to r) Mark, Greg and Ashlee Bradshaw.

Markets dealing with 140,000 cartons a week. He receives product from northern NSW and north Queensland.

"The subtropical supply of quality product is not consistent, but some growers can provide good quality fruit so it is possible," says Greg.

Building stronger relationships and keeping the market informed are two key points that Greg thinks subtropical growers should be striving for. Promotion should be targeted when the fruit is best and that's after January he says.

He gets out and visits his growers about once a year so that he can keep in touch and get an idea of the product which is likely to be coming into market.

Market trends? Greg sees a growing demand for green cooking varieties with the growth of the Asian communities.

"Niche products do offer an opportunity for the subtropical growers to develop these new markets. I feel there is a 'changing of the guard' coming so keen growers should be looking at their product, quality and market opportunities."

## Bunchy Top update

A new Bunchy Top Hotline phone number has been established and in the months ahead, there will be a campaign to create more awareness of the disease in the community and get people to report suspect banana plants.

The Hotline phone number is 1800 068 371. Calls will be taken at the ABGC office and passed on to the team in either NSW or Qld. Growers are encouraged to report sightings of possible BBTV as well.

There has been good community response to publicity in northern NSW and detectors are visiting sites in Lismore, Byron Bay and Mullumbimby.

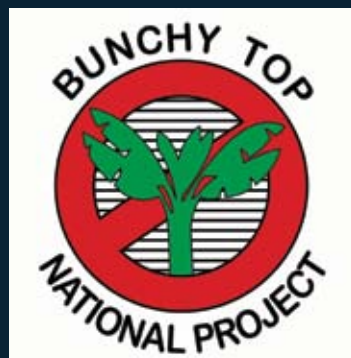
Coordinator David Peasley says that work is well underway on destroying a plantation at Terranora which has had the highest incidence of Bunchy Top – in fact more than the total of all others in the region.

All high risk plantations were inspected in September and will be visited every four weeks to check on them, while an analysis of all plantations in the region has now been completed (the full story in the next edition).

Queensland's officer for the program Edith Nicholls has also completed a three day training session with the NSW team to assist her in the program in her region.

In the meantime she has also been busy dealing with backyard sightings done by local surveillance on the Sunshine Coast.

The Bunchy Top Steering Committee meets again in November.





# Start your folders! Fact sheets underway

Inside this edition is the first of several Fact Sheets which are being produced to keep growers up to date on growing and crop management.

The first is about Bunchy Top and the next topics will include fertilising, leaf analysis, Panama wilt and flying foxes.

The series is called the 'Subtropical Banana Growers' Best Practice Guide' and the sheets are hole punched so that they can be kept easily together in a ring folder.

Please keep this first one aside and watch out for others as they are sent out, mainly with the newsletter to keep our costs down.

"They are designed to provide current thinking on particular topics of interest and importantly provide contacts or links to more information," says Subtropical Banana Industry Communications Officer, Neville Sloss.

"While some are more specific to particular regions, over time the majority of them will be useful to all growers."

They will also be online on the subtropical pages of the Australian Banana Growers' Council website at [www.abgc.org.au](http://www.abgc.org.au)



## Around the regions

### Tweed/Brunswick

It is time for all you Tweed, Murwillumbah and Brunswick growers to get along to a regional meeting! (and those of you in other regions too!)

There has been fairly poor attendances of growers at most regional meetings in recent times, but now that the new levy is in place and new programs are underway, it makes sense for more growers to get along and find out what's happening in your industry.

- Coming up - It was decided to change venue for the next meeting which will include the AGM. It is being held at a new venue, the Murwillumbah Golf Club, and \$10 will be provided towards the meal for each grower. The date of the meeting is Wednesday November 18 at 5.30pm for meeting followed by dinner – all growers in the district are urged to attend. Details: Robert (07) 55909812

### Nambucca

- Coming up - The next meeting for the Nambucca District will be held on Tuesday November 10 at 6pm Nambucca Hotel, Macksville. Contact Peter 65681908 All growers welcome.

### Coffs Harbour/Woolgoolga

At the last meeting there was news that Coles had adopted a 'buy local' policy – hopefully it will help subtropical growers get better access to one of the major retailers.

Also in Coffs, members of the National Party visited recently affirming their opposition to the import of Filipino bananas. They met with local growers in September who made the case for the protection of the Australian industry.

- Coming up - Next meeting will be held at the Coffs Harbour Catholic Club on Wednesday November 11, starting with a meal at 6pm. Details: contact Michelle 66525633. It will be the AGM for the association so all growers welcome.

### Richmond

With only a few members in its region, the Richmond group has one meeting a year, held in August.

### SE Queensland

See the centre spread report in this issue on news from SE Queensland growers. Early in the New Year I hope to get up to Bundaberg and speak with some of the growers in that region.

### WA Carnarvon

At the time of going to print, we didn't know if the Sweeter Banana Co-op had taken out the Business Enterprise Category for Regional and Community Achievement Awards in Western Australia. A gala dinner was being held in Perth on 23rd of October to announce the winners.

### Sweet Show success

Members of the Sweeter Banana Coop are now 'recovering' after serving out nearly 50,000 tasting Smoothies or banana samples at the Perth Royal Show. The WA Minister for Agriculture Terry Redman visited the stand and it was a great week supported by lots of grower volunteers and friends and family.



Grower Tim Hyde (r) and Minister for Agriculture Terry Redman at the Royal Show.



Linda Lyall, Angela Lyall and Lily Baker at the Royal Show District Display.

# South East Queensland – growers are fewer and farther between, but still committed to the industry.

## Merv & Naomi Moorhead, Wamuran, Moorhead and Rutter Bio-dynamic bananas

The day I visit Merv Moorhead, he is complaining about the ability to bring 1500 suckers across the border into South East Queensland from northern NSW.

“NSW’s permit system has worked fine since 1927, why doesn’t the Qld Primary Industries and Fisheries trust their permits?” says Merv, who to many in the industry is known to have strong opinions on issues.

Merv looks like he has been a banana farmer all his life, but that’s not quite so. His father was a grower at Mount Mee and he had certainly has it in his blood, but he spent many years as an aircraft maintenance engineer for Ansett.

In 1980 he bought his father’s farm and got it growing again, after it had run down. In the early 2000s he moved to Wamuran, near Caboolture and he’s growing on about 8 hectares now, but with plans to expand in the near future.

It is encouraging to hear of Merv and his wife Naomi’s plans to expand their farm, Moorhead and Rutter, which proclaims in its marketing ‘Proudly growing high quality Australian bananas since 1925’.

Merv sells most of his Cavendish bananas direct to the public at their market stall in Brisbane at the Northey Organic Markets every Sunday.

And at a price of \$4.80 a kilo for his ‘bio-dynamic’ bananas, Merv is getting a price that many other subtropical growers would envy. They sticker the fruit and have created a strong ‘nostalgic’ image for the brand with brochures and attractive cartons.

“We cannot get a decent price in the wholesale markets anymore, but now we never seem to have enough to supply the markets we do, so selling direct is our future,” says Merv.

Merv says openly that he’s not a supporter of the ABGC and has been disillusioned with the industry in the past. (After a chat and a cup of tea he thinks we might be on the right track in the subtropical sector though!)

With other local growers he has been involved in some cooperative efforts in the past, but now he is concentrating on expanding his farm and increasing sales through his own efforts.

Merv has employed a business consultant, Clive Enever, to assist him in the process and Clive firmly believes that the Moorhead & Rutter biodynamic bananas offer a taste advantage and can continue to command brand loyalty at the markets where they are sold.

“Next year Merv will have a less stressful working life and earn 10 times the return he has in the past for his bananas – that makes good business sense!,” says Clive.

In fact what they are doing is one of the marketing recommendations made in the new subtropical marketing report featured on page 1.

“We do consumer research at the markets and we also find that people like to know who they are buying produce from,” says Merv.

Merv doesn’t give too much away about his biodynamic growing, but it appears that while it isn’t certified organic, his growing uses biodynamic farming principles of nurturing the soil without the use of chemicals and volumes of fertiliser.

The farm is registered with Demeter which is the registered trademark of certified bio-dynamic produce.

He’s now looking for additional land to grow more biodynamic bananas, so it is good to see Merv and Naomi still looking forward in this industry – most grandparents are thinking about retiring!



Merv and Naomi Moorhead.

## Kurt Lindsay – Caboolture, Snake Gully Bananas

You can rightly claim an industry is in your blood if you are fifth generation on the farm.

Kurt Lindsay is one of the few, with his father Greg still helping out and grandfather Frank still living on the property and keeping an eye on things.

The property is over 100 hectares with around 12 hectares growing bananas and the rest bush.

Kurt says they used to have a good mix of Cavendish, Lady Fingers and Gold Fingers but Panama affecting Lady Fingers and the loss of the Coles business for Gold Fingers has not been good.

“We would be growing mainly Lady Fingers without Panama, despite the extra work in them. Maybe again one day if they find a cure.”

For Kurt, the wholesale markets are not fair on the subtropical fruit.

“Costs are all adding up and we just don’t get a fair go in the markets, even when our fruit more than holds it own in January and February.”





Kurt behind the wheel of one of their three historic Chevy trucks.



Dianne West.

Kurt fertilises four times a year and irrigates about six hectares. Three big dams with the largest holding over 225 million litres ensure there is plenty of water to keep them growing.

Under the Snake Gully brand the Lindsay's also supply into some local markets and use one of their historic Chevy trucks to draw attention to their stalls.

Kurt helped plant out his first patch when he was 13 and now at the ripe old age of 29 he has worked for 17 years in the banana industry.

"I like growing bananas, but I would prefer to get a good price for the good quality bananas we produce. Just getting what they're worth would make a difference!"

Photo: Kurt behind the wheel of one of their three historic Chevy trucks

## Dianne West, Wamuran

Dianne West has done just about everything in the banana business except buy them!

With a degree in Agricultural Economics, Dianne is well skilled to work in the agricultural field. Before she 'married into bananas' she worked on the family property growing zucchinis, tomatoes and tobacco in the Glasshouse Mountains.

Now she's working in another job for an irrigation company while she rekindles her spirit to move to a next stage in banana production and build the business again.

Her husband Paul grows their bananas and in the past Dianne has tackled the wholesaler role for a co-op group in South East Queensland.

"We invested in ripening rooms and trucks and managed to build up good support from retailers, in particular Bi-Lo. We had pretty good consistency of supply and quality."

A major body blow came when Coles bought Bi-Lo and they lost their main customer.

Now Dianne is content to focus on their own farm plans and she believes that growing organically is the way to go. 'Slowgrown' is a term she likes.

"We are not spraying and using legumes underneath to control weeds. We are also concerned that the soil needs to be good for farming in 100 years time so we must look after it."

Dianne says they intend to remain small and supply into markets and selected shops.

"We will service those who appreciate the quality of our fruit, rather than worry about the massive companies dominating the supermarkets," says Dianne.

## Kel Yarrow, Kulangor (near Nambour)

Like Merv, Kel is already having a bad day when I visit him early in the morning.

There has been a mix up in staff Group Certificates – not a good way to start any day!

Beyond that, Kel says he has been having a bad couple of years on the banana front.

"For the past three years we have been 'chilled out' in this area which has stopped the growth of the bananas. Cold winds have had a marked effect on our production – this year we'll do 5,000 cartons, in the past it would be around 18-19,000."

He has also had the bunchy top virus on his property and worked with the ABGC on ridding it of the disease.

"Tony Heidrich was a great help and was also involved in helicopter surveillance which went well."

Kel has diversified with limes, lemons and lychees, but still loves banana farming.

"I love what I have been doing and want to continue. The industry needs us in the subtropics, but we cannot produce for nothing. No matter how good our fruit is it is still classed as second grade.

"Our bananas are a better size and we need marketing help to sell them," says Kel.

Kel and his wife June are not too optimistic about the market for subtropical bananas, but he's encouraged by the reaction at the Saturday markets when people try his bananas and they then keep coming back.

Let's hope through the new national levy, some marketing initiatives for subtropical bananas get up and running to keep the dedicated growers like Kel in the industry.



Kel Yarrow.

# Bring out your drums!

The drumMUSTER program is 10 years old this year and continues to gain support as more chemical users discover the value for their operations in returning their clean, empty drums.

The program provides a solution to the problem of used chemical containers on farms. The clear aim of the drumMUSTER program is to rid the environment of used chemical drums and put them to good use through recycling.

All industries are under increasing pressure with regard to sound environmental outcomes and drumMUSTER participation strengthens this focus.

drumMUSTER's southern Queensland and Northern Rivers NSW consultant, Colin Hoey, says "as an industry aligned with coastal regions the banana growing community should be aware of their obligations in waste management."

Local shire councils deliver the program and have sites available to receive drums. Please contact your chemical reseller or

a Regional Consultant if you need further information or assistance. The number of drumMUSTER receival depots is growing

"All you need to do is clean your containers so they are free of chemical residues, then deliver them to your nearest collection point," says Colin.

Since the drumMUSTER program began, more than 13 million used chemical containers have been returned to depots around Australia.

## For further information, contact:

**Colin Hoey (SQ & N. Rivers),  
0428 964576**

**Phil Tucker (Grafton/Nambucca),  
0427 925 274**

**Bevan Henderson (WA), 0429 089 780**



## Sub Tropical Receival Sites

Council	Site	Receival Details
Ballina Council	Southern Cross Drive Waste Facility	Receival during open hours. Please notify weighbridge staff on arrival.
Byron Shire Council	Myocum Landfill	Receival during open hours. Please notify staff on arrival.
Coffs Harbour Council	Woolgoolga Waste Transfer Station	Held 3rd Wednesday in May each year
	England's Road Waste Facility	Monday - Friday by appointment only. Ph 0417226 985
Lismore City Council	Lismore Waste Facility Wyrallagh Rd.	Receival during open hours. Please notify weighbridge staff on arrival.
Tweed Shire Council	Stotts Creek Waste Depot	Musters in May and December Deliveries at other times to Stott's Creek by appointment only. Ph. 6670 2440
Nambucca/Maxville	Nambucca Transfer Station.	Ongoing receivals at the Nambucca Transfer Station. Ph. 6568 2170 for bookings and further information.
Fraser Coast R C	Saltwater Creek Road Recycling Centre	Receival during open hours. Please notify weighbridge staff on arrival.
	Bauple Tip	Receival during open hours. Please notify staff on arrival.
Moreton Bay R C	Caboolture Tip, Bribie Island Road.	Receival during open hours. Please notify staff on arrival.
	Wamuran Co-op	Receivals for clients during open hours at the Co-op
Sunshine Coast R C	Pomona Transfer Stn	Receival during open hours. Please notify staff on arrival.
	Nambour Landfill	By appointment Ph. Viv on 0417 763 008 or 5475 7022
	Beerwah Transfer Stn	Anytime during open hours Mon - Friday.
Bundaberg R C	Tirroan Landfill, Childers Landfill, Meadowvale Transfer Station, Booyal Transfer Station, Impact Recycling Bundaberg	All sites receive drums during open hours.
	Qunaba Landfill	Receival by appointment. Ph. 4150 5400 for bookings
	Onfarm Service	Free onfarm pickup for over 200 drums in Bundaberg Regional Council area. Ph. 4155 3851 for bookings.
Carnarvon, W.A.	Browns Range Landfill	Receival during open hours Monday to Friday

# FOR SALE

## Banana Ripening rooms

Located in SE Qld and from ex wholesale business.

There are various sizes and configurations available: 2 x 6 pallet, 3 x 6 pallet and a 28 pallet large holding room.

All are less than 10 years old, have been well maintained and are in excellent working order.

Made by Qld Cold Rooms, they feature 3 phase, sliding doors and are easy to relocate. Trickle gas injection system also available.

Phone Dianne on 0438 129046 for details or to arrange an inspection.



## Want to buy or sell?

The Subtropics Banana News is offering space to sell equipment or to put in 'wanted to buy' mentions as a service to growers. This applies to farm or associated equipment - sorry no household garage sales!



## New Biosecurity Act for Qld

As a result of the Queensland Biosecurity Strategy 2009–14 a new Act will modernise Queensland's biosecurity legislative framework.

A draft of the Biosecurity Bill 2009 will be released in 2010 for extensive public consultation before it is finalized.

Views and comments on the current Queensland legislation dealing with biosecurity and your suggestions for the new approach are welcomed.

The ABGC will be responding on behalf of the industry, but growers are invited to respond as individuals. All responses are required by November 7 2009.

To review Queensland's biosecurity strategy visit [www.deedi.qld.gov.au](http://www.deedi.qld.gov.au) or for more information email: [sandra.golding@deedi.qld.gov.au](mailto:sandra.golding@deedi.qld.gov.au)

## Subtropical on the web

The ABGC website now features a specific section for the subtropical sector and you can view it [www.abgc.org.au](http://www.abgc.org.au)

The pages provide an introduction to the subtropical sector, with archives of past Subtropics Banana News and the e-newsletter. Sections on each state and region are also featured and we are now featuring information about meetings and other regional news.

The first fact sheets for the Subtropical Research and Best Practice Guide are now going online as well.

Log in, visit the site and see for yourself.

## Australian Bananas promotion - update



Star of the NRL Grand Final Billie Slater got on his bike with his nine month old daughter Tyla Rose to support National Ride to Work Day and promote Australian Bananas

### Bananas online

The current promotions campaign is well underway and now 'Australian bananas' are featuring on Facebook.

In mid October already the new site had attracted over 1,000 fans.

The first phase of TV and radio advertising has finished and the Facebook campaign is just one of the online campaigns which have begun.

Websites such as 'inthemix', 'moshtix' or 'Adconian TV' aimed at the 18-39 years old target audience are included. These entertainment and information websites attract hundreds of thousands of 'hits' each week.

Early feedback is that visits to the

Australian Bananas website are increasing so younger people are interested to find out more.

### Banana powered bike riding

Australian Bananas were key sponsors for the National Ride to Work Day on 14 October.

15,000 bananas were given away at breakfasts held in city locations across Australia in exchange for banana logo use and promotion in all publicity and advertisements for the day.

Bananas ambassador, Billy Slater, the star of the NRL Grand Final, also featured in the promotion of the event.

## NSW Banana Industry Act - Review Update

More than 20 submissions have been lodged and two meetings were held with growers as part of the review process.

At the Murwillumbah meeting there were 20 people, while around 30 attended the Coffs Harbour meeting.

The introduction of a national banana levy for research, disease control and promotion opened for question whether the existing state-based banana levy raised under the Banana Industry Act 1987 is required in New South Wales.

The review is being conducted by Industry and Investment NSW.

Following the meetings Trevor Black, Chair of the BIC said that most agreed that the Act should be repealed and the committee be dissolved now that the main roles of the BIC were now being undertaken through the new national levy.

It costs around \$130,000 a year to maintain the committee, before any programs are funded, which makes it a very expensive 'holding' cost.

Chief Economist with IINSW, Mr Scott Davenport is conducting the review and will provide a report to the Minister in early December for consideration.

# See how you measure up and how you can improve your business – new benchmarking study

A new project that will allow growers to compare their production processes and business performance against others in the banana industry has begun called the “Banana Enterprise Performance Comparison.”

Experience across agricultural industries has shown that by sharing information it is possible for all growers to become more productive and profitable.

The project is funded through the national levy and organised jointly by the Banana Industry Advisory Committee, ABGC and HAL.

The project has been awarded to CDI Pinnacle Management, a Brisbane based consultancy, and it will be managed by director, Shane Comiskey.

“I was a fruit and vegetable grower with my family up to 10 years ago, so I understand the need to provide research which is really useful to growers.”

A letter is soon to be dispatched to banana growers inviting participation in the project. A cross section of 50 growers is being sought.

“The process will be very simple, a phone discussion will be followed by a meeting in person to gather details. We will need a range of information about your farm in order to establish benchmarks for the industry,” says Shane.

To compare a business with another business, all activities from ground preparation right through to when you market your bananas needs to be understood. Information on your properties, farming processes, technologies in use, harvesting, handling and packing practices and finally production volumes and financials needs to be gathered.

## Confidentiality assured

Personal (particularly financial) information will be protected in a number of ways including:

- **Only CDIPM personnel will have access to the financial information provided, which will be destroyed afterwards.**
- **All growers will be allocated an identification number so they remain anonymous.**
- **Data that might identify specific growers, eg. very large production volumes, will not be reported. All Key Performance Indicator reports will be presented as averages or percentages.**
- **The ongoing management of the program will be the responsibility of the ABGC.**

Participants in the project will receive their own individual benchmarking report which will compare their business against others participating in the project. Non-participating growers will have access to industry average data.

If you are interested in participating or finding out more about the project contact Shane Comiskey on 07 3217 6466 or email [scomisk@pinnaclemanagement.com.au](mailto:scomisk@pinnaclemanagement.com.au)

“We have recently completed two very similar assignments on behalf of the oyster and aquaculture prawn industries - feedback from growers has been very positive that it has provided a useful business management tool,” says Shane.

## What's new in the World?

### Snack wrap

7-Eleven in Dallas in the US is trialling single bananas in plastic wrap to increase shelf life.

Fresh Del Monte created the wrap, which slows respiration by keeping most oxygen and moisture out. The bananas, green when wrapped, will ripen more slowly.

For 7-Eleven, which is increasingly dependent on fresh food sales as cigarette sales spiral downward, this is no small matter. The chain will sell more than 27 million bananas this year. (abc News -USA)

### Push button bananas

At a Chicago conference a new vending machine has been displayed which dispenses individual fresh bananas.

Other products include fresh-cut pineapple chunks, apple slices, grapes, baby carrots, celery sticks and grape tomatoes. Some of the cut fruits and vegetables are available with light dips. Prices range from US\$1 to \$2.25 per item. (Miami Herald)

### Bananas into plastic

Researchers at Queens University in Belfast are turning banana plants into plastic as part of a pioneering study, which promises environmental benefits and may increase the profitability for plantation owners and boost job security for workers, one of the university experts said.

Household items like wheelie bins and plastic dolls could be made using the new technique. (Belfast Herald)

### Banana chips

In Jamaica wafer-thin chips of bananas are being fried with barbecue and other secret Jamaican seasonings to create ‘St. Mary’s Barbeque Banana Chips’.

They are packed by the JP Group into bright yellow and burgundy bags, fully sealed and ready for supermarket shelves.

What began as a cost-saving measure to avoid wasting bananas has turned into JP’s main product. Snacks now account for 70 percent of business. (Miami Herald)

## What does it all mean?

### ‘Benchmarking’

Essentially, benchmarking provides a snapshot of the performance of your business and helps you understand where you are in relation to a particular standard, which this project will help set in our banana industry.

### ‘Key Performance Indicator’ or KPI’s

Key Performance Indicators are quantifiable measurements, agreed to beforehand and unique to a business or industry, that reflect the critical factors needed for a business to achieve success.



Shane Comiskey from Pinnacle will lead the project.



# THE SUBTROPICS BANANA NEWS

**this issue**

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## Editorial

It is hard to believe that 2009 is coming to an end and soon we will be writing '10 on our cheques, if we still write them!

Electronic banking is rapidly replacing the need for cheques, there are literally millions of mobile phones in use in Australia every day, and people are under all sorts of different 'modern' pressures in their lives.

It is interesting then, that an increasing number of people in capital cities and regional centres are going back to the 'old' ways when it comes to food and produce.

From my observations the organic push is clearly happening here and is a market niche that offers opportunities for growers in Australia.

Sure it is not for everyone, nor is it likely that the majority of consumers will want organic, but those who do, they are willing to pay a premium and a better return results for growers.

The Marketing Review said a key short term possibility for subtropical growers was expanding into the premium independent food and produce retailers. Growing organic could be one alternative for some subtropical growers to grow your businesses?

Have a safe and happy festive season!

*Neille*



*Who are these young people and what are they doing? Turn to page 8 for the answer.*

## New National Hort Award news

The Horticulture Australia Council has just put in submissions to vary the 2010 National Horticultural Award so that better consideration is taken of industry needs.

As well as the banana industry, the Council includes around 20 other horticultural organisations in its membership and has been mounting a case to vary the Award on key points:

- to enable employers to continue to pay piece rates of pay to casual employees who pick produce, as opposed to a minimum rate of pay supplemented by an incentive based payment;
- to pay with regard to the perishable nature of the produce grown when setting hours of work provisions for employees who pick and pack the produce; and
- to provide for roster arrangements and working hours that are sufficiently flexible to accommodate seasonal demands and restrictions caused by weather as to when work can be performed.

The HAC is hoping that it will be able to argue its case before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, as "we have significant independent economic analysis that documents the potential negative impacts on the horticultural industry from the Award as it now stands," said a HAC spokesperson.

While the new Award is due to come into effect on January 1, it is believed most provisions will not affect smaller growers until July 1, 2010. More information in future editions.

## Forum to seek growers' input

Growers from all banana regions of Australia will be given the opportunity to input into the future of the industry at a special forum in Coffs Harbour in March next year.

"The forum is being organised to collect the views of growers about possible topics for research and development and how the Industry levies are best spent," says CEO of ABGC Tony Heidrich.

One person from each region will be invited to attend the forum, which will also be attended by the chairs of the Industry Advisory Committee and its sub-committees.

"It is hoped that each region will be able to discuss issues at their first meetings of the year or convene a special meeting to do that, and also select a representative to take their views to the forum.

All costs of attendance will be covered by the ABGC to make it accessible to all.

"It is important that we can collect opinions and ideas so that national levies can be used to assist our industry's development in the future," said Tony.

It will be a busy week in Coffs Harbour for the banana industry from Monday 1 March. The forum will precede the first ABGC Board meeting of 2010, as well as IAC and subcommittee meetings.



Know-how for Horticulture™

# Opportunities to grow the domestic market

In the last News, there was a general story on the ‘Opportunities to Grow the Domestic Market for Subtropical Bananas’ Report. Here we look at some of the findings and recommendations.

A key challenge in market development is identifying how to position the product with consumers so that the product attributes they value the most are emphasized and the product is insulated as much as possible from competitor value propositions. The first table shows Inovact’s assessment of the product attributes that are always talked about – size, sweetness and product origin.

Attribute		Consumer Preference		Ability to defend in market	
Title	Description	Strength	Assessment	Strength	Assessment
Size	Sub-tropical bananas are readily supplied in smaller sizes than current market standards.		Most preferred attribute. Consumer surveys have shown a consistent and widespread preference for smaller fruit amongst consumers.		Less defendable. Tropical suppliers are also able to supply smaller fruit by altering practices. Relying on this attribute alone may make it difficult to defend markets in the longer term.
Sweetness	Longer growing times in subtropical regions can produce a relatively sweeter fruit.		A preferred attribute. Consumer surveys have shown a preference for tastier fruit that is significant but weaker than size preference.		Defendable. Subtropical systems are able to produce sweetness. However sweetness is not evident to consumer at point of sale and preference will take time and consistent performance to build.
Regional origin	Sub-tropical bananas come from distinct regional areas.		Least preferred attribute. There is some evidence of consumer preferences for regional origin being important in sub-tropical regions. There is no strong evidence that this will drive preference in other markets.		Most defendable. This is the attribute that is most unique to subtropical fruit and is easily communicated.

The Report says achieving market development will require a long-term commitment by all of industry. It says that three strategies could be adopted at an industry level to catalyse sub-tropical market development.

They are: **1. Develop Awareness, 2. Inform Decision Making, 3. Facilitate Action**

An analysis of each strategy in terms of initiatives, investment, benefits and risks is provided in the chart below.

Strategy	Types of Initiatives	Poss. Cost	Industry Involvement	Key Benefits	Key Risks
Develop Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Active communication of these report findings in industry and wider communication channels, and</li> <li>– Providing targeted opportunities for groups of growers to interact with successful businesses from across the supply chain who understand the market development opportunity and how it can be pursued.</li> </ul>	\$20,000 - \$100,000	Low - the industry is mostly a passive participant in the market development process.	Development remains completely driven by private actions with access to industry research and information	The initiative has limited or no impact on market development
Inform Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Initiatives above designed to develop awareness</li> <li>– Consumer research to develop a stronger understanding of consumer preference at point of sale</li> <li>– Development of in-store promotional / communication concepts</li> </ul>	\$50,000 – \$200,000	Medium – the industry is actively trying to support good decision making	Market development is more likely to succeed as it is driven by better market information	Limited engagement by businesses in research design makes it less influential
Facilitate Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Initiatives above designed to develop awareness and inform decision making</li> <li>– Development of product quality</li> <li>– Facilitation of supply chain partnerships</li> </ul>	\$100,000 - \$300,000	High – the industry is actively trying to support good decision making and facilitate partnerships	Growers who are less able to make development happen have a forum and assistance	Industry is seen as responsible for business success Limited private engagement and investment

## Comment

The review provides a sound platform on which marketing ideas can be drawn up for the subtropical sector.

ABGC CEO Tony Heidrich suggests that an ideas group of committed growers could help get thinking going to explore wider market outlets.

“I think there are a lot of ideas out there and they just need to be gathered together and considered for any marketing mix. For example in the suburbs of the cities snack and food vans supply lunches and snacks to thousands of workers every day – is this a market opportunity for subtropical bananas?”

For a copy of the report go to [www.horticulture.com.au](http://www.horticulture.com.au) or email [neville@greenpr.com.au](mailto:neville@greenpr.com.au)



# Floods in Coffs again!

It has been a big year for floods in Coffs Harbour with the area being hit for at least the third time with over 500mm in 24 hours last month.

Nicky Singh had a new creek 'develop' on his property and his main dam half filled with soil and rocks washed down.

The photos show areas which were washed away by the flood waters. Where Nicky is standing was 2 metres of soil which was grassed between plantations. Overall though, there was little damage sustained by the banana plants in the area - most damage was done to infrastructure such as roads.



## Around the regions

### Tweed/Brunswick

There was a good attendance at the recent AGM which was held at the Murwillumbah Golf Club and followed by an informal dinner.

Elected – again – to the post of President was Robert Pierce with Vice President for the year ahead being Andy Everest. Dave Perry continues as Treasurer and Kelly Burgoyne as Secretary. Just about all other growers in attendance volunteered to be on the Committee!

I & I NSW's Jeremy Bright conducted a brief needs assessment review during the meeting in which growers were asked about issues of most importance to them. The results will be reported in the February edition of Subtropics Bananas News.

### Murwillumbah Show results

Andy Everest received the trophy for Most Successful Exhibitor at the 2009 Murwillumbah Show, scoring a win in seven of the 11 classes to take the trophy, including Champion Hand, Champion Carton, Best Hands of Cavendish and Lady Fingers, as well as the best commercial bunches of both varieties. He also got five second places!

Graeme Disney won three of the other classes - Heaviest bunches of Cavendish and Lady Fingers, and Best Commercial Carton of Cavendish, and took out three second places.

The other remaining class was for Champion bunch of the Show which went to Neil and Elizabeth Thompson, who also scored two second places in other classes. The only other grower to get a 'look in' was Robert Pierce, with second place in the Best Lady Finger Hand.

Andy Everest was presented with the most successful exhibitor trophy from the recent Murwillumbah Show.



Andy Everest



Lyn Black from Richmond managed to secure some promotional t shirts for the Dunoon women's soccer team for the Masters' Games. They didn't win, but it was great exposure for Australian bananas!

### Nambucca

The November meeting was a quiet one at Nambucca. There was some concern raised about the results of the recent Marketing Report and general discussion that bunch bags were not lasting as long as they used to.

With the help of Mick Gentle at the meeting, sample bananas were organised to go to the Sydney Morning Herald's food writer, Robin Powell, to encourage people in Sydney to look for NSW bananas.

### Richmond

Richmond growers recently took part in the annual Lismore Show mounting an exhibition of the fruits of their labour (see photo).

### Coffs Harbour/Woolgoolga

The AGM for Coffs/Woolgoolga was held at the November meeting with Ron Gray back in the President's seat and Wally Gately his Vice President. Taking on the role of second VP is Phil Bicknell.

Among topics of discussion in the general meeting was the problem with brush turkeys damaging fruit. A possible Factsheet will be considered on dealing with the problem.

### SE Queensland

Nothing to report from this area at the moment – that we know about! Growers – please remember to tell us if you have any news of interest – always keen to hear what is going on.

### WA Carnarvon

A new website is up and running for the Sweeter Banana Coop. Check it out at [www.sweeterbanana.com](http://www.sweeterbanana.com) – it is bright, happy and informative!

Having just experienced days over 40 degrees, the importance of a secure water supply is never more evident. The WA State Government has given approval to fund the remaining part of a new water pipeline ensuring adequate water resources, essential for sustainability of the Carnarvon horticultural region. A detailed report will be in a future edition.

# A commitment to organics

Innovative and committed are two words to describe husband and wife, Tony and Dianne Coe, in their banana growing.

They have around 20 hectares of beautiful country on top of a mountain range at Bowraville on NSW's mid north coast. (They are in the Nambucca district)

They were never banana growers until they bought the property eight years ago, which had been largely abandoned by the previous grower some years earlier. What bananas were left needed plenty of 'TLC' to get them back to good production.

Tony and Dianne are certainly committed. Both are vegetarians, have strong Christian beliefs and both made a commitment to grow organically. Both of them work on the farm daily.

Currently they are managing four hectares, just this year they have planted another one hectare and are steadily expanding their plantation.

While they say it is no more expensive, their commitment to organics and sustainable agriculture has meant lots of hard work, removing weeds by hand and the production of their own fish emulsion, which they foliar spray fortnightly. Foliar feeding is 8 to 20 times more efficient than root feeding, according to Graeme Sait from Nutra-Tech Solutions.

## Soil biology

"We found that we have an excess of phosphorous in our soil so the microbes in our spray fertiliser help break down the phosphorous as well as other locked up nutrients."

Zinc, iron, copper, sulphates are added into the mix as well as folvic 1400 to help the plants absorb the nutrients. Potassium silicate is also added to the liquid fertiliser.

They are concentrating on getting their soil biology right and use microbes to improve their soil.

"We also use Nutri-tech microbe food and Mother Earth organic fertiliser. We only use BFA certified product, apart from the natural products we get such as the fish emulsion and oyster shells," says Tony.

The oyster shells are spread on the soil and break down over time adding calcium.

"Good mulching has also helped us bring back to life poor plants and keep down weeds."

Their plantations are on very steep land so stopping soil erosion has been important for them as well, making sure that access tracks are well made and trash helps to stem the flow of any heavy rains.

Being organic, they don't use any sprays to control pests. Old butts are cut open and left to dry to kill any beetle larva. They make beetle traps from cut up stools to attract the beetles, then they catch them and destroy them, thus stopping the breeding cycle.

## Good hygiene

Attention to hygiene is also important and they try to keep the shed as clean as possible and also thoroughly clean bags before reusing.

When washing banana hands, ozone is added to the water to clean them without the use of any chemicals. Ozone is actually pure oxygen which kills the bacteria.

New suckers planted out have attracted the interest of local wallabies and they have been using a product called D.Ter to control them.

They are committed to growing organically and while it means more work, they feel that once they have the plantation fully established, the work should ease a little.

For Tony and Dianne, getting production right has been their primary aim in their endeavours and while they market into Sydney, increasing their markets will be the next stage as they extend the plantation.

Editor's note: I can honestly say that the bananas they gave me were among the best bananas I have ever tasted!



Tony cuts up the stools for trash and to create beetle traps



Weeds are kept down by constant maintenance and a good layer of trash





A new planting – those at the bottom have been eaten by the local wallabies!



Tony and Diane proudly with a freshly cut bunch of their organic Cavs.

## Project update



### Mapping the problem

In NSW all commercial plantations in the specific region have now been inspected and an action plan has been drawn up, taking into account a variety of factors.

A plantation rating scheme has been established and the new categories are:

- A - No BBTV recorded**
- B - No BBTV for 2 years (provisionally free)**
- C - No more than 1 in last 12 months**
- D - More than 1 in last 12 months**
- E - More than 10 in last 12 months**

This chart shows the number of plantations per risk category.

CATEGORY	AREA (HA)	No. of PLANTATIONS	% BY AREA
A	203.40	72	26.8
B	161.47	53	21.3
C	214.55	46	28.2
D	141.78	26	18.7
E	38.04	9	5.0
TOTAL	759.24ha	206	100.0%

David Peasley and his team have drawn up an inspection frequency for the categories and Category D & E will be inspected every 4 weeks during the growing season and once over winter, Category C & B plantations will be inspected two to three times a year, while Category A will have a minimum of 1 inspection per year.

### Cross border cooperation

The National Project Steering Committee is meeting as this issue is going to press and is addressing the issue of across the border cooperation.

The two NSW inspectors and Edith Nicholls (from Qld) will be meeting Dr John Thomas in his laboratory at QDPI Indooroopilly to familiarize themselves with the science behind the bunchy top virus and the development of the eradication strategy.

### New awareness leaflet



A new leaflet designed to increase awareness of the possibility of the disease in home gardens and 'backyarder' properties has just been printed.

The leaflet points out the basic signs to look for and stresses the need to call an inspector if they have any doubts. It will be distributed in SE Qld and NSW by the Bunchy Top team when they are out and about.

A full progress report on the National Bunchy Top Project will be in the December edition of 'Australian Bananas'.

## From the ABGC Board...

The latest ABGC Board meeting was held on 3 December at South Johnstone. Here are the key points of interest to subtropical growers...

### New President

Cameron MacKay was elected President. He had been in the role temporarily after Nicky Singh stepped down. The new Vice President is Adrian Crema and the new Deputy Vice President is Paul Johnston.

### Major Review approved

The Board decided that it was time to review the strategic plan, the constitution, membership structure and fees of the ABGC.

A committee or panel will be formed which will include board members, representative growers from each banana growing state, along with ex-officio people who can assist in the evaluations and recommendations that follow.

Apart from growers, it was agreed that subtropical communications officer Neville Sloss will be included in the review.

CEO Tony Heidrich is undertaking the early planning and the project will be the first major exercise for the new CEO when he/she takes over the role in March 2010.

### New CEO to be appointed

After eight years of outstanding service, Tony Heidrich announced his resignation recently and will be finishing in the role in February.

"I have thoroughly enjoyed my time with the

Australian banana industry, and now it is time to move on to other challenges," Tony said.

Interviews with prospective candidates have just been completed and the announcement of the new CEO is expected soon.

### Banana Congress 2011

The next Banana Congress will be held around the first week in June in 2011 and it has been decided to hold it again in South East Queensland.

After its great success this year on the Gold Coast, it was felt that the location was most central for the whole of industry, while allowing growers to combine a holiday with the event.

### NT now on Plant Health Subcommittee

Stephen West, the Chief Plant Health Manager with the Northern Territory's Department of Regional Development, Primary Industry, Fisheries & Resources, has been nominated for IAC Plant Health Sub-committee.

His appointment will complete representation from all banana growing states.

### NSW Board spot

The vacant board position for NSW will remain vacant pending the review outcomes. "We want to make it easier to attract directors so we may need to change our constitution to accommodate this," says Tony Heidrich.

## A great farewell and a big thank you to Len Collins

Tully grower Len Collins is well-known for leading the campaign to keep Australia free from imported banana pests and diseases as former chairman of the Australian Banana Growers' Council imports committee.

That's why many banana industry families and friends gathered at a farewell and thank you dinner on 3 December to recognise the great contribution made by Len during the past 10 years on the imports issue.

Len spearheaded a four-pronged scientific, legal, political and public awareness response on behalf of Australian industry when the Australian Government began an import risk analysis in 2000 after the Philippines lodged an application to export bananas.

Attending the dinner were Senator Ron Boswell and Member for Hinchinbrook, Andrew Cripps along with Len's chosen successor as imports chair Patrick Leahy

ABGC CEO Tony Heidrich said: 'Len has the innate qualities of a natural born leader – a combination of quiet confidence, determination, decisiveness and clear thinking.

As a thank you to Len, the ABGC presented him with a limited edition book, A Salute to Leadership, which encapsulates the essence of the 10-year campaign and includes tributes from 16 of Len's associates.

Copies of the excellent book compiled by Jane Milburn are available from the ABGC office – call Jann on (07) 32784786.



Above: Len Collins and Senator Ron Boswell  
Below: Grower, Pat Arcella and Patrick Leahy, new chair of the Imports Committee



## ABGC - it is YOUR industry voice



Some growers question the value of membership or the voluntary levies associated with the ABGC. But do you question the value of the banana industry having an ABGC??

The Australian wool industry has the Australian Wool Corporation, vegetable growers have AusVeg, and even garlic growers have the Australian Garlic Industry Association. Across the horticultural and other rural production industries of Australia, association bodies work in the interests of their members.

Without the efforts of ABGC, would we have had Filipino bananas coming into Australia soon?

The Mission statement says: The Australian Banana Growers' Council Inc will represent the interests of Australian banana growers by:

- formulating and advocating industry policy;
- communicating information;
- promoting best practice in marketing and environmental management;
- fostering research and development; and
- engaging in all related activities which together will lead to the long term prosperity of the Australian banana growing industry.

For all growers, and particularly for NSW growers with the possible end of the BIC, the ABGC is the main force of the industry. It relies entirely on the voluntary levies for its operation and contrary to popular belief it does NOT have any access to the new national levy. ABGC deserves your support to represent all growers.

**STOP PRESS: The ABGC Board is undertaking a study to look at membership and fees to take the Council forward and gain more support for its role and its operation – stay tuned for more!**



# Sweet Success in WA

One of the great success stories of the Western Australian banana industry is the Sweeter Banana Cooperative at Carnarvon.

Formed 16 years ago, it represents 28 growers in the Carnarvon growing region or about 50% of them in WA.

From its packing shed it can pack and send out up to 10000 boxes of bananas per week during peak season, supplying around 10- 20% of the Perth Market.

“We are producing three lines, extra large bananas, ‘Lunch Box’ bananas and seconds which are now our ‘Smoothies’ bananas,” says Manager Bryce Guthrie.

Bryce is new to the Coop and Carnarvon this year but has taken up his role with great enthusiasm. Previous shed manager, banana grower Darrell Munro, has now semi-retired but still keeps an eye on things.

The Co-Op is managed by a grower board including Chairman Tom Day and Vice Chairman Tim Hyde. A marketing committee includes board members Tim Hyde, Doriana Mangili and grower Catriona Nixon.

Up to 35 staff are employed in the packing shed, many of them who have been employed for some time, in a region where lots of workers are casual backpackers.

“We have a waiting list of 75 people who want to work here so that is a good sign that we provide a good working environment,” says Bryce.



Trong Ngoc Nguyen, who has been with the SBC for six years.



Washing and preparing for packing



Manager Bryce Guthrie in front of the packing team



An overview of the packing shed

When the bunches are brought in from growers, they are queued up, sprayed to keep them cool in the hot summer months and automatically weighed and recorded to the specific grower.

Unlike the rest of the country, most Carnarvon bananas are sent to market already packed into plastic bags usually of 750gms. Lunch Box bananas have been a great success story, and have been marketed on their convenient size and their sweeter taste.

“The hands are tracked right through the packing system so we can identify any fruit leaving the shed,” said Bryce. “Each day they are then stored in our cool rooms and loaded that night for the road trip to Perth. They are in the markets within 24 hours.”

The system also allows the Coop to accurately record each grower’s different product, grading and volumes and then pay them on a weekly basis. Growers have access to an intranet site where they can check their position in the league table for quality, volumes and bunch sizes, as well as the top three growers and the average for the week, month or year. Up to date prices are also posted on the intranet site so growers can see their returns on line.

Catriona says the marketing of seconds bananas as Smoothies packed into bright bags has been really successful since their introduction earlier this year.

“We have been able to add value to our growers’ returns.”

# Australian Bananas Promotion

– continues on several fronts

## The campaign to encourage Australians to eat more bananas continued with a major promotion during November in IGA stores across the country.

David Chenu from Horticulture Australia Ltd who is managing the campaign reports that 1280 promotional kits were distributed to stores which included posters, entry forms and other promotional materials.

“People had to purchase at least one kilogram of bananas to get an entry form, which put them in the draw for a family holiday to the Gold Coast,” says David.

“This has been one direct promotion to directly increase purchases, while our other marketing activities are designed to increase awareness and encourage more people, particularly younger people to try bananas as a snack/energy food.”



Television advertising for the current financial year has finished, with the campaign through August reaching 2.89 million people in the targeted younger age groups.

It featured on shows like ‘Packed to the Rafters’, ‘My Name is Earl’ and ‘Rove’.

On the radio front, through September a national campaign is estimated to have been heard at least five times by more than 2 million 18-39 year olds in Australia.

In addition, advertisements promoting bananas were also broadcast over Coles and Woolworths in-store radio.

## Digital campaign

The digital campaign includes advertising on popular websites including those aimed at the youth market, such as Inthemix.com.au, moshtix and news.com entertainment section.

“We also have a presence on Facebook and have already attracted over 3,000 fans in a few weeks,” says David.

**The big promotion carrying into 2010 will be with the ‘So You Think You Can Dance’ program on the 10 Network.**

During auditions over the last two months, a ‘banana lounge’ was set up for contestants waiting for their audition, where they could relax and recuperate, with the help of a banana or two. (answer to photo question on page 1!)

When the program begins on 31 January, Australian bananas will be heavily promoted through the life of the program over 14 weeks.

‘Make your body sing’ – on the dance floor!

## Can you help in Panama disease research?

Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries is involved in a new ACIAR project led by Tony Pattison from their South Johnstone office and as part of that project they are trying to determine some soil health characteristics that might help to suppress Panama disease.

To do this study they need to compare fields where Panama is bad with fields where it isn't so bad (for whatever reasons - good management or natural soil characteristics that slow the development and spread of the disease).

10 fields in the subtropics are needed for the study - 5 “bad” and 5 “suppressive”. Involvement would mean probably only requiring one visit to take some soil samples (of course using every precaution against spreading the pathogen).

They will perform a comprehensive array of tests on the soil samples to learn as much as they can about the soil health status. Knowing what is happening in your soil will be an added bonus to the grower participants.

If you think you might fit the bill and are willing to involve your property, telephone Jeremy Bright on 02 6626 2445.

## Fact Sheets for your folder.

Inserted into this edition of The Subtropics Banana News are the next two Fact Sheets.

No.2 is the first part looking at Nutrition and the importance of soil testing to help you plan your fertiliser program. No. 3 provides an overview on Panama disease and some tips in dealing with it.

They are designed to be kept aside in a folder for reference – the holes have already been punched for you!

They are also being put on the Subtropical pages of the ABGC website. Online we will also be adding links to any new research relevant to the topics.

More are coming in the New Year – dealing with Flying Foxes and more on nutrition, among other issues.

## Here's to a very Merry Christmas and wonderful New Year!

Best wishes to all in the subtropical banana industry for the festive season ahead.

Relax, put your feet up for at least a day or two, and enjoy the company of family and friends.



The Subtropics Banana News will be back in February! In the meantime, don't forget to send in any contributions or photos – all welcome.



# THE SUBTROPICS BANANA NEWS

**this issue**

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New CEO for Banana Growers Council p.8

## Editorial

So here we are in February and how many New Year's resolutions have already fallen by the wayside?

New Year's resolutions are normally personal goals or intentions, but maybe we could have a couple of late ones for the subtropical banana industry in general?

How about any or all of the following?

- We will work to maintain quality and consistency in our product
- We will look at ways to extend our markets
- We will participate in regional meetings where possible and be more involved in our industry
- We will get a better price for our product!

It's probably more of a 'wish list' than New Year's resolutions, but with a more professional approach across the subtropical industry, who says they cannot be achieved?

Following the widespread coverage of the wastage of FNQ 'less than perfect bananas' story in January, many people voiced their support for smaller tastier bananas, grown of course in the subtropics.

Let's hope in 2010 more of this market can be tapped for everyone's benefit. Hopefully the forum coming up in Coffs Harbour will provide the opportunity for ideas to capitalise on this.

Regards,

*Neille*

This newsletter is funded by HAL using the banana levy and matched funds from the Australian Government.



(l to r) Edith Nicholls, David Peasley, Tony Burke

## Bunchy Top briefing for Minister Burke

The Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon Tony Burke, began his working year with a tour through some horticultural districts including a visit to Snake Gully Bananas in SE Queensland to keep up to date with issues confronting the industry.

The occasion was a good opportunity for him to be made aware of the National Bunchy Top Project, now six months into its implementation. The project is being funded by the national levy with matched Australian Government funding.

NSW Coordinator, David Peasley, and SE Qld inspector, Edith Nicholls, explained the program and what was being undertaken in northern NSW and SE Queensland to control the virus, as the first stage towards its eradication.

They highlighted that with few commercial farms in the region now, that the task there was straightforward, but the bigger issue was on the smaller hobby farms and in backyard plots of bananas.

A publicity program to increase awareness of the virus was launched successfully in northern NSW late last year and the campaign has just begun in SE Qld.

David explained that in northern NSW, all the commercial farms had been mapped and a comprehensive work plan had been established to destroy and monitor those farms with the disease. (See Australian Bananas Dec 09 edition for comprehensive report)

Kurt Lindsay's Snake Gully Bananas farm near Caboolture had some excellent bananas on display to rival any of those that might come out of far north Queensland.

Kurt's father, Greg, was on hand to point out how much better subtropical bananas tasted (than FNQ ones!) and gave the minister and his entourage some samples to prove it!



(l to r) David Peasley, Edith Nicholls, Tony Burke, Kurt Lindsay



Know-how for Horticulture™

# Bunchy top update



Apart from bringing the Federal Agriculture Minister Tony Burke up to speed on the project in January, the team have been hard at work on both sides of the border.

In SE Queensland, there has been a change in team members with Trevor Lanham taking over the supervisory role for the project and working alongside inspector Edith Nicholls.

This will benefit the project as Trevor has been involved in past activities to control Bunchy Top, so his experience will be invaluable in the new project's implementation.

A media release has just been distributed in the Sunshine Coast area to alert residents of the possibility of Banana Bunchy Top Virus in their plants in their backyard or hobby farm.

"It is relatively simple to find infected banana plants in commercial plantations, but beyond those properties we require assistance from the community in tracking down and destroying infected plants," Ms Nicholls said in the release.

It is hoped the publicity will generate more awareness of sickly looking bananas and the need to report them to the 1800 hotline, either on their own property or on neighbours.

## In NSW

A very comprehensive report on the Project was published in the December edition of Australian Bananas, but after a well earned Christmas break, David and the two detectors, Wayne and Grant are back on the job.

They are utilising the database that they have created to organise their work plans and return visits to infect farms.

A trial on the effectiveness of different insecticides to control aphids is now underway at the Alstonville Centre for Tropical Horticulture and results will be reported in a future edition of Subtropics Banana News.

# Regional round-up

## SE Queensland



Kurt Lindsay (pictured above) didn't let a visit from the Federal Agriculture Minister Tony Burke interrupt his work – he shows he's quite capable at cutting hands as well as telling the Minister a few things about the subtropical banana industry and the importance of no imports because of disease risks.

## Nambucca

The first meeting of the year was held on 2 February with a smaller attendance than usual. Topics were the fall away in prices and the upcoming Industry Forum.

Two or three growers will attend the Forum in addition to their nominated delegate, as it is 'just up the road'. The delegate selected was Peter Hughes and Stephen Spear and Gary McCudden will attend.

Next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday 4 May, at the Nambucca Hotel in Macksville, starting at 6pm, followed by subsidised dinner. Details: Peter on 65681908

## Coffs Harbour

The Coffs meeting was told that a change of Agriculture Ministers in NSW had delayed the process for any decisions on the future of the BIC.

Of the submissions made, 20 had been in favour of closing down the BIC, but any recommendations made to the Minister were unknown at this stage.

There was also lively discussion about possible marketing ideas to raise the profile of subtropical bananas, including billboards and point of sale materials.

Ron Gray, Mick Gentle and David Tate will be taking those ideas and others to the Forum in Coffs Harbour on 2 March.

Next Meeting is planned for Wednesday 5 May, starting with subsidised dinner at 6pm.

Details: Michelle, ph: 66525633

## Richmond



With only a few members in the Richmond group they don't have regular meetings, but they do manage to support the industry and local shows. Jeff Larrison (pictured) coordinated an excellent display at the Lismore Show late last year.

## Tweed Brunswick

The February meeting was being held just as this newsletter was going to print so any news will be reported in the next edition.

Details of the next meeting will be published in the March Email-News and the April Newsletter, or contact Robert Pierce on (07) 5590 9812.

## WA Carnarvon

### Desert Sweet

Outside of the Sweeter Banana brand in Carnarvon, the Desert Sweet brand has now become established in the Perth marketplace.

Cherelle Hardman, who with her husband Darryl established the brand, reports now that five growers are packing under the Desert Sweet label.

"The other growers are packing separately, but we are all selling into the Perth marketplace through Mercer Mooney and getting good prices for our fruit. Woolworths are now among our regular customers," says Cherelle.





The Desert Sweet 'competition' vehicle regularly competes in bush races, but its most recent attempt in the Gascoyne Bash saw it break down – not even the sombreros helped it get to the finishing line!

They're aiming to produce more than 100,000 cartons for 2010 and have established a loyal customer base. Apart from promoting their Carnarvon origins, Desert Sweet is also taking part in the 'Buy West Eat Best' government promotion.

"We believe it is good to have a second brand from the region and Desert Sweet is providing that alternative, where the growers still can operate individually, but gain the benefits of being under the one brand," she added.

## Sweeter Coop on Sunrise

Given less than 24 hours notice, Doriana, Catriona and Bryce at the Sweeter Coop welcomed the 7 Network's Sunrise weather man Grant Denyer and crew on February 11.



Grant Denyer in the Sweeter Coop shed.

Doriana reports, "we had a great morning even though we had a 2.00 am start so the eastern states still got live weather! We got the shed up and running and Grant had a turn at hanging some bananas, and doing some sorting!. He seems very passionate about supporting local farmers.

"It was a great experience and absolutely worth losing a night's sleep over! We also got lots of emails from people asking where they can buy sub-tropical bananas in NSW, an encouraging sign for NSW growers - the market is out there, we just need to find a way to get our bananas to the people who want them."

## Freshcare

As usual the Sweeter Coop in WA has been busy with all grower members completing the updated Freshcare certification, Version 3..

The Freshcare Code of Practice Food Safety and Quality is an industry owned standard, describing the good agricultural practices required on farm to provide assurance that fresh produce is safe to eat and has been prepared to meet customer requirements.

Freshcare is the horticultural industry's own on farm assurance program, developed by industry, for industry and operated as a 'not for profit' organisation. It is 'owned' by nineteen peak industry bodies including the Australian Banana Growers Council and supported by Horticulture Australia Limited

## Removing confusion

When is a Carnarvon banana not a Carnarvon banana – when it is from Queensland!

There have been concerns in the WA marketplace that shortfalls in WA bananas are made up with Queensland bananas and presented in the market place as Carnarvon bananas.

This has lead to recent action with the ACCC finding that remedial action needs to be taken by two market agents in Perth, as the situation is misleading to consumers.

Surely people wanting to buy subtropical bananas grown in Carnarvon should know clearly that they are what they appear to be?

## Have your say

Representatives of all the banana growing regional groups will meet in Coffs Harbour in the first week in March.

The day long forum will include a review of the Strategic Plan, an overview of the R&D and promotion programs that have emanated from that plan and other important issues.

If you have a matter you would like discussed please contact your regional representative who will be attending:

WA - Doriana Mangili

Tweed/Brunswick - Robert Pierce

Richmond - Jeff Larsson

Coffs Harbour/Woolgoolga - Ron Gray

Nambucca District – Peter Hughes

Trevor Black as chairman of the BIC in NSW has also been invited to attend and Neville Sloss will be there to report on the outcomes for subtropical growers.

It will be a busy industry week in Coffs Harbour with the Board of ABGC meeting the next day and the Industry Advisory Committee and subcommittees meeting after that.

## Subtropical response

News that a large percentage of the FNQ bananas were wasted because of stringent specifications by the major supermarkets provided an opportunity for a subtropical response through a news release quoting ABGC Board member Peter Molenaar.

The news release, which made the case for NSW bananas which are smaller or blemished but have more flavour, gained widespread use across regional NSW media including ABC North Coast and major regional newspapers.

# The Indian connection in the Subtropical banana industry in Australia

Australian cities have sister cities overseas, but if Australian states had sister states overseas, then New South Wales and Punjab in north west India would be a good fit.

It seems that many Indians working and reliant on the banana industry consider both states their homes!

The first Indians came to Australia from Punjab to work and earn money at the start of the last century, but as the years went by they began buying land and establishing their own farms.

Moved into owning farms was possible as the land was not that expensive to buy and not much else was needed apart from some simple machinery, according to Kirpal Husna of Woolgoolga.

The strength of family has remained over the decades with many men and women travelling backwards and forwards between the two countries to visit relatives and property they own in both countries, and often to get a bride or groom. Some growers are also quite recent immigrants.

Family is all important in the business of growing bananas for the Indian community and here we report on four Indian families in NSW.

## About Sikhism

There are many Indian growers in the subtropical banana industry and on the next pages we report on several families.

As most Indians in Australia come from Punjab, most are Sikhs as it is the main religion of that state, founded there by the guru Nanak in the 16th century.

Its theology is based on a supreme God who governs with justice and grace. Every human being, irrespective of caste or gender, has the opportunity to become one with God. The basic human flaw of self-centredness can be overcome through proper reverence for God, commitment to hard work, service to humanity, and sharing the fruits of one's labour (ref - Britannica Concise Dictionary.)



Above: the Sikh temples in Woolgoolga with the inset being the first Sikh temple in Australia.



Photo: ( l to r ) Harbingin, Harinder, Malkiat, Kirpal and Rajan. Inset : Gurkran

## Woolgoolga

Farming side by side in the Woolgoolga region are the Husna brothers, Harbingin (Harry), Kirpal and Malkiat, who are third generation banana growers in Australia and who have their fourth generation already involved.

Their grandfather Moti first moved to Australia in 1901 and started life as a hawker selling in the Grafton area, and then he moved into farming bananas.

Like most original Indian immigrants, only the worker was allowed to be here so the family remained in India in Punjab, looking after the farms back 'home'.

Moti bought a banana farm then his son 'Charlie' came out to help when he was around 12 years old in the '40s.

The families generally stayed in India, but in 1968, Charlie's wife Kisso and the six children all made the journey to Australia to live.

They bought and sold several banana farms, but after Charlie's death in 1984, the three brothers continued to work the family farm, but gradually ended up with separate but adjoining farms of 30 acres each.

"It remains a family affair with each of our sons interested in continuing on and being banana growers. It seems that only about 25% of Indian families are continuing in just growing bananas with many in the younger generations moving into blueberries and hothouse growing," said Mal.

Kirpal added, "The women also play a big part in the farm, helping with the packing, as well as keeping us fed!"

For the future, Mal's son, Harinder, Kirpal's son, Gurkran and Harry's son, Rajan are all keen to carry on.

"We like the lifestyle, even though it can be hard work. It's cool," Harinder and Rajan agreed.

The brothers all sell into the Sydney and Melbourne markets and have sold mainly Cava in the past.

On Mal's plantation, the decision has been made to move more into Lady Fingers, with the intention to have around 50% of the planting.

"Despite more work required for Lady Fingers, the consistent pricing attracts us," said Mal.

While Australia is now their home, the family still owns the family farm and other property back in the Punjab.

"Not many girls want to marry a banana farmer in this region, so we need to go back to India for our wives!" said Mal.





Kulwinder (left) and Bulwinder Basra stand in front of one of their dwarf Rossi Ladfingers.

## Coffs Harbour

South of Woolgoolga is one of the biggest growing regions in NSW around the city of Coffs Harbour.

Relative 'newcomers' to banana growing in the area are the Basra brothers, Kulwinder and Bulwinder. In 1986, their family moved from Punjab to Woolgoolga, where their uncles had a property.

Father Dilbag Singh Basri, who now helps them out for a few hours each morning, worked for other growers in the early days, but by 1989 was able to buy 12 acres on Coramba Road at Coffs. They still have that property, with an additional 30 acres nearby.

Like Mal Hunsda, the Basri's are planting more Lady Fingers to gain a better and more consistent price for their fruit. They have already planted 14 acres and intend to do another 10 next year.

"We planted our first dwarf or Rossi Lady Fingers three years ago and we are getting excellent bananas from them. We are planting suckers and not tissue culture and they continue to be dwarf plants," said Kulwinder.



Some of the first Rossi Lady Fingers planted alongside the Basra's dam are providing excellent fruit.

They sell through the Melbourne and Sydney Markets under the Basri Top Quality brand.

By pruning hard, they are growing larger bananas and getting their fruit into the major supermarkets.

"The trouble is that we are getting much the same price as we did 20 years ago – in the meantime fertiliser has gone from \$250 to \$1200 a tonne and cartons from \$1 to \$2.50. It is hard to make a profit," said Kulwinder.



Mohan (left) and Jeffery in front of the old packing shed they helped build in 1985.

## Tweed

### The Singh's

In the lush valleys of the Tweed region are many banana farms, which used to supply the majority of bananas for the Australian market.

Nowadays that role belongs to far north Queensland, but many growers are still growing and finding their markets.

Two brothers, Mohan and Jeffery Singh have 50 acres of bananas on their 160 acre property and grow only Cavendish.

They have had a long term relationship with Moraitis in Melbourne and supply between 400 and 1000 cartons a week.

"The relationship is important to us – they take our fruit in the quiet times and provide us with a fair price all year round – we have been with them for many years", said Mohan.

Mohan and Jeffery have carried on where their father Sam left off and are happy with their way of life.

"We start at 5am and finish at lunchtime, but we work seven days a week," says Jeffery.

Mohan worked for 10 years with a car company but is now happy to be working on the farm. Sam still helps out with packing and the brothers do all the other work.

Unlike many banana farms, they have a conveyor belt and not a wheel for cutting, washing, sorting and packing hands.

"It is equivalent to two people and we are very happy with the way it works," says Mohan.

As they are quite isolated, they are able to aerial spray and they control pests and supplement their fertilising this way.

"We live in Murwillumbah so this helps us organise our lives – if we lived on the farm we would always be doing something," says Jeffery.

Unlike some families, they are not sure if the next generation will continue the farm. Mohan's son Steven works on another banana farm and enjoys the company of others of his own age, while Jeffery expects his young children will want to do something else in their lives.

"They are fifth generation here in Australia for our family, but the future is their choice," said Mohan.

# The Indian Connection... continued...

## The Atwals

The Atwals on their farm at Dunbible near Murwillumbah decided to control their own destiny and over the last decade have moved into direct supply to retailers in the Gold Coast region.

Father Dave started banana farming back in the late 1970s with 20 acres after he came from the Punjab. He still has that farm but across the hill is their main farm with around 80 acres planted, one of the biggest farms in the Tweed.

Dave decided to go into ripening when he was no longer able to do the hard physical work around the farm. Now his three sons, Robbie and twins Rodney and Steve, manage most of the work, but Dave still helps out with packing and the ripening rooms.

They have just recently finished a new dispatch shed with three ripening rooms included. By 3am every morning their delivery truck is loaded and then on the road to drop off to around a dozen retailers on the Gold Coast.

"We wanted to have greater control over our prices and our markets and decided to go direct. While sometimes the markets might offer a better price we have a more consistent price by dealing direct," says Rodney.

They market under the Atwal Banana Ripeners brand promoted 'farm ripened fruit', selling most in plastic crates holding 14kg each.

"We still sell some of our fruit into the markets, but we are happy to sell the vast majority direct and are now looking to move into supermarket supply," says Rodney.

They buy Cavendish and Lady Fingers from some other smaller growers to maintain their supply and are also working the farm so that they can better cover 12 months of the year.



Dave and son Rodney show off fruit ready for dispatch in their ripening room.

"We are planting Lady Fingers every year as we find that the fruit from the younger plants is right in the winter months," says Dave.

Importantly, they are working to produce and supply quality fruit for customers and they believe it is as good as any other fruit going into supermarkets.

"With our new dispatch shed and commitment to quality and programs such as Freshcare, we are confident that we will soon be supplying supermarkets on the Gold Coast," said Rodney.

Times have changed since the Northern Rivers region was supplying 85% of Australia's bananas around 30 years ago. Dave remembers driving down to the Murwillumbah train station and not being able to park and unload his bananas, it was so busy.

"We believe we have a future in the banana industry, and we have chosen the direct way to market. As long as we do it right we believe we can build our business further," says Rodney.

## Marketing update



The biggest media event for Australian banana promotion is underway with the "So you think you can Dance" television program (SYTYCD) on the 10 Network.

It is a \$1 million campaign for bananas, and while the advertising is being seen in the capital cities, the promotion on the show will reach audiences all around Australia.

It is designed to increase consumption of bananas among the 18-39 year olds and position bananas head-to-head with other, less-healthy energy snacks.

David Chenu from HAL who is managing the campaign says "the sponsorship of So You Think You Can Dance will give our brand massive exposure through every aspect of this multi-media event."

"Australian Bananas will also have a significant presence on the SYTYCD website. There will be online advertisements through the site and total branding of a key page on the site – the Australian Bananas Rehearsal Room."

David says the campaign will also continue to have a strong presence in other websites related to energy and music festivals.

Additional television advertising is planned in March as well as radio advertising coming up in April.

So, if more people are encouraged to buy Australian bananas, all banana growers will share in the market growth.





# Water, a precious resource for some growers

We have reported the flooding in the growing district of Coffs Harbour\* in past editions, but there is one subtropical growing region in Australia where water is not so plentiful.

In Carnarvon, WA, buying water is one of the biggest costs for growers. With an annual rainfall of only 230mm, most water doesn't rain down, but comes from bores on the Gascoyne River bed or piped in by Gascoyne Water from a bore further upstream tapping into a major basin.

In October last year funding was announced to replace and upgrade the existing pipelines which will also allow for an expansion of the irrigated area by 400 hectares.

When I visited in July last year General Manager of Gascoyne Water, Joe Rebola, told me that the replacement was long overdue – the existing pipeline has 400% more leaks than the average for Australian water pipelines.

## Utilising technology to get the best results

Bananas and beans were among the first crops to be grown in the Gascoyne irrigation area, initially watered by flood irrigation.

Now watering is done by sprinklers or trickle irrigation to maximise effectiveness and minimise use. As well, irrigation systems are used for fertigation.

Taking it to a new level is the banana farm of Bob Symonds where manager Peter van Blommestein is overseeing the establishment of a new 45 hectare plantation, complete with a sophisticated watering and fertigation system, as well as a commitment to mechanise as much as possible.

At a cost of \$1/2 million, it is probably the most significant subtropical irrigation system in Australia.

Peter, who is from South Africa, says the climate is similar to his old country, but his role is somewhat different. In South Africa he was a professional hunter!

Peter says with the allocation of water tightly held, growers need to make the most efficient use of water they buy. The farm has two huge storage tanks which combined hold 1/2 mega litre of water, alongside the pumping and fertigation plant.

A bank of pumps delivers 300kpa into the line to irrigate the bananas, and there is enough capacity in the system to irrigate the other side of the property which grows mangoes, grapefruit.

At the moment, Peter is focussed on getting the best from the system for the banana plantation.

The system automatically backflushes every 30 hours and the 250,000 litres used annually for this process is recycled. Filters in line are designed to minimise any



The new pumping, fertigation and filtering system. Row spacing allows for mechanical harvesting



Peter Blommestein stands in front of the storage and fertiliser tanks

blockages in the sprinklers.

The irrigation system was designed to deliver water and carefully measured fertiliser quantities when and where it is needed.

Fertiliser from four holding tanks is mixed to deliver the right amount of nutrients, according to the plantation's needs. Trace elements, urea, potassium and sulphates are all added through the computer controlled system.

"We are always fertilising through the irrigation system, we just slow down in the winter months," Peter says.

To assess nutrient needs, leaf analysis is done in March and October.

To control pests, Integrated Pest Management is used, including predatory mites and Peter says it has been very effective.

"We are pleased that we can support the 'spray-free' aspect of bananas grown in Carnarvon."

The plantation has also been established so that harvesting of the crop can be as efficient as possible. The rows have been spaced 3.8 metres apart, with plants 1.5m apart to allow for mechanical harvesting and easy access by tractor.

"We wanted to do one crop really well, so we need to do it properly using all the science and technology available. What you put in is what you get out, so we are focussing on growing and harvesting the best bananas possible," says Peter.

East coast subtropical growers may not like the idea of buying most of their water needs, but I am sure that they would envy farming the flat land of the Carnarvon growers.

\* The average annual rainfall for Coffs Harbour is 1700mm, in 2009 the total rainfall was more than 2800mm, that's nearly three metres!

# New CEO for Australian Banana Growers Council

The new CEO for the Australian Banana Growers' Council, Jonathan Eccles, has hit the ground running with a wide range of meetings to learn about the workings of the banana industry.

ABGC president Cameron MacKay said Jonathan is an established horticultural industry professional with broad experience in production and supply chains, as well as research and development, and promotions management.

"Jonathan is linked into the horticultural network and understands the workings of groups such as Horticulture Australia Limited and Plant Health Australia, in addition to having corporate governance and consultancy experience," Mr MacKay said.

"We welcome Jonathan to the role and are confident that he will continue to lead the industry in the same professional manner as our departing CEO Tony Heidrich.

"The focused and strategic leadership provided by Tony during the past eight years has been integral to the ongoing strength and success of our \$400 million industry spread across Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland."

Jonathan says he is excited to be joining the banana industry at a time when the national levy means it is well-positioned to undertake research and development programs to identify and pursue future opportunities.

"Bananas are Australia's number one fruit and as an avid consumer myself, I come to this role as a big believer in the product," Jonathan said.

*Editor's note: I understand that for many years that Jonathan has enjoyed a banana sandwich every day for lunch! And he tells me nowadays he even bakes the bread himself!!*

## A farewell from Tony Heidrich

I regard the role of ABGC CEO as one of the jewels in the crown of Australian horticulture and it has been my privilege to serve in this position for the past eight years. Whilst I see a very bright future ahead for the banana industry I do have some observations from my time as CEO that I would like to share with you.

Firstly, we have successfully integrated a collective of state based industries into one strong national industry. The challenge is to ensure that you continue to think and act as a strong and united national industry.

Bananas will always be a high profile industry in Australia and it needs to ensure it has highly competent and knowledgeable industry leaders to represent it. Clear policies on important issues should be in place and leaders should enjoy your support and be able to drive the industry's policy agenda.

Embrace regional diversity of production, not only as a risk management tool in the event of a natural disaster occurring in north Queensland, but as an opportunity to provide consumers with choice in respect to fruit size and flavour characteristics.



Former ABGC CEO Tony Heidrich (l) with new CEO Jonathan Eccles.

Reject defeatist thinking – the sub tropical sector does have a viable future but it will require vision and leadership to drive the sort of changes required. The resources are available (national levy funds) and by actively engaging in the levy investment process, any number of opportunities can be identified and exploited.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the ABGC board and the banana growers of Australia for their support over the past eight years and would like to wish incoming CEO Jonathan Eccles all the very best in his new role.

## News Briefs

'Bananas and other tropical fruits under subtropical conditions: Challenges and innovative solutions'

That is the topic for a symposium being held during the 28th International Horticultural Congress being held in Lisbon, Portugal, 22-27 August, 2010

The International Horticultural Congress (IHC) in Lisbon will be the venue for a symposium on production and marketing issues for bananas and other tropical fruits grown in subtropical regions.

Information about banana symposium: <http://www.ihc2010.org/symposia.asp?page=banana>

## Eco Bananas protect their innovation



Trademark action by Australian Eco Bananas has forced a large European company to withdraw its nomination for a major international innovation award.

Fyffes of Germany was one of 10 companies who nominated for the Fruit Logistica Innovation Award (FLIA) 2010 in recognition of outstanding innovation in products and services.

Fyffes, which is one of the largest tropical produce importers and distributors in Europe, based their nomination for innovation on waxing the tip of their bananas to identify their organic status.

## UK Prime Minister goes bananas

According to 'The Sun' newspaper in the UK, the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, has taken to eating up to nine bananas a day as he shapes up for the forthcoming election campaign.

His wife, Sarah, was said to be responsible for the new dietary fad, having persuaded him to adopt them as a healthier alternative to the KitKat bars he used to enjoy munching.

"The Prime Minister has always taken the view that a balanced diet is very important," the PM's spokesman said. "Portions of fruit and veg taken on a daily basis can only lead to good health and radiance."



# THE SUBTROPICS BANANA NEWS

## this issue

Fair Work Reforms p.2

Bunchy Top update p.4

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Regional Wholesaling p.8

## Editorial

Hi,

Two very important areas of concern are the topics of meetings happening on the East Coast in the next month or so.

The new Horticultural Award has come into effect and we report on that in this issue. There are a number of issues which should be of concern to any grower who employs any workers, casuals or family, and the two Fair Work Seminars will provide the chance to find out more.

In early March the Forum of representatives of all the banana growing regions plus ABGC and HAL representatives discussed among other issues, subtropical marketing.

It was decided that two workshops will be held on the east coast to discuss the next steps towards effective subtropical marketing and promotion.

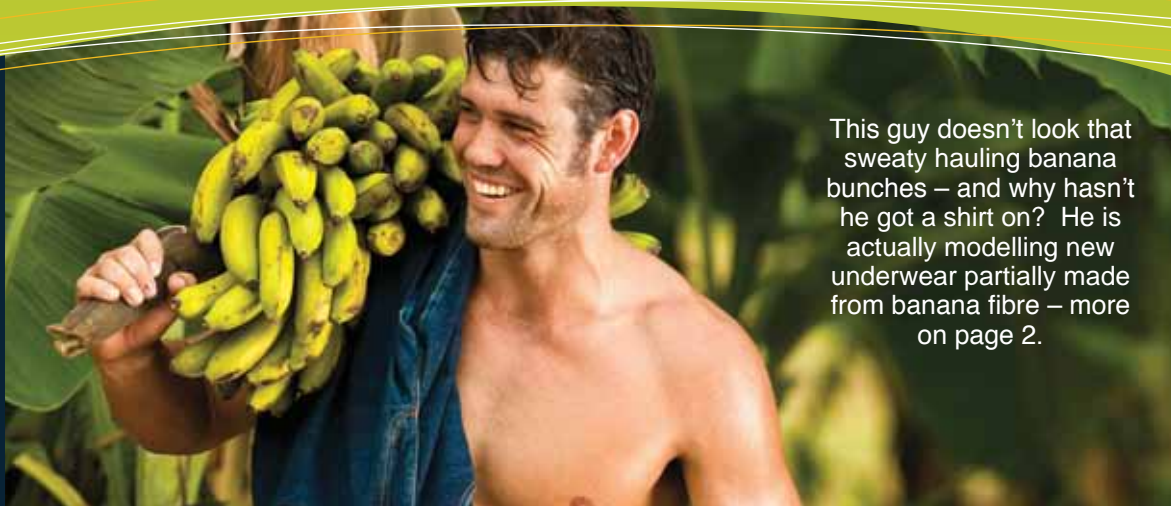
All agreed commitment was one of the most important ingredients to marketing success, apart from a range of other factors – not just a catchy name!

Read this edition for more information about these two topics, come along to the seminars and workshops and be part of the future of the subtropical banana industry.

Regards,

Neille

This newsletter is funded by HAL using the banana levy and matched funds from the Australian Government.



This guy doesn't look that sweaty hauling banana bunches – and why hasn't he got a shirt on? He is actually modelling new underwear partially made from banana fibre – more on page 2.

## IMPORTANT MEETINGS YOU SHOULD NOT MISS

### New Horticultural Award Seminars

Seminars to assist growers in NSW understand their responsibilities under the new national workplace relation system and to provide an over view of the National Employment Standards and the Modern Horticultural Award 2010.

The Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) is organising them in conjunction with the Australian Banana Growers' Council in a national targeted education and compliance program for the horticulture Industry – the Horticulture Industry Shared Compliance Program.

The primary aim of the seminars are to provide a better understanding of the Commonwealth workplace laws including the modern Horticulture Award 2010 and, the National Employment Standards that came into affect on 1 January 2010.

We have been advised that from May to June 2010, Fair Work Inspectors will target a random sample of employers in the horticultural industry under FWO jurisdiction for a compliance audit of employer obligations.

So it is in the interests of NSW growers to attend one of these seminars:

**Coffs Harbour, Thursday 28 April, 5-7pm Coffs Harbour Catholic Club**

**Murwillumbah, Wednesday 29 April, 5-7pm, Murwillumbah Services Club, Wollumbin St**

Turn to page 2 for more information about the new award.

### Marketing Ideas Workshops

Two workshops are to be held on the east coast to discuss marketing opportunities for the subtropical sector.

This was a major outcome of the recent Industry Forum held at Coffs Harbour where marketing and promotion were major concerns for subtropical growers.

While WA representatives were able to talk about their successes, delegates were keen to see more support for subtropical fruit in the marketplace.

The two Workshops are being organised by David Chenu from Horticulture Australia, who is managing the overall marketing program for the banana industry.

The workshops will provide the opportunity to discuss why past attempts have not worked, what is needed to make subtropical marketing successful, practical suggestions and ideas for any future activities and where to from here.

**The workshops will be held in May – the dates are tentatively 19 May in Coffs Harbour and 20 May in Murwillumbah. South East Queensland growers are encouraged to come along to the Murwillumbah meeting.**



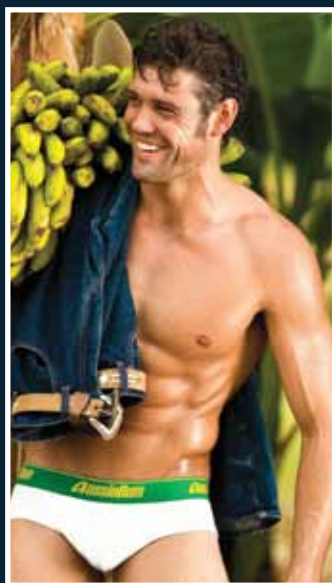
Know-how for Horticulture™

## aussieBum launches 'banana undies'

An Australian underwear manufacturer captured media attention around the world in early March when it launched a new underwear range made with banana fibre.

"aussieBum has a responsibility to continually research and develop new fabric technologies. Banana fibre characteristically enjoys good lustre, is lightweight, offers strong moisture absorption and is considered one of the most eco friendly fibres in the world today.

"We are truly proud of our contribution to the development of this fabric. It's exciting and once again, delivers Australia to the doorstep of the world!" says Sean Ashby, aussieBum founder.



While the briefs are made in Australia, the banana fibre is imported from South East Asia, as it could not be sourced here. While mainly of cotton, they do include 27% banana fibre.

"We believe it is a perfect example of showing that if there is demand in Australia, it could help industry in Australia, as we would naturally grab the chance to buy yarn in Australia. Sadly the last one in Brisbane closed down 6 years ago," said an aussieBum spokesman.

The undies come in briefs or hipsters and are priced around \$30. Check them out at [www.aussiebum.com](http://www.aussiebum.com)

## The Fair Work reforms and the Horticulture Award

Denise O'Reilly, Commercial Lawyers provided this overview...



The new Horticulture Award 2010 and 10 new minimum terms and conditions of employment commenced on 1 January this year. These new rules are important because

penalties of up to \$33,000 can apply, and the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) is already prosecuting employers who breach the Awards.

### What is the Fair Work Act?

The Fair Work Act replacing the 'Work Choices' regime has now commenced. The Act makes significant changes to the rights and obligations of employers, employees and unions. It has introduced:

- New minimum terms and conditions called the 'National Employment Standards' which created new rules such as that annual leave now accrues progressively, employees can elect to take 24 months (rather than 12) parental leave, the obligation to give all new employees (even casuals) a copy of the Fair Work Information Statement, and many others
- New rules for the collective negotiation of terms and conditions of employment in 'enterprise agreements', including removing non-union agreements, individual agreements and changing the tests agreements have to pass
- New rules about the rights of trade unions to enter worksites

Because the NSW and Queensland State governments have referred their industrial relations powers to the Commonwealth, the new laws also apply to private sector employers such as partnerships and sole traders.

### What is the Horticulture Award 2010?

The Horticulture Award replaces all existing state/federal awards previously covering the horticulture industry. The Award introduces many new minimum conditions that may increase wage costs for business in different States. These include:

- 38 hour week (rather than 40 for some states)
- increased overtime rates:  
Monday to Saturday overtime at 150%  
Sunday overtime at 200%
- increased casual loading of 25%
- ordinary hours on Saturdays only with agreement of majority employees (otherwise overtime rates may apply)
- ordinary hours only between 6.00am -

6.00pm, worked 8 hours per day (unless majority employee agreement)

While 'Transitional' rules mean that some financial terms will not apply until 1 July 2010, all other clauses (such as the 38 hour week, ordinary hours) apply already. Businesses should seek legal advice to make sure they are complying.

Employers who only came under the federal laws on 1 January 2010 (such as sole traders/partnerships) can apply their State award until January 2011. However, they must comply with the remainder of the legislation and minimum conditions.

### Agreement making

The rules for making agreements that override awards have also changed significantly. Individual agreements can no longer be made, 'employee collective agreements' no longer exist, and if a majority of your employees want to negotiate an agreement via their union, you have to bargain with them in good faith.

The rules for how to negotiate and then make the agreement have also changed.

What should your business do?

Obtain advice to ensure compliance – the Fair Work Ombudsman is enforcing these rules, and will prosecute employers for breaching minimum conditions.

Denise O'Reilly, Associate, Workplace Relations

Ffrench Commercial Lawyers email: [doreilly@ffrenchlegal.com](mailto:doreilly@ffrenchlegal.com) or ph 07 5591 7555

### For Western Australian Growers...

Which system you are in is based on whether the employer is a constitutional corporation.

The Western Australian state system covers employers that are not constitutional corporations and their employees. In general terms, this includes employers who are sole traders, and some partnership and trust arrangements.

The national industrial relations system broadly covers employers who are constitutional corporations and their employees.

There is no absolute rule that determines whether a particular corporation is covered by the national industrial relations system. Broadly speaking, Proprietary Limited [Pty Ltd] or Limited [Ltd] companies tend to be in the national system by virtue of their trading or financial activities.

Check with the WA Department of Commerce for more information.

The Fair Work Seminars will provide an opportunity to hear more about the Award and what your obligations are:

Wednesday 28 April - Coffs Harbour, 5pm, Coffs Harbour Catholic Club.

Thursday 29 April - Murwillumbah, 5pm Murwillumbah Services Club.





All the banana industry representatives at the March Forum

## Regional round-up

### Coffs hosts Banana industry meetings

In early March, several industry meetings were held in Coffs Harbour including a Forum for regional representatives to discuss issues, the ABGC board meeting and meetings for the Industry Advisory Committee and its sub committees.

Representatives from subtropical growing regions attended the Forum, as well as Board members, other regional representatives, Jonathan Eccles the new CEO for ABGC and John Tyas, HAL's Industry Services Manager for bananas.

Presentations included a summary of the new Strategic Plan, and updates on marketing, research and development. The Forum also provided a chance for growers to give their thoughts on issues.

Marketing was the principal issue discussed with subtropical growers keen to see some efforts devoted to helping their industry. The recent Subtropical Marketing Review had not provided plans for the future said some, but it was argued that it had identified what the industry needed to do and to focus on to market successfully.

David Chenu from HAL, who is managing marketing, hooked up by phone and highlighted the current marketing program which was focussed on building the market among 18-39 year olds. Bananas as a healthy snack food is the key message in the major campaign currently underway on the TV program, 'So you think you can Dance?'

An outcome of the Forum and subsequent meetings was for the Subtropical Marketing Workshops mentioned on page 1.

Every grower should also read the Strategic Plan for the industry. It can be downloaded from the ABGC website or contact the office for a copy, ph 07 32784786.

### WA Carnarvon

Good results are being achieved in the shade cloth trials – a detailed report in the next issue.

## A Super presentation coming up at NSW regional meetings

Superannuation is not only important for your retirement but is a very tax effective way of saving.

Unfortunately, understanding the rules, regulations, benefits and pitfalls is not that easy.

Wayne Hulin, the National Development Manager for Austsafe Super will be speaking at NSW regional meetings in May to explain current opportunities and answer any questions growers might have in 'simple speak'.



Wayne Hulin

AustSafe Super is a true industry fund dedicated to rural and regional Australians and is a not for profit fund with low admin fees. It is currently ranked a top performing fund in Australia (for the balanced fund as surveyed by SuperRatings as at Dec 2009).

If you are concerned about your and your family's financial future this will be a valuable session to attend.

### Nambucca

Next meeting is on Tuesday 4 May, at the Nambucca Hotel in Macksville, starting at 6pm, followed by subsidised dinner. Details: Peter on 65681908

### Coffs Harbour/Woolgoolga

Next Meeting is planned for Wednesday 5 May, starting with subsidised dinner at 6pm at the Coffs Harbour Catholic Club. Details: Michelle, ph: 66525633

### Tweed Brunswick

Next meeting is on Wednesday 12 May, at 5.30pm followed by a subsidised dinner. It will be held at the Murwillumbah Golf Club. Contact Robert Pierce on (07) 5590 9812 for more information.

# Australia's Farming Future

The Australian Government's Australia's Farming Future program could help you. Philip Hindley, Agricultural Consultant/ Financial Counsellor based at Ballina NSW, has supplied the following information that may be of assistance to some growers...

Climate Change Adjustment Program and Transitional Income Support (TIS)

Eligible farmers can apply for assistance under this scheme through Centrelink. The three main components of this scheme are as follows:-

- Income support of up to \$835.40/fortnight for a couple (ends 30/6/10).
- Advice and Training Grant of up to \$5,500 (GST inclusive).
- A re-establishment Grant of up to \$150,000 for a farmer who has sold their farming enterprise.

All the above are income and asset tested. Applications for the Advice and Training Grant can be lodged up until the 30/12/2011.

Under the scheme farmers have to obtain a Farm Business Analysis and Financial Assessment, which is paid for by the Government as part of the scheme. For more information call Centrelink Farmers Assistance Hotline on 1800 050 585.

FarmReady Reimbursement Grants.

A reimbursement grant of up to \$1500 is available per financial year. This covers participation in approved training courses, for example Freshcare training or updates. Up to a further \$500 for associated reasonable costs may also be reimbursed per financial year. A list of approved courses is on the FarmReady website.

To contact FarmReady: <http://www.farmready.gov.au>, email [admin@farmready.gov.au](mailto:admin@farmready.gov.au) or call 1800 087 670.

If you would like any assistance or information on either of these schemes, Philip would be happy to assist. He can be contacted on 02 6686 7779, or 0428 759 812, or email [phindley@bigpond.com](mailto:phindley@bigpond.com)





Edith Nicholls

## South East Queensland

In January the project team decided it was necessary to de-limit the Northern boundary of BBTV in South East Queensland to assist with focussing surveillance efforts. 90 sites were surveyed in the Gympie area and no BBTV was detected there and east to the Kin Kin/Pomona area.

In February a meeting was held with Tony Heidrich and Jonathan Eccles (ABGC) to assist with prioritising work effort in accordance with the BBTV Eradication Program. The following surveillance and eradication priorities were identified:

1. Commercial banana farms and all properties within a one kilometre radius of the commercial property to protect industry from encroaching disease pressure.
2. Properties with suspected BBTV as reported by the public, including commercial growers.
3. Known BBTV hotspots
4. Properties along the NSW/QLD border in the Gold Coast area.

5. Further delimiting surveillance along the outer edges of the known BBTV infected area to better identify the northern and western boundaries.

Maps have now been prepared with a one kilometre zone around each commercial grower's block to assist surveillance efforts and surveillance of two commercial blocks belonging to a single grower had a 100% inspection of all residential blocks within this 1km buffer.

Surveillance in the Cooroy area to better define the Northern Boundary of the BBTV infested area is currently happening along with ongoing surveillance in priority areas.

Development of a new factsheet regarding BBTV and residential bananas to enhance awareness of the project and encourage support and compliance from local residents has also commenced.

Project staff are happy to meet with local banana growers or attend any meetings in South East Queensland to provide information regarding their activities and remind growers of banana regulations.

*From Trevor Lanham and Edith Nicholls, DEEDI Qld Bunchy Top Project team.*

## SE Qld Surveillance Statistics

Month	Commercial sites inspected	No. sites infested	Residential sites inspected	No. sites infested
January 2010	21	3 (19 BBTV infected plants)	90	13 (133 BBTV infected plants, 16 feral plants)
February 2010	3	0	165	13 (100 BBTV infected plants)





An overgrown patch in northern NSW



Weed growth makes it nearly impossible to inspect plants

## Northern NSW

### Fair go – don't let your fellow growers down!

That's the call from the NSW BBTV team as they are finding inspections very difficult on some properties. There are growers who are always behind in controlling weeds, always too busy to keep up-to-date with managing the plantation and always ready with the excuses as to why things are the way they are. But in the end, it is fellow growers and his industry that is affected most.

Cleaning up weedy and neglected plantations is a high priority for the National Bunchy Top Project which aims to eradicate Bunchy Top from Australia forever. In the NSW Bunchy Top zone which extends from Byron Bay to the Qld border, every plantation is inspected on a planned program schedule depending on its level of Bunchy Top infection.

Those plantations that are too weedy to inspect just stay there and Bunchy Top has a free chance to spread until the plantation is clean enough for every plant to be inspected – including the suckers.

We have three highly trained professional Bunchy Top detectors whose job it is to inspect every plant, not just the parent plant but every sucker. Bunchy Top symptoms can

appear on the sucker but not on the parent plant, and if they cannot see every plant because of weeds, the plantation is reported as "too weedy to inspect" and they have to wait until the plantation is free of weed growth so they can inspect every plant thoroughly.

Some plantations have not been inspected for over 12 months because of their weedy state and legal action seems to be the only option left for these growers who simply do not realize how their negligence adversely affects their neighbours and their industry.

From my perspective as coordinator of the NSW eradication program some growers simply have too many bananas to look after properly and you would have to ask the question – "wouldn't it be better to manage a smaller area properly, rather than have the extra expense in materials and labour trying to look after a larger area where the constant problems of reliable labour, unfavourable weather and high input costs are greater?"

I am sure the net return and fruit quality for some growers would be higher if they followed this regime.  
*David Peasley, NSW Coordinator, National Bunchy Top Project.*

## Subtropical Banana Industry Communications Survey

### WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

You will find within this newsletter a questionnaire which asks some simple questions about our industry communications over the last 12 months.

Ideally I would call each of you individually to ask you the questions, but that would take another year, so your help in filling out the questionnaire and returning it would be greatly appreciated!

*To encourage you to participate, one lucky respondent will win a  
**\$100 Bunnings voucher.***

*Spend a few minutes to give us your thoughts, post it back in the reply paid envelope and you will be in the running for the **\$100 voucher.***

# Irrigation conference and exhibition coming up



Irrigation Australia's biannual National Conference & Expo run concurrently with over 500 people attending the Conference and more than 3,500 people expected to visit the 2010 Exhibition.

They are being held at Sydney's Darling Harbour, from 8 to 10 June.

The Conference has the theme One Water Many Futures and will look to the future of irrigation and its role in food and fibre production, in our lifestyles and in its interaction with the environment.

Topics such as the future of subtropical irrigation, water trading, catchment water cycle management and several covering environmental, social and economic issues will be on the program.

## Expo free

You don't have to be a conference attendee to visit the Irrigation Expo. It's open to all, free, and will feature over 100 companies from Australia and overseas showcasing a vast range of irrigation equipment, technology and knowledge.

Among the exhibitors there will be plenty displaying products and technology of particular interest to horticultural producers.

NaanDan Jain Australia offers advanced irrigation technologies and design. They offer both high quality subsurface drip for orchard and field applications and environmentally friendly undertree sprinklers for orchards and plantations.

The flagship product of Sentek Sensor Technologies, EnviroSCAN®, is a widely adopted soil moisture monitoring solution. The data obtained by the sensors is collected by a central logger and then downloaded by the grower through a variety of telemetry methods. They have case studies showing its application in bananas, mangoes and macadamia nuts among other crops.

Visitors to the Exhibition can also register in advance for a number of interesting 1½ -2 hour workshops.

Further information on the Conference program and the Expo can be found at [www.irrigationaustralia.com.au](http://www.irrigationaustralia.com.au)



Jeremy Bright

Recent new member of the Industry and Investment NSW (formerly NSW DPI) team, Jeremy Bright took the opportunity to quiz growers at north coast meetings about their needs in research and development. He provided this overview for our newsletter...

The November meeting of the Tweed / Brunswick BGA and the December meeting of the Richmond BGA provided an opportunity for me to survey banana growers. Rather than looking at the national perspective, this process was designed to understand the specific local needs.

Growers were asked to nominate areas of need for research or development within the local industry. The chart shows the priorities which were listed and I hope there may be opportunities to address these through industry or other sources of funding, in current and future projects.

Issue	Priority
New Varieties	1
Panama	2
Bats	2
Bunch Pest Control	4
Worker safety	5
Growing with less chemicals-clean, green	5
Too much red tape	5
Plant nutrition (dry land farming)	8
Beetle borer (pheromone traps)	8
Minimising grey winter fruit	8
Wild turkey control	11

## Some observations included:

### New varieties

Opportunity to put new varieties in at CTH Alstonville with regular field days for growers to evaluate plants and fruit, OR through a tour to inspect variety selections at South Johnstone. Of particular concern is the development of Panama resistant varieties and their acceptability with the consumer.

### Panama

A current ACIAR funded project managed by DEEDI, Qld is looking for panama infested and non-infested land to compare practises and soil amendments in the belief that a healthy soil has a better chance of fighting panama compared to a not so healthy soil. A request for interested growers was in the previous edition of the Subtropics Banana News. Involvement is sought from DEEDI for 5 NSW growers to be part of the project.

### Bats

Currently a Primefact is being produced regarding flying fox control and there was a fact sheet produced for the subtropical sector

## Needs and priorities – what do you growers think?

and distributed last issue. Netting is the only effective option available, however the cost is prohibitive.

Anecdotal evidence may suggest that flying foxes prefer native flowers to bananas and perhaps establishment of native tree corridors could be investigated. Limited benefits have been found with deterrents such as chemical smells and odours.

### Bunch Pest control

This issue was raised and was concerned primarily on soldier fly. Identification and control as well as what damage it causes.

Communications will be dealing with this and other pests throughout the year. One other concern arising from this issue was 'what is the best mix to apply when dusting the bunches?'

### Worker safety

Relating to minimising chemical use. Looking at options for safer nematode control eg molasses. This will also relate to growing more clean, green fruit.

### Too much red tape

Relates to the levy and project development process. Also the repetitive QA exercise that had to be performed every year. This is costly and some believe could be better if done at less regular intervals.

### Plant Nutrition (dry land farming).

Recommendations for fertiliser rates at strategic times exist, but if no rain for an extended period, fertiliser is not utilised. Only suggestion would be to apply prior to rainfall event. Some were interested in the durability of particular fertiliser formulations to last the periods of no rainfall and whether they were still effective once it did rain.

Raises the possibility of a trial at Alstonville to look at the benefits of micro-spray irrigation versus dry land farming. How long would it take for an economic return on investment in installation costs? ie benefits in quicker turn around therefore more fruit, bigger bunches, more consistent bunches etc?

### Minimise grey winter fruit.

What is best practice? Looking at aspect of block, irrigation, time fruit is hanging, number of hands hanging through winter etc. Some growers were suggesting that a best practice guide be produced with regards to avoiding grey winter fruit.

I look forward to working closely with the Tweed / Brunswick and Richmond growers in the future. Please feel free to contact me about this process or anything to do with bananas. I am here for industry and really look forward to meeting more of you and seeing you in the future.

Jeremy Bright Ph: 02 6626 2445, mobile: 0427 213 059, Email: [jeremy.bright@industry.nsw.gov.au](mailto:jeremy.bright@industry.nsw.gov.au)

(Jeremy is located at the Centre for Tropical Horticulture, Bruxner Highway Alstonville NSW).





## Reducing pesticide use - Geckhos Bananas

One grower who has reduced the need for pesticides is Ted Knoblock in South Boambee, south of Coffs Harbour.

"I reduced them back so that now all we use is sulphur dust. We thought about going organic but our research showed we couldn't survive if we went totally organic."

Ted said they had tried predatory mites but found that they didn't last through winter.

"Currently we can produce bunches from September 1 until January 31 each year without using any chemicals on the fruit. We still have to control weeds, weevil pests, and if weather conditions are extremely humid we may have to apply a fungicide to the banana leaves to control leaf disease."

Ted wanted to turn the new practice to a marketing advantage so five years ago he began a new marketing name calling his fruit Geckho Bananas and brought other growers in to market under that label.

Apart from some shelf display material, the bananas are promoted by stickers on each cluster (not every banana) which refer people through to a dedicated website which explains their philosophy in growing Geckhos.

"Originally I had thought of calling them 'Blue Tongues', but it was agreed that the name geckos was better as they are much friendlier and likely to appeal. In fact we now see more geckos around thanks to the reduction in chemical use. The 'h' was added so that people doing web searches would find us more easily."

After 32 years growing bananas, he is happy with the direction the business has now taken and says the returns are reasonable and steady.

"When prices are low in the marketplace, we can get \$4-5 a carton more for our product, and when they are really low we can usually still get \$12 a carton."

"What we cannot get are other growers willing to commit for the longer term. We would love to promote more and are confident that we can expand our market but currently we just don't have the fruit to do it."



Ted and son Steve Knoblock with some of their Geckho bananas

Currently there are about 50,000 cartons of Geckhos going into the local area and Sydney region each year, being supplied by three growers.

"I am confident with the 'food miles' issue growing, people are wanting to buy more locally produced food, which has been produced with minimal use of chemicals – it is good for our future."

Ted's son Steve is working on the farm, which is also producing lychees, macadamias and avocados.

"Diversification is handy to ensure a reasonable income, but we're still putting in more bananas and replanting every year."

## IPM trial begins in Coffs Harbour

Small grower and part time TAFE lecturer, David Tate, has combined his two interests into a new project to measure Integrated Pest Management on his banana plantation in Coffs Harbour.

In early March with the help of overseas Indian students from the Coffs Harbour TAFE he released several million trichogramma wasps into the plantation to help control sugar cane bud moth and light brown apple moth.

In addition he is releasing lacewing larvae in an attempt to control aphids, mites and moth eggs and to remove the need to use chemicals to control these insects.

"I wanted to remove the need for chemicals like Ficame and Chlorpyrifos and move to environmentally friendly measures instead," said David.



David Tate



The wasps come out of the cardboard veneer onto the leaves through tiny holes

David got the insects through Bugs to Bugs, which supplies them to growers in the WA growing area of Carnarvon with good success.

The trial is being supported by the Coffs Harbour Growers Association which has funded the purchase of the bugs.

"I opted for an inundative release so that they would establish control – once in place they should survive indefinitely, if not for several years, removing the need to pay out for pesticides every year," David said.

David will be monitoring the results of the release with the help of his students over the year ahead.

The plantation of around three hectares had not been farmed commercially for some years when David took it on in early 2006. But he managed to get enough return from the crop to get a good start, thanks to Cyclone Larry!

We will revisit the trial in a future edition to report on its progress.



# Regional wholesaling

## Golden Dawn – Coffs Harbour

20 years ago Andrew Davis from Golden Dawn wholesalers and ripeners in Coffs Harbour never thought he would still be in the business.

He has seen the highs and lows, business has shrunk with the changing marketplace but it still continues, working with around 20 banana growers and a variety of other produce such as tomatoes, avocados and Lebanese cucumbers.

“About seven years ago when we lost Woolies’ business from Coffs to Forster, I thought it was over, but we are still here!” said Andrew.

Golden Dawn started out as a brand for avocados but changed to the name of the business for the green fruit on wholesaling it conducted.

“Over the years we have served all the major players on the retail front and we have had banana growers come and go - and some who have not given an order to anyone but us in that time.”

Golden Dawn supplies to retailers from Grafton in the north to Port Macquarie in the south, as well as green fruit into the Sydney Markets.

### A future for regional wholesaling?

Andrew is confident of the future and hopes to expand into other retailers as the demand for locally grown produce increases, and as the issues of climate change and food miles grow.

“We have an opportunity with Coles as their policy has now changed, but the growers themselves need to improve



standards. With the right quality we can get opportunities at the right prices. They require Freshcare rating, which is not that difficult but some growers just cannot be bothered!”

One of the requirements is a commitment to more consistent quality, something Andrew believes is holding back subtropical bananas from getting a greater market share.

“It has to start at the shed and only the best bananas should be packed in the first cartons. Too often that doesn’t happen in the Coffs region. And growers then complain about the prices they get for fruit which is not up to standard.”

Commitment is another issue that Andrew feels strongly about.

“Growers need to look at prices over a year and not just over a couple of weeks.

We have had three major spikes this year and while they have been brief, the return is better over time than most growers think.”

“I don’t like to pay less than \$10 a carton at anytime for quality fruit, even less than \$15 a carton as I know they are not making money. But commitment to quality will help us all get better prices.”

## News Briefs

Britain’s oldest known man to father a child at age 75 attributes his virility to bananas, because of the potassium, zinc and vitamin B in them, which increase energy and aid fertility.

Gerry Burks says “People might say things about my years, but I look after myself. I’m young at heart. I don’t drink or smoke now...and I eat lots of bananas and always have done. I don’t eat much salt and have home-cooked food.”



## GM bananas

Researchers say the first genetically modified (GM) bananas to be harvested in Australia are showing positive early results.

The crop was planted last year in the South Johnstone area, south of Cairns in far north Queensland, and the first fruit has now been harvested.

It is part of a trial to try to increase the vitamin and mineral content of bananas for consumption in East Africa.

## Lots of bananas!

Sainsbury’s, a major retail chain in the UK, claims that it is now the world’s largest retailer of Fairtrade products. They say they sell over 650 million bananas a year, or 1,200 a minute, which means a total Fairtrade premium to banana suppliers of £3.9m per year benefiting small farmers, farm workers and farming communities.

## FOR SALE

Banana props

Peter Molenaar near Mullumbimby, NSW, has a quantity of banana props for sale.

They are 12 to 14 feet long, wire is attached, some are treated timber. The price is \$1.00 per prop.

Phone a/h (02) 66842676.

## Industry get together at Coffs

Growers were invited to a barbeque with the ABGC board when industry meetings were held in Coffs Harbour. The few who took the opportunity enjoyed the occasion to chat with industry colleagues.



(l to r) Adrian Crema (FNQ), Bruno Franco (Coffs), Tom Day (WA) & Paul Johnston (FNQ)



(l to r) Sandro Franco (Coffs), Barrie MacKay (FNQ) & Gary Fattore (Banana Exchange)

# THE SUBTROPICS BANANA NEWS

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## Editorial

Welcome to the June/July edition of Subtropics Banana News.

As usual plenty has been going on and the recent subtropical marketing workshops have been setting some future direction for growers on the east coast.

One positive observation of the workshops was that there are a significant number of growers who believe in their product and a future for subtropical fruit in the marketplace.

I think the situation in Macksville in the Nambucca Valley (see story page 5) should be seen as an indicator that once people have enjoyed subtropical bananas, they will come back to them after they have tried the alternative.

The price and convenience of the larger supermarkets will always appeal to many shoppers, but there are also a significant minority who will seek out and pay more for better taste. So now the challenge is to promote the differences to them and get consistently good quality fruit to them.

The big test will be the commitment by growers to any subtropical marketing initiatives.

Regional branding? – a smart idea. Start local and grow from there? – a smart idea too!

Let's hope we are about to see the beginning of a new era for subtropical bananas.

Regards,



This newsletter is funded by HAL using the banana levy and matched funds from the Australian Government.



One of the working groups at the Coffs Harbour Subtropical Marketing Workshops. (l to r) growers David Tate, Wally Gately, Kris Pierce and George Rai.

## Subtropical marketing moves forward

An east coast Subtropical Market Development Working Party is to be established following the recent workshops held in May.

This was one of the recommendations to be put forward by workshop facilitator Tristan Kitchener in his report.\*

The eight person working party will be made up of growers and wholesalers representing the two major regions, an ABGC representative, communications officer and a new Market Development Officer.

"We believe it is important to have someone who can drive the project and this person will be appointed on a part-time basis and work for, and with, the Working Party," says Jonathan Eccles, ABGC CEO.

"It is hoped that we can appoint the Market Development Officer and the Working Party can be conducting its first meeting soon so that the project is up and running in the next few months."

The report also recommended a regional NSW banana brand in the local growing areas, supply local retailers and expand it slowly.

Tristan Kitchener, formerly with Coles and Sainsburys UK, recommends that fruit should be branded and sold through selected wholesalers in each growing region into local outlets, possibly in both loose and pre-pack format.

"Utilize established relationships where possible and support by point of sale communicating taste, lunchbox sized fruit and localness," Kitchener says.

The brand should be an overarching NSW brand but should also leverage off existing or developing regional brands such as Northern Rivers Food or Coffs Coast, he recommends.

"It will be up to the Working Party to work with the Market Development Officer and decide what can be implemented from the report," says Jonathan.

"Ultimately it will be up to growers themselves to participate and support any initiatives that come out of the Working Party, if any efforts are to be successful."

For the story on the workshops turn to pages 4 & 5. \* The Kitchener Report is being sent to all participants in the workshops and is available by emailing [neville@greenpr.com.au](mailto:neville@greenpr.com.au) or by visiting the ABGC website [www.abgc.org.au](http://www.abgc.org.au)

If you would like to nominate for the Subtropical Market Development Working Party – please email [jonathan.eccles@abgc.org.au](mailto:jonathan.eccles@abgc.org.au) to register your interest by 31 July.



Know-how for Horticulture™



# New Horticulture Award & Fair Work Reforms

## Did you know you are required by law to hand a copy of the Fair Work Information Statement to any new worker on your farm?

This was one of the changes introduced from January 1 of this year as part of the new National Employment Standards.

Two information sessions were held recently for growers in New South Wales in Coffs Harbour and Murwillumbah with some growers taking advantage of the opportunity to get updated.

While we realise that many growers have small farms, even if you have a part timer or casual employee, you must be up to date and have appropriate records. The Fair Work Ombudsman representatives indicated at the information sessions that during the next two months, audits will be done by inspectors, so be prepared!

The National Employment Standards now are:

**38 hours per week for fulltime employees** – plus reasonable additional hours.

**Requests for flexible working arrangements** – allows parents or carers of a child under school age or of a child under 18 with a disability, to request a change in working arrangements to assist with the child's care.

**Parental leave and related entitlements** – up to 12 months unpaid leave for every employee, plus a right to request an additional 12 months unpaid leave, plus other forms of maternity, paternity and adoption related leave.

**Annual leave** – 4 weeks paid leave per year, plus an additional week for certain shift workers.

**Personal / carer's leave and compassionate leave** – 10 days paid personal / carer's leave, two days unpaid carer's leave as required, and two days compassionate leave (unpaid for casuals) as required.

**Community service leave** – unpaid leave for voluntary emergency activities and leave for jury service, with an entitlement to be paid for up to 10 days for jury service.

**Long service leave** – a transitional entitlement for certain employees who had certain LSL entitlements before 1/1/10 pending the development of a uniform national long service leave standard.

**Public holidays** – a paid day off on a public holiday, except where reasonably requested to work.

**Notice of termination and redundancy pay** – up to 4 weeks notice of termination (5 weeks if the employee is over 45 and has at least 2 years of continuous service)

and up to 16 weeks redundancy pay, both based on length of service.

### Provision of a Fair Work Information Statement

– employers must provide this statement to all new employees. It contains information about the NES, modern awards, agreement-making, the right to freedom of association, termination of employment, individual flexibility arrangements, rights of entry, transfer of business, and the respective roles of Fair Work Australia and the Fair Work Ombudsman.

As mentioned in the last edition of the Subtropics Banana News, because the NSW and Queensland State governments have referred their industrial relations powers to the Commonwealth, these new standards apply to partnerships and sole traders, as well as company entities.

### In place now is the Horticulture Award 2010 which brings into action other new requirements for employers such as:

- increased overtime rates:
  - Monday to Saturday overtime at 150%
  - Sunday overtime at 200%
- increased casual loading of 25%
- ordinary hours on Saturdays only with agreement of majority employees (otherwise overtime rates apply)
- ordinary hours only between 6.00am - 6.00pm, worked 8 hours per day (unless majority employee agreement)

For companies these will apply from July 1, 2010 and sole traders and partnerships have until January 1, 2011 to introduce some of the new requirements. Until then you are still covered by the State Award.

In Western Australia, in general terms, employers who are sole traders, and in some partnership and trust arrangements are still covered by the State Award as W.A. has not handed over its state powers.

If you are a Proprietary Limited [Pty Ltd] or Limited [Ltd] company in W.A. you are most likely to be in the national system. Check with the WA Department of Commerce for more information.

What is important is that if you employ anyone, part-time, full time, or casual some of the rules have already changed for you the employer, regardless of your business structure and the onus is on you to comply.

**To get all the information you need, please contact the Fair Work Ombudsman on 131394 or go to [www.fairwork.gov.au](http://www.fairwork.gov.au) or alternately contact a qualified lawyer who will be able to help you. In our last edition we had an article by Denise O'Reilly from Ffrench Commercial Lawyers on the Gold Coast. She is happy to provide some advice - [doreilly@ffrenchlegal.com](mailto:doreilly@ffrenchlegal.com) or ph 07 5591 7555**



At the session in Murwillumbah were (l to r) Peter Molenaar, Pam Pierce, Andy Everest and Shane Conroy

# Regional Round up

## Tweed Brunswick

A major dental problem kept Wayne Hulin, National Business Development Manager for Austsafe Super from getting to the Nambucca and Coffs May meetings, but he had recovered for the Tweed / Brunswick meeting the following week.

Wayne provided some good advice to the growers present and even offered to sponsor the King and Queen Banana awards at the next banana Festival – the weigh-in will be on 19 August at 4pm at Coles in Murwillumbah.

Jeremy Bright from Industry and Investment NSW also reminded growers that he was available for growers' consultations. If you would like any assistance contact Jeremy on 6626 2445, mobile 0427 213 059, or email [jeremy.bright@industry.nsw.gov.au](mailto:jeremy.bright@industry.nsw.gov.au)

**Next meeting: Wednesday 11 August, at 5.30pm followed by a subsidised dinner. It will be held at the Murwillumbah Golf Club. Contact Robert Pierce on (07) 5590 9812.**

## Coffs Harbour/Woolgoolga

At the May meeting, the Coffs association honoured executive officer of the Banana Industry Committee, Bob Campbell, for his contribution to the industry.

President Ron Gray thanked Bob for all his hard work over the years since he began with the industry in 1967.

Among his roles, Bob helped with the first national Bunchy Top Program and is continuing to do consultancy work in the industry, now that the BIC is closing.

He was presented with a plaque and an impressive cooler box he can use out in the field while he consults!



Bob Campbell(l) is congratulated by President Ron Gray

**Coffs Harbour/Woolgoolga next meeting: Wednesday 4 August Coffs Harbour Catholic Club, starting with subsidised dinner at 6pm. Meeting starts at 7pm. Details: Michelle 66525633**



Stephen is one of two NSW representatives, alongside Peter Molenaar(l) from further north. (pictured at last year's Banana Congress)

## Nambucca District

It was a quiet May meeting for the district, but since then the news is that Association President Stephen Spear has been seconded onto the Australian Banana Growers' Council Board. Stephen fills the vacancy that was created when Nicky Singh resigned late last year.

The sad news from Nambucca was the passing of industry stalwart, Gary McCudden after a battle with cancer. His story in the column alongside.

**Next meeting: Tuesday 3 August, Nambucca Hotel, Macksville, starting at 6pm followed by subsidised dinner. Details: Peter, ph 6568 1908**

## WA - drought continues

Drought was declared in Carnarvon in April when levels hit a new low in the Lower Gascoyne River aquifer. Water stopped flowing in the river a year prior and the hoped-for summer rains didn't happen. It was the first time for 40 years that a cyclone didn't make contact with the west coast in late summer and bring the rains.

The drought declaration means that growers whose bores have become too saline can apply for more water from the Gascoyne Water Cooperative, but reports say at this stage banana growers have not needed to make that call.

In the meantime, Ivor Gaylard from the Gascoyne Growers' Association reports that they are among the most efficient and productive growers in Australia, when it comes to irrigated water use.

The value of produce in 2009 per giga litre of water was \$6.35million, compared with the national figure of \$1.61 million. (see table at the bottom of the page)

# Farewell Gary

Sadly we report the loss of Gary McCudden, a banana industry stalwart from Nambucca Heads, in NSW.

Gary, 53, was a Lady Finger and Ducasse grower. He was president of New South Wales' BIC from October 2001 to November 2005 and was on the board for six years.

He was also active at a national level joining the Australian Banana Growers' Council board in December 1997. He became chairman in 2001 and continued in that role until 2003 before becoming vice chairman to Patrick Leahy in 2003/04.

During Gary's time in the chair, the McKenna Report was handed down and he was therefore involved in the commencement of the revamping of ABGC.

Former president Nicky Singh said Gary recognised the need to restructure the ABGC board and upgrade its Constitution to reflect the changing demographics in the industry.

"Gary was good-natured and well liked in the banana-growing community," Nicky said.

Additionally he was heavily involved in the Nambucca Heads Fire Brigade for about two decades, including a period as fire chief.

Nambucca district President Stephen Spear said Gary will be sadly missed and it was a tribute to him that many from far and wide in the banana industry attended his funeral.

Gary passed away on 5 June losing the battle with cancer and leaving his wife Vicki and son Nicholas.



Gary McCudden

Water Use Efficiency, Carnarvon vs National

	Carnarvon			Murray-	
	2007	2008	2009	Darling 2007	National 2007
Water Usage (GL)					
Basin A (inc. unrestricted)	5.3	5.3	6.0		
Scheme	5.1	4.9	5.9		
TOTAL IRRIGATED WATER	10.4	10.2	11.9	3,142.0	7,636.0
Value of Produce (\$million):	\$ 87.6	\$ 72.8	\$ 75.8	\$ 4,936	\$ 12,319
Value per GL (\$million):	\$ 8.40	\$ 7.17	\$ 6.35	\$ 1.57	\$ 1.61



# Subtropical Bananas Marketing Workshops Report



## The future marketing possibilities for subtropical bananas were discussed at two workshops held during May on the East Coast.

The workshops were funded by the national levy and were recommended by the IAC following the review of Subtropical Marketing undertaken by Inovact.

They were held in Coffs Harbour and Tweed Heads and growers and other stakeholders were invited along to give their thoughts and help map out some future directions.

There was consensus across both workshops that some form of regional branding was needed and that it was best to start local and expand from there.

"Participants all agreed that when people tried subtropical bananas they were unanimous that the flavour was identified as being more tasty and sweeter than tropical bananas," said Communications Officer, Neville Sloss.

Neville worked with David Chenu from Horticulture Australia Ltd who manages marketing and promotion to organise the workshops. Tristan Kitchener was the facilitator and encouraged participants to look at strengths and weaknesses and consider options.

Having worked with Coles and UK major supermarket chain, Sainsburys, Tristan was able to bring extensive experience to questions regarding retailing and supply chain issues.

At Coffs, there were 27 in attendance - 17 growers, two central markets wholesalers and three local wholesalers and a representative of a local food network, along with ABGC's President Cameron MacKay and CEO Jonathan Eccles and the workshop team.

The Tweed Heads event had 17 attending in total with eight growers, a central market wholesaler, two from I & I NSW and Geraldine O'Flynn from Southern Cross University, apart from the ABGC and HAL team.

The workshops developed what they saw as the key attributes of subtropical bananas and then worked from there to consider solutions to the marketing issues.

Among the attributes apart from flavour and size were:

- **seasonality**
- **less chemical use & environmental awareness**
- **lower cost to supply local markets**
- **small family farms and businesses**
- **access to tourists**
- **regionality**

With such a significant percentage of Lady Finger bananas being grown in the subtropics, it was felt that the specific subtropical marketing should focus on Cavendish, but at the same time there was opportunity to promote Lady Fingers more nationally.

A number of solutions were proposed, debated and voted upon at each workshop, based upon the differentiable attributes that had been identified. Both workshops selected similar solutions with key themes being:

- **Desire for a brand**
- **Building a proposition around the product attributes of superior flavour/taste and smaller sized fruit**
- **Starting locally then expand, linking in with key local wholesalers and access local retailers, as well as harnessing opportunities from tourism and tourist authorities.**





Photographs above were taken at both workshops except the one on the right. The facilitator Tristan Kitchener had a past affiliation with bananas running the London Marathon in this banana suit. And yes, even though it took him six hours, he made it to the finish!

Whilst solutions were voted upon, no one single solution was identified as meeting all requirements. The three solutions that were most supported were:

- **Supply local independent retailers, including Coles stores.**
- **Supply nationally via key wholesalers in each Central Market**
- **Supply locally via a Regional Brand, and take advantage of local tourism**

“Based on the output from the workshops and conversations with supermarkets, independent retailers, growers, wholesalers, ripeners, consultants, HAL, ABGC and others, it is clear that there is no silver bullet,” said Tristan Kitchener following the workshops.

“The most suitable solution is a mix of all of the main solutions proposed.”

A report has been prepared and it is hoped that recommendations will begin to be implemented early in the second half of the year.

## Loyalty returns in Macksville!

There was a feeling that the new Woolworths in Macksville, in the Nambucca Valley would severely impact on the local retailing trade, and particularly for bananas, but fears seem to be unfounded.

On a recent visit two months after the new supermarket had opened – and they had FNQ bananas on sale at \$1.84 a kilo – a local supermarket and wholesaler both reported that sales had picked up again.

Local wholesaler in Macksville, Alan Denison, reported that sales dropped by 35% when Woolworths opened, but in the weeks following they had returned to less than 10% down on previous sales levels.

One of the supermarkets in the area also reported a similar drop in sales across the board, but said sales had recovered as the ‘novelty’ of the new supermarket had worn off. They were still well down on sales overall, but were heartened with the return of loyal customers.

The good news was that retailers of local bananas had maintained a fair price for their product at around \$2.49 or \$2.99 a kilo so perhaps that shows that quality, size and flavour will command a reasonable price when people are given the option?

“Locals have now been able to confirm that Nambucca Valley bananas are the best tasting around and they have remained loyal!” said Alan.

Bananas at two supermarkets in the same country town and both selling – guess which is the Woolies display.



## Federal Government assistance changes

Various extensions to government assistance were announced in the 2010-11 budget. The income support for eligible farmers under the Climate Change Adjustment Program (CCAP) and Transitional Income Support has been extended for a further 12 months until the 30/6/2011. The income support is currently up to \$835.40/fortnight for a couple and it is for up to 12 months.

The other components of the scheme are still available including an Advice and Training Grant of up to \$5,500 (GST inclusive) and a CCAP Re-establishment Grant of up to \$150,000 for a farmer who has sold their farming enterprise.

Under the scheme farmers have to obtain a Farm Business Analysis and Financial Assessment, this is paid for under the scheme.

### Exceptional Circumstances (EC) Exit Package.

In addition to the above there was also an extension to this package up to the 30/6/2011, it also includes an EC Exit Grant of up to \$150,000. Centrelink suggest that a farmer may wish to test their eligibility for this grant instead of the CCAP Re-establishment Grant if they are in an eligible area.

With both the CCAP Re-establishment Grant and EC Exit Grant even if a farmer has already sold and left farming they may still be eligible to apply for one of these grants depending on when they sold.

**For more information about any of the above contact consultant, Philip Hindley on 02 66867779 or email [pehindley@bigpond.com](mailto:pehindley@bigpond.com)**

## Sheltered bananas netting gains

Bananas grown under netting in a trial at Gascoyne Research Station in Carnarvon are outyielding unprotected crops by up to 25 per cent in their first harvest.

Project manager Chris Schelfhout from the Department of Agriculture and Food said bunches grown under the net are weighing around 40 kilograms compared with about 32 kg outside.

The banana trial was planted about 15 months ago and is supported by Horticulture Australia Limited and the Sweeter Banana Company in Carnarvon.

"Full protective netting is reducing the strong wind effects at Carnarvon, improving the environment for plant growth and fruit development," says Chris.

The idea to try them for bananas resulted from a visit to Israel by a group of growers and department staff.

"Bunches after a first harvest tend to be larger so if future bunches inside the net weighed more than 60 kg we might have a few logistical issues in handling them," he said.

Carnarvon provides less than a fifth of the bananas consumed in Western Australia, but higher yields would offer potential for growers to increase their share of the market.

Netting costs are substantial, but could be worth the investment if returns are

increased significantly through faster growth, more productive plants and higher quality fruit, but it was still too early to look at the cost benefit analysis said Chris.

The economics of the netting will be analysed after several harvest cycles.

Fruit quality results of the trial will be assessed by the SBC after harvest is completed, but initial indications are that both quality and yield are better inside the nets.

There is also a planting densities trial being conducted at the research station and preliminary results indicated that the closer plantings would increase overall yields despite smaller bunch sizes. More on that later in the year.



A walk-in weigh station is used to measure the yields in Carnarvon.

## Bunchy Top update

David Peasley has been appointed National Coordinator of the Banana Bunchy Top Program, at a recent meeting of the Project's Management Committee.

Following the resignation of Edith Nicholls as South East Queensland inspector, the whole program will be managed by David, including a new inspector to be based at Nambour. The position is being advertised.

The Management Committee recognised the needs of the Project and the need to 'remove' the state border so that it could be more logically managed.

The NSW inspectors will be given reduced Qld inspector powers and one of their first exercises in the winter months will be to rid the Currumbin Valley of Bunchy Top.

It also recognised the potential enormity of the task in South East Queensland with the large number of backyard bananas throughout the region. The project was focussing on scoping and containment at present, and in later stages will be looking to

technology to assist with identification and eradication.

## Planting permits still required

Growers are reminded that planting of banana plants in NSW still requires permits through the state government department, Industry & Investment NSW.

Despite some confusion last year that the industry might move to self-regulation, the permit system still remains, with the only change being that National Bunchy Top Project Coordinator, David Peasley, has been appointed to process applications.

"There is a purpose in the permit system and that is to stop the spread of Bunchy Top. Our inspectors have found some plants planted without a permit in the Tweed area have Bunchy Top, so I would stress that any grower must apply for a planting permit," says David.

**Planting Permit Applications should be collected from I&I NSW offices and lodged with them. Note: Legal action will be taken if planting occurs without a permit.**



# Uralba Valley Bananas



Located inland from Ballina on the north coast of New South Wales is Uralba Valley Bananas, one of the few still operating in what was once a strong banana growing area.

The farm is owned by the Simpson family and it is one which is self contained - packing and ripening fruit then selling direct to retailers.

Ian Simpson says they began supplying into shops about 25 years ago when their agent retired. Since then they have built up relationships with a variety of retailers from Evans Head in the south, up to Byron Bay and across to Lismore.

"When the markets turned their back on NSW fruit in the 1980s we focussed on selling locally and we started with one small ripening room – now we have two ripening rooms, a cooling room and a holding room."



Some of the family team in the Uralba packing shed, (l to r) Lorraine, Julie, 'adopted' Ben and Warren.

"We sticker some clusters in each carton which is also branded with Uralba Valley 'Real Flavour' Bananas, and we find that retailers tell us that customer look out for our brand."

"The smaller stores are where people provide feedback to retailers and the (smaller) size and flavour of our bananas is what their customers want," added Ian.

They are producing between 400 and 500 cartons a week and find that continuity of supply is not a real problem. However, in May last year they were hit with a major storm which set back production by 60% and is now only returning.

Winds up to 130km/hr were recorded in the area and within 24 hours some patches were almost flattened.

"One bonus was that I was able to play tennis twice a week for some months!" joked Ian's wife Lorraine.

Among their customers are Coles and IGA and they are Freshcare accredited as well as meeting Coles' own audit.

"When it comes to buying our fruit, we find it is all about the decisions of the changing people in the stores, not just the policies of the company. If the manager changes, they may or may not decide to continue to take our fruit. That makes it hard to budget and even harder to plan investment decisions into the business."

## Uralba Valley Bananas' operation is a real family affair.

Ian Simpson is the 'main man', younger brother Warren works alongside and their wives, Lorraine and Julie, are part of the team packing the fruit every day, seven days a week. They all have one 'adopted son' Ben Luker who works alongside them.



Ian Simpson in the field – good cover grass and double planting to provide space for tractor access.

Mum Clare still does the books, organises orders and even does afternoon tea for them each day, while Dad Colin helps out as well. Another brother David also works on the farm

It must be in the blood as grandfathers of both Ian and Lorraine began growing bananas in the district back in the depression years of the 1930s.

Clare's first memories are of the banana farm and she packed her first box of bananas when she was six years old and remembers helping to make the wooden boxes as well.

She also recalls her father preparing a nearby hillside for growing bananas. "It was all done by hand with forks then!" The bananas used to be shipped to Sydney by boat first, then the train came."

According to Colin they would certainly be millionaires by now if they had 'got a dollar for every banana that was packed!'

## Good environmental practice

The Simpson's farm is clean and well organised with rows that are double planted with good grass ground cover to reduce soil erosion between them.

Some of their patches are irrigated and the double rows allow fertiliser to be spread off by tractor and for any spraying to be done. Ian uses Basta to keep down weeds in the rows.

The family is committed to banana growing and they take fruit from some other local growers to meet their retailer needs.

"People say our bananas have 'real' flavour, so we are confident of our subtropical fruit and our future," says Ian.

It seems that Uralba Valley Bananas is going to be one banana farm that will keep the tradition alive in this district.



Mum Clare, who's still busy with orders and afternoon teas every day with Ian

# Survey confirms value of subtropical communications

**It was hoped that the chance of winning a \$100 Bunnings voucher might encourage more of you to fill in the Subtropical Communications Survey included with the last newsletter, but you must be all 'surveyed out' by the various people who want your opinions!**

The good news is that 34 people took the time to provide some feedback and that is just under 7% of readers. There were 27 growers (two of whom were wholesalers as well) one wholesaler and six others including researchers.

Thank you to those who took the time to give me some feedback and the results and inputs will provide useful information for Horticulture Australia Limited and ABGC, as this specific contract concluded as of 30 June.

More than two thirds of respondents were over 45 and nearly one third over 60 years old. Of the grower respondents there was a good regional cross-section with five from WA, two from South East Queensland, seven from northern NSW, 10 from Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga and three from Nambucca district

## Key findings include:

- Both Australian Bananas and Subtropics Banana News were seen as the best places for information among growers, and the next was - other growers
- It seems that the frequency of the newsletter is about right - 19 people said every 2 months was best, while five said every three months and six said every month
- Readers wanted more research, general industry news and stories about other growers
- Currently the most popular articles are about growers stories, regional news and Bunchy Top Project
- While three people said it needed improvement, 29 said subtropical communications was either excellent (6) or good (19)
- 22 said that the ABGC was a good or medium source of information
- 25 found the research and best practice sheets a good or medium source of information
- 21 respondents were members of local grower associations
- 25 out of the 34 have access to the internet and email (I have only 30% of growers overall who have supplied an email address)

There was a variety of comments offered through the survey. Here are some of them.

## ***What other topics would you like covered in Subtropics Banana News?***

Projection of supply peaks / soil health news / fertilizer programming / international R & D / How good growers survive and thrive / GM benefits for disease resistance / more on Lady Fingers / more on Bunchy Top / more on market pricing / advice from top growers / successful niche marketing project updates would be useful

## ***Any comments on the Fact Sheets?***

NSW bias / difficult to reach a balance between readability and technical content

Soil health would be worthwhile / any more to come?

## ***What value do you get out of regional meetings?***

Have done since 15! / stay in touch locally / catch up with other growers / to keep up to date / always have been involved / gather information / good to pick up useful info

To make legislative and industry development relevant to local industry

## ***If you are not in a regional association why not?***

Nothing in SE Qld / industry is reactive not proactive / not enough time

## ***Please comment on the future of the banana industry in your region***

Future limited to fewer committed growers / not enough help available to produce top quality fruit / ABGC is not providing enough support / ABGC/HAL is not providing any practical assistance to WA industry / subtropical growers are ageing – need more young farmers / low grower returns and big supermarket margins / SE Qld has enormous potential – should just get on with it and stop trying to compete with FNQ / markets for genuine subtropical fruit

## ***Please share any other comments you would like to make***

Need more field days / unique innovation including marketing is needed /

Needs to be more support for WA industry eg R & D post harvest, management, marketing to ensure geographical diversity / a highly successful project – would be good to combine tropics and subtropics into one newsletter and have different sections

## BIC to close

A bill to repeal the Banana Industry Act and wind up the Banana Industry Committee in NSW has made its way through Parliament and the Committee will officially close on June 30.

The NSW Minister for Primary Industries, Steve Whan, told Parliament that "since the commencement of the Act in 1987 the number of banana growers in NSW has declined from around 1,000 to 400.

"This has reduced the committee's funds, limiting the services the committee provides."

"Dissolving the Committee by July 1 2010 provides the opportunity for any remaining committee funds to be transferred to a national body like the Australian Banana Growers' Council for the benefit and development of the NSW Banana industry."

A liquidator will now be appointed to finalise the financial affairs and a Memorandum of Understanding has already been drawn up between the Committee and the ABGC to manage the remaining funds.

The funds are to be used for research and development to benefit banana growers in NSW and will be administered by representatives of the former Committee and the ABGC.

## ***The winner is.....***

**Chris Armstrong of Carnarvon was the lucky winner of the draw for the \$100 Bunnings voucher among participants in the Communications Survey. Congratulations Chris and thanks to all those who filled in the survey recently. The voucher is on its way to you!**

**If you would like a complete copy of the survey, contact Neville Sloss on 0414562010 or email [neville@greenpr.com.au](mailto:neville@greenpr.com.au)**



# SUBTROPICAL BANANA GROWERS BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

## Pests & diseases: Banana Bunchy Top Virus

### What is it?

Banana Bunchy Top Virus (BBTV) is considered to be the most devastating viral disease of bananas worldwide. Fortunately in Australia it is restricted to subtropical areas of South East Queensland and Northern NSW.

Plants infected with the virus can have several symptoms, the most obvious one being a bunched appearance of newly emerged leaves. The virus is spread by the banana aphid (*Pentalonia nigronervosa*) or by affected plant material. In Australia, only plants in the *Musa* family and *Ensete* genus are affected by BBTV – related species such as heliconia are not susceptible or carriers of the disease.



### What damage can it do?

BBTV infected plants do not produce edible fruit and the disease can spread quickly, therefore its potential to cause significant loss of production is high. In addition, planting material cannot be taken from infected properties, or within 1000 metres of a known BBTV infection.

A severely affected plant will show upward rolling leaf margins  
(all photographs courtesy of David Peasley)

## What to look for

- Infected plants will be stunted in the early stages, and will not produce bunches
- If plants are infected at a later stage, bunches may be distorted
- Reduced growth with emerging leaves becoming choked and bunched
- Dark green dot-dash flecks along veins of leaves, most visible on the underside at the base of the leaf adjacent to the midrib (see photo below)
- Flecks in veins forming characteristic hooks into the midrib from the leaf blade, and also on the petioles and leaf sheaths
- Affected leaves appearing more upright with pale yellow margins, slight upward rolling of leaf margins

As the banana aphid is a very weak flyer, in normal circumstances, 70% of new infections will occur within 20 metres of an infected plant. After infection, symptoms will appear only after two new leaves have emerged on a newly infected plant, so it is important that inspections take place as close as possible to this interval to identify and destroy new infections and contain the spread. On occasions, aphids have been known to spread several kilometres on upper level air currents, but this is rare.

Remember, bunchy top is very difficult to identify, in the early stages even for experienced detectors. If a plant looks suspect, it's recommended to tag the plant and to get an experienced BBTv inspector in to confirm the diagnosis. It is also important that new infections are reported to help track the spread of the disease.



Banana aphids on young banana plants



Dot-dash flecks through the leaf veins are characteristic of BBTv

## What can you do to control and stop it?

The most important person in the control of BBTv is YOU, the grower. Regular inspection of the plants in your patches is critical to early detection so that it can be stopped before it spreads.

Once an infection is detected, the current control method is a pseudostem injection with glyphosate to kill the infected plants, combined with an insecticide, dimethoate, to kill aphids present on the plant. Allow the plant and its aphids to die before disturbing the plant. Early removal of the plant after injection may disturb the aphids and they will then reinfest other plants.

### Preventing new infections

Use of clean planting material, such as virus indexed tissue culture plantlets, is the safest way to prevent new infections. Following these simple steps will minimise the risk of BBTv entering your plantation:

- **Only use virus indexed planting material from a QBAN accredited source or bits and suckers from an approved clean area or nursery outside the bunchy top zone.**
- **Maximise distance of planting clean material from infected site (preferable more than one kilometre)**
- **Keep plantations relatively weed free to allow thorough inspections by detectors**
- **Don't disturb infected plants. Infected plants should be destroyed as soon as possible after detection to prevent spread of infective aphids**
- **Assist BBTv detectors by keeping them informed of any new plantings, or appearance of suspect plants**

## What you should do if you find a possible infection of BBTv among your plants

BBTv is a regulated banana disease under active quarantine in Australia so you need to immediately report any suspect plants to the BBTv Project Management hotline **1800 068 371**.

Detectors will work with you to identify and destroy all affected plants, and then help you to monitor your patches to ensure that any further outbreaks are controlled.



## What is happening on the industry/ research front?

A National Banana Bunchy Top Virus Management Project has recently commenced. The project is funded by the national banana levy and matched by the Australian Government through Horticulture Australia Ltd.

For NSW, a Project Coordinator has been appointed and two detectors have been employed in the new three year program, while a detector is employed in Queensland through Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (QPIF). The intention is to extend the program over 10 years, aiming for complete eradication of the virus from Australia.

Under the new project, BBTv will be tackled in two phases. The first phase aims to eradicate the disease on commercial banana plantations, while at the same time banana plants in the zones immediately surrounding commercial plantations will be identified and destroyed if BBTv infections are found. In the second phase, backyard banana plants in towns and surrounding areas will be identified and if infected, destroyed to prevent new infections spreading onto commercial plantations.

The project is looking at new methods of detecting the disease. UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) have been tested for large area coverage for detection of backyard and feral banana plants. Once the plants are identified and mapped, detectors can then follow up on the ground to determine if they are infected with BBTv.

Project Partners:



## Additional tip

It is known that feral and backyard bananas can harbour the virus and are less likely to be detected, so keep a watch out for possible infected plants when travelling around your local district.

For further reading: Farm Biosecurity Manual for the Banana Industry, call **13 25 23** or download at [www.farmbiosecurity.com.au](http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au)

Industry and Investment NSW: <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/horticulture/tropical>



This fact sheet was compiled with the assistance of Industry and Investment NSW. The input of Mark Hickey and Jeremy Bright (II NSW), David Peasley (Peasley Horticulture) and Dr John Thomas (QPIF) in compiling this factsheet is gratefully acknowledged.



# SUBTROPICAL BANANA GROWERS BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

## Banana Nutrition - Part 1 The nutrient cycle

### Understanding the nutrient balance – to get the best from your plants

Fertiliser nutrients can be removed from the banana plantation in three ways:

- through harvested fruit (Crop removal)
- losses in water leaching through the soil or erosion or
- converted in the soil to compounds which are not available to the plant (fixed).

**Crop removal** - A range of studies looking at banana crop removal have found that an average rate of nutrient removed in the harvested fruit and stems from a 25 tonne/ha crop is approximately 60kgs of nitrogen, 20 kgs of phosphorous and 220 kgs of potassium per hectare (Vimpany et al 1995).

About a third of this nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium is removed with the bunches, as well as 25% of the magnesium and 3-6% of the calcium, manganese, copper and zinc.

**Leaching losses** - Although most banana soils are of medium texture (podsoils or ferosols) and reasonably resistant to leaching, leaching losses can be high where bananas are grown on lighter soils, such as in Carnarvon. Erosion losses can be controlled by directing the water to designated drains and continually slowing up the rate of water runoff from the paddock through trash barriers. Phosphorus does not bond to soil particles and is most prone to erosion losses.

**“Fixed” nutrients** - Phosphorous compounds can readily revert from soluble to insoluble forms in some soils and become unavailable to the plant. Surface applied phosphorous can also be tied up in the first few millimetres of soil, where roots can't readily extract it. Banana soils with a pH below 4.5 will have decreased soil microbial activity, reduced nutrient cycling and restrictions in nutrient availability.

**Fertilising** - Organic matter should be regularly applied in the form of mulch or banana trash to help hold nutrients in the soil. Fertilisers should be applied at selective times in small regular quantities, i.e. before rainfall events to limit leaching losses. In replacing nutrients back into the field factors other than crop removal should be considered such as follower competition, total yield per hectare, leaching, run-off and weed competition. Ideally fertigation is the best way to get nutrients to the roots, but many subtropical banana growing plantations are not irrigated.

## Movement within the plant

Nutrients are never independently the parent's or follower's. Phosphorus for example can move from parent to follower and vice versa.

Once the bunch has been harvested from the parent plant, the nutrients in the stem within can then be transported to the follower. In fact within 10 weeks up to 40% of the follower's nutrients requirements can be provided by the parent pseudostem. The followers have access to nutrients through their own roots as well as the parent crop roots.

### Practical Tips

- Remove unwanted suckers as they compete for nutrients with the parent.
- Leave 1.5 metre pseudostem after harvest as this will feed the ratoon.
- Strive for a healthy root system as healthy roots take up fertiliser - sick roots do not.
- Condition the soil over time. This allows good availability of nutrients in the soil.
- Fertiliser placement is not critical if the root system is healthy, but even application will keep growing uniform.
- Regular testing of soil (every 3 years) and leaves (every year) will help you understand your crops' nutritional requirements.

## The importance of a soil test

To understand better the nutrient requirements of your crop a good place to start is to find out what nutrients are in your soil. A soil test should be conducted every three years to assist in this understanding.

The soil characteristics will affect the quantity and the availability of the nutrients. For example a soil with high organic matter and clay content will hold more available nutrients than a sandy soil. A soil test should consider a range of factors including:

- The Cation Exchange Capacity. Generally speaking if this is greater than 10 it is favourable for good availability of nutrients.
- pH, which affects the availability of nutrients in the soil. Acidic soils will effectively reduce the availability to the plant of nitrogen, phosphorus, calcium, magnesium, molybdenum and boron. Low pH can also lead to poor root growth. Bananas perform best if pH is above 5.0 (CaCl test)



A thick layer of trash provides an ideal environment for accelerated biological activity, breakdown of plant material and release of valuable nutrients.

Concentrating the trash between plants in a "double row" system



## Don't underestimate the value of trash

The total amount of dry matter in trash is directly proportional to the yield, i.e. for each tonne of fruit, 1 tonne of dry matter is added. Nutrients are released from the trash at different rates, depending upon the nutrient. Nitrogen, calcium and magnesium are slow release, while potassium is more soluble and more quickly released from the trash.

Breakdown of trash is a result of water availability, microbes and temperatures. The trash will breakdown into the soil and become available for the current plant, reducing the quantity of added fertiliser needed. It also helps in moisture retention in the soil and reduces erosion.

### For more information about nutrition or soil testing:

**NSW:** [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/horticulture/tropical](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/horticulture/tropical) or contact your Local Extension Officer. **WA:** DAFWA, ph 08 9956 3333, or [www.csbp.com.au/Home-Fertilisers/Nutrition-Services/Soil-Plant-Testing.aspx](http://www.csbp.com.au/Home-Fertilisers/Nutrition-Services/Soil-Plant-Testing.aspx) or contact the Carnarvon Growers Association, ph (08) 99418384 **Qld:** Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries Business Information Centre on 13 25 23 or [www.dpi.qld.gov.au](http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au)



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# SUBTROPICAL BANANA GROWERS BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

## Panama Disease

Panama disease is a fungal disease that kills banana plants. It cannot be eradicated and can put banana farmers out of business. Dead plants leave behind spores that will infect any subsequent plantings.

Panama disease invades plants through the roots and blocks the vascular tissue, cutting off the supply of water and nutrients. Banana plants of all ages are susceptible.

The first symptom is yellowing, starting from the outside of the older leaves and progressing to the younger leaves. Some vertical splitting of the corm at ground level may be an early indicator of Panama disease. Subsequent wilting of leaves will lead to most leaves hanging down like a skirt around the pseudostem with a few young upright leaves giving a spiky appearance to the plant. Ultimately, all the leaves will die and hang down.

Once a plantation has Panama disease, there is no known cure or control mechanism. The spores will remain in the soil for decades and susceptible varieties cannot be grown.

Panama disease was first discovered in Australia in the 1870s and since has spread to most banana growing districts. The disease spreads within the plantation when spores are moved in soil by water, workers, vehicles, animals or movement of planting material. The disease has mostly been spread between plantations by movement of infected planting material or soil.



Panama in lady fingers



Panama in the pseudostem

## Panama Races

The fungus that infects bananas is *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *cubensis* (Foc). There are 4 races of Panama which affect different groups of banana varieties.

**Race 1** is common in the Northern Rivers in NSW as well as the Sunshine Coast and Brisbane in Queensland. Race 1 is less common in Coffs Harbour, Woolgoolga, and Bundaberg. Race 1 will kill Ladyfinger, Ducasse and plantain bananas.

**Race 2** effects cooking varieties like Bluggoe

**Race 3** only affects some species of Heliconia.

**Race 4** has two sub types which will kill varieties affected by Race 1 and Race 2, as well as Cavendish types. Subtropical Race 4 has been found in the Tweed, South East Queensland and Bundaberg districts.

(Tropical Race 4 was found in the Northern Territory in 1997 and is so far restricted to the Northern Territory. It is much more virulent than subtropical Race 4.)



## How can the disease be eradicated?

Currently, it cannot. Once a plantation is infected susceptible varieties cannot be grown.

## How can Panama be kept away?

Panama disease has no natural long distance dispersal mechanisms, so it can be kept out of a plantation. Growers who want to grow susceptible varieties in the long term need to quarantine their farm. There are many farms in Australia that cannot grow Ladyfinger or Ducasse varieties.

## Recognise and manage the risks

- NEVER use planting material from farms that have Panama disease. The only guaranteed disease free plants are from QBAN tissue culture nurseries.
- Keep entry to your farm restricted.
- Ask those who must enter your property to clean their vehicle and boots.
- Don't put bunch stalks from an infected patch back into the plantation.
- Don't cut infected plants up, or move or disturb them.
- Don't bring second hand cartons onto your plantation.
- Make sure any pallets entering your farm are clean.
- Make sure any other plants, like avocado trees, are produced in a clean nursery and free of panama disease.
- Check any suspect plants.

## Slowing the spread on farm

Panama is spread by spores moving in infected soil and between roots of neighbouring plants. Water flow will, in time, spread the disease to areas downhill from an infected area. Traffic through the plantation may need to be changed to minimise the speed of spread. The infected site should be planted with grass to minimise spread of spores by soil erosion. Spores can also contaminate irrigation water.

## Using resistant varieties

If a farm is infected with Panama disease, growers will need to have the disease sent to a laboratory to determine which Race of the disease is present. If a Ladyfinger grower has Race 1, Cavendish varieties could be planted, as could some of the varieties from the FHIA breeding program. Goldfinger is the best known of these varieties, although not commercially successful, and FHIA18 is a ladyfinger type fruit.

### For more information about Panama disease:

**NSW:** [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/horticulture/tropical](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/horticulture/tropical) or contact your District Horticulturist. **QLD:** Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries Business Information Centre on 13 25 23 or [www.dpi.qld.gov.au](http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au) **WA:** Contact DAFWA, ph (08) 9956 3333 or the Carnarvon Growers Association, ph (08) 99418384



This fact sheet was compiled with the assistance of Industry and Investment NSW. The technical assistance of Peter Newley, District Horticulturist, Mid North Coast, Coffs Harbour, and Dr Juliane Henderson, of DEEDI Qld, Indooroopilly, is gratefully acknowledged.



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# SUBTROPICAL BANANA GROWERS BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

## Banana Nutrition - Part 2 Leaf analysis as a guide

Leaf analysis is a useful management tool for your fertiliser programs, however the information needs to be considered with a range of other factors in mind, which may include soil analysis, pest and disease status, and climatic conditions.

A leaf analysis each year will assist in implementing your fertiliser program and whether you require extra or less of various elements. Done in conjunction with a soil analysis every three years, it will give a stronger picture of the status of your plantation.

Extension horticulturists from state government departments or private consultants can help with analysis of results. Expert interpretation is vital in improving the fertiliser program and therefore the quality and quantity of your fruit.

### Taking the sample

First, try to avoid plants that are likely to throw bunches within the next three months. Choose medium-sized followers on which the third last fully emerged leaf can be reached from the ground.

Half way along this leaf take strips of leaf blade 20 cm wide from each side of the midrib. Take samples from 10 plants, bulk them and place in a clean plastic bag.

Samples may be taken at any time of the year, however for consistency they should be taken at approximately the same time each year. In the case of sub-tropical bananas you should ensure that the sample is taken when the plant is “actively growing” and not when it is in a dormant state as it would be in the June-July period. Samples should be sent to the laboratory as soon as possible.

### Results

The results will come back from the laboratory in a standard format. These can then be compared against levels recommended for bananas. From this and in conjunction with soil interpretation, you will be able to identify whether changes need to be made to fertiliser programs.



Sample the third youngest leaf that has fully emerged



Cut out a section of leaf about 20cms wide from each side of the midrib

Nutrient level standards	
Deficient	Yield is reduced and symptoms can usually be seen.
Low	Reduced yields however symptoms may not be present.
Optimum	Enough nutrient to allow high yield.
High	Yield may be reduced due to over supply.
Toxic	Symptoms of toxic effects may show up in plant. May cause death.

It is important to remember that if concentrations are high you may need to reduce the rate of fertiliser applied and work out possible causes through interpretation of the soil sample and other contributing factors.

## Nutrient Balance

Not only is it important to have sufficient levels of nutrients available to the plant but it is also critical that the balance of nutrients available in the plant and soil are correct.

An example of this is nitrogen and potassium. Experience in Coffs Harbour has shown that concentration of nitrogen in the leaf can be higher than that of potassium due to an oversupply of nitrogen or an under supply of potassium. Adjustments can be made by decreasing the over supplied element or increasing the under supplied element, depending on where the element sits on the individual categories and within the soil analysis.

There may also be scenarios whereby the element appears okay in the soil but is deficient in the plant. Such situations may be due to pH. Highly acidic soils can lock up elements such as magnesium, calcium and zinc. If we were to only take a leaf test we would consider just increasing these elements in a program, whereas the real solution would be to increase the pH and make these elements available to the plant.

### A typical nutrient range for subtropical bananas from leaf analysis

Nutrient	Deficient	Low	Optimal	High	Toxic
Nitrogen N (%)	<2.6	2.6-2.8	2.8-4.0		
Phosphorous P (%)	<0.13	0.13-0.19	0.2-0.25	>0.25	
Potassium K (%)	<2.5	2.5-3.0	3.1-4.0	>4.0	
N/K ratio			1:1.0-1:1.2		
Sulphur S (%)	<0.1	0.1-0.2	0.23-0.27	>0.27	
Calcium Ca (%)	<0.5	0.5-0.7	0.5-1.2	>1.25	
Magnesium Mg (%)	<0.20	0.2-0.3	0.3-0.46	>0.46	
Sodium Na (%)			0.01-0.10		
Chlorine Cl (%)	0.8-0.9				
Copper Cu(mg/kg)		3-7	7-20		
Zinc Zn(mg/kg)	<14	14-20	21-35	>35	
Manganese Mn (mg/kg)	<10	25	1000-2200	4000-6000	
Iron Fe(mg/kg)			70-200		
Aluminium Al(mg/kg)			50-240		
Boron B(mg/kg)	<10	10-20	20-80	80-300	>300
Molybdenum Mo(mg/kg)			1.5-3.2		

These levels were reported by DW Turner from his pot trials carried out at Centre for Tropical Horticulture, Alstonville (1983).

### Key points to remember

- Leaf analysis is a useful tool in assessing and adjusting your fertiliser program
- It should be used in conjunction with a soil analysis to give you a more accurate assessment of your needs
- Other factors such as pest and diseases and climatic conditions will influence your needs
- Seek expert input to ensure the best changes to your fertiliser program – if needed.

### For more information about nutrition or leaf analysis:

**NSW:** NSW: [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/horticulture/tropical](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/horticulture/tropical) or contact your Local Extension Officer **WA:** DAFWA, ph 08 9956 3333, or <http://www.csbp.com.au/Home-Fertilisers/Nutrition-Services/Soil-Plant-Testing.aspx> or contact the Carnarvon Growers Association, ph (08) 99418384 **Qld:** Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries Business Information Centre on 13 25 23 or [www.dpi.qld.gov.au](http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au)



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# SUBTROPICAL BANANA GROWERS BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

## Managing Flying Foxes in Bananas

Flying foxes are regarded by many banana growers as a significant pest. Where crops are unprotected, feeding damage to flowers, scratching of skin or feeding on prematurely ripening fruit can cause significant losses of fruit and add to production costs.

### The Grey Headed Flying Fox

Although black flying-foxes (*Pteropus alecto*) and little red flying-foxes (*P. scapulatus*) occur on the NSW North Coast and SE Queensland, the most common species is the grey headed flying-fox (*P. poliocephalus*). Grey headed flying foxes (GHFF) roost in camps along much of Australia's central east coast, with the largest camps on the NSW Mid North and Central Coast. They are migratory, but may set up colonies in regions where a reliable food source exists.

GHFFs are primarily nectar and native fruit feeders. During foraging, GHFF disperse pollen and seeds of diet plants and so play an important role in the ecology of native forest communities. Clearing of native vegetation over the years has restricted their food sources and when food is scarce, they will increase their visits to commercial fruit crops. Food preference studies (Gopalan 2004) showed that native blossom was preferred well ahead of banana, red papaya and mango. A study by Ballard in 2004 also found that flying fox damage is most commonly reported from Lady Finger growers, with 23% of growers reporting some form of damage. Recent informal surveys with growers suggest damage levels have increased since 2004.



Cavendish bananas at the early bell emergence stage. Banana flowers at this stage are attractive to flying foxes.



Grey headed flying foxes in a colony (photo courtesy of Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts)

Mean annual flying-fox damage estimates for each fruit type by growers (Ballard, 2004)

Type	% reporting damage	Growers surveyed
Bananas - Cavendish	11.96%	54
Bananas - Lady Finger	22.96%	49
Bananas - other	14.36%	14

Although most damage seems to occur from September to January, flying foxes have been observed in plantations year round. In serious cases, damage can cause up to 50% loss of fruit from a bunch, due to scratching or feeding on fruit. They have been known to tear through bags to get to ripening fruit.

Ladyfinger bananas, which make up about 20% of the NSW industry, are particularly attractive to flying foxes as they produce more nectar than Cavendish and other varieties. As a result, growers are forced to bag bunches soon after bell emergence, as bracts open and flowers appear, necessitating once or twice weekly inspections and bagging depending on growth rates, adding extra costs to production. One grower estimate suggests that for a 12 ha farm, the extra labour and downgrades in a typical damage year in Ladyfinger bananas accounts for over \$3,000/ha in lost income.



## BEST PRACTICE TIPS TO REDUCE THE IMPACTS OF FLYING FOXES

- Bagging bunches early at bell emergence is the best control option.
- Ladyfinger bananas produce more nectar than Cavendish, so it's particularly important to bag as the first flower bracts lift.
- Use double bagging, or thicker bunch covers to reduce scratching damage.
- Clip the bottom of bags with light staples to prevent GHFF crawling up into the bunch. Staples can then be removed easily at bunch pruning stage.
- Do not allow any ripe bunches to remain in the plantation as the ripe fruit will emit ethylene which is thought to attract flying foxes. Ripe fruit also attracts birds and possums.
- Do not dispose of rubbish fruit in the plantation as this will also attract flying foxes.
- Use attractive feeding plants on the perimeter of the plantation to distract them from commercial crops.

## The legislation

**NSW** Grey headed flying foxes are listed as a threatened species under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act (TSCA). Section 91 of the TSCA states that a licence may be issued authorising a person to take action that is likely to result in the harm of a threatened species under s120 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act where there is a threat to life or property. Damage to commercial fruit crops is regarded as constituting a threat to property where damage can be established and where it is likely that further damage will occur if no protective measures are taken.

The Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water has a policy in place which provides for the administration and management of flying fox licences in NSW. The policy is currently under review.

Commercial fruit growers who intend to scare or shoot at flying foxes by using gunshot are required to apply to their local National Parks and Wildlife Area Office for a licence to conduct such activity.

**Qld** In September 2008, the Queensland Government ceased issuing permits to shoot grey headed flying foxes, effectively banning culling in commercial orchards.

**WA** There have been no reported problems with Flying Foxes in the Carnarvon growing district.

## Management Options

In other fruit crops such as stonefruit, exclusion netting has been found to be the only truly effective way to manage flying foxes. However, netting structures are very difficult to erect on the steep slopes used for banana production and therefore cost prohibitive.

Culling by shooting animals under permit is not regarded as being very effective and other methods of deterrence have proven unsuccessful in the past. Small scale research into sound and light deterrents in orchards is currently being conducted in Queensland as part of the Flying Fox Working Group Action Plan. Some guidance on future management options for banana growers will hopefully come from that work.

References: "A survey of interactions between humans and flying foxes in NSW" Ballard G, 2004  
"A Flying Fox Update" Industry and Government Flying fox Working Group, Queensland, November 2009

### For more information about flying foxes:

Flying Foxes control methods research findings - [http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au/documents/BusinessAndTrade\\_BusinessDevelopment/Flying-fox-control-methods-research.pdf](http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au/documents/BusinessAndTrade_BusinessDevelopment/Flying-fox-control-methods-research.pdf)  
General reading: [www.environmentnsw.gov.au/flyingfoxes](http://www.environmentnsw.gov.au/flyingfoxes)



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# SUBTROPICAL BANANA GROWERS BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

## Climate change and subtropical bananas



Soil erosion causes major damage to infrastructure such as roads

Like most agricultural industries in Australia, subtropical banana growers are already beginning to feel the impact of climate change and climate variability. Some of the more negative impacts, such as reduced rainfall in spring, will require some level of adaptation by banana growers. Planning early to adapt to these risks and being aware of the opportunities that climate change may also have to offer will help minimise the impacts on farm productivity and protect farm businesses.

This factsheet is designed to be a starting point for identifying decisions that need to be made to help you be better prepared for the consequences of climate change. Additional information and support to help you adapt to climate change is also identified.

## Key concerns for Australia's subtropical banana industry

Listed here are some of the possible impacts that could result from climate change in subtropical banana growing regions. These impacts are based on widely accepted and credible models from groups such as the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology:

- Drier hotter springs resulting in water shortages. Evaporation rates are expected to increase with temperature. This will result in increased irrigation demands in regions such as Carnarvon.
- Losses due to sunburnt fruit are likely to increase. High temperatures are also likely to impact on fruit size and bunch emergence.
- Plantation groundcovers could be compromised during prolonged dry conditions and high temperatures, leaving soil more exposed.
- Non irrigated plantations would be more prone to stress.
- Increased frequency and intensity of storms earlier in the year.
- Increased banana "blowdowns" during intense storms resulting from systems such as East Coast Lows.
- Increased damage to shelter structures (ie windbreak trees) and infrastructure (sheds, roads etc.)
- Increased disease incidence due to extended leaf wetness and saturated soils.
- Increased leaf tearing from high winds reducing photosynthetic ability and possibly inducing more disease.
- Change in pest/predator ratios due to higher temperatures.
- New tropical zone pests moving further south.
- Flying fox damage in plantations could increase due to reduced nectar flows in native forests, particularly during dry springs.
- Increased pressure on agricultural land and higher land values as population moves to climatically favourable areas such as the NSW north coast.
- Increasing energy costs impacting on intensive farm operations such as harvesting, coolstore operations and transport.
- Increased input costs such as diesel, fertilizer and electricity.

## Opportunities for subtropical bananas

There are expected to be some positive effects from climate change:

- An increase in areas climatically suited to bananas due to increased temperatures and reduced incidence of frosts in certain locations.
- Drier springs resulting in reduced disease incidence.
- Proximity of the east coast industry to the Gold Coast and Brisbane, and growth in local farmer markets providing opportunities for "local food" branding.

A major restriction to exploiting these opportunities could be insufficient on-farm water storage for irrigation. The NSW Northern Rivers region, for instance, has relatively short river catchments, resulting in rapidly declining flows during periods of dry weather and difficulties arise with the cease to pump orders which follow.

# Adaption strategies

## Increased storm frequency and intensity

- Cultivate and prepare ground for plantings only during drier months to avoid erosion during heavy rainfall. Use irrigation to establish groundcovers immediately after cultivation and place temporary controls (ie haybales or hessian sausages) in erosion prone areas.
- Use groundcovers such as molasses grass to protect soil during heavy rainfall.
- Ensure drainage lines are well grassed and rocked to withstand high water velocity.
- Consideration should be given to establishing windbreaks in current and new plantings, keeping in mind the following:
  - Careful species selection to avoid brittle trees
  - Potential competition for light, water nutrient with crop
  - Effect of spray drift
  - Good air drainage is essential to prevent cold air gathering in pockets
  - Use of artificial structures

## Increased pest and disease incidence

- Conduct more frequent monitoring for pests and diseases.
- Ensure disease prevention strategies such as de-leafing are carried out frequently.
- Manage soil borne pests. Plantations with high nematode infestations have weaker root systems and are more prone to blowdowns during severe weather events.
- Participate in regional grower networks such as PestWeb, which is based on the NSW North Coast, which provide information on new pest incursions and outbreaks.



Growing under shade cloth to cope with high temperatures and high winds in Carnarvon, WA



Cover crops between rows to reduce erosion

## Seasonal water shortages

- On-farm water storages may be required for new plantations. A volume of 3 megalitres of water for every hectare of bananas is considered adequate in dry years.
- If water supply is inadequate to fully irrigate the entire plantation, design the irrigation to supply water to meet peak water demands on a portion of the plantation. This is a better option than under irrigating the entire plantation.
- Consider increasing capacity of existing on-farm storages. Deeper storages are preferable to shallow, wide structures, as evaporation losses are significantly reduced.

## Other Strategies

- Undertake an energy audit of farm operations to identify where savings can be made.
- Explore options for on-farm renewable energy generation, such as solar or wind turbines.
- Use lighter coloured and reflective bunch covers to reduce bunch temperatures during summer months.

### For more information:

**Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency (previously the Australian Greenhouse Office):** [www.climatechange.gov.au](http://www.climatechange.gov.au) **CSIRO Climate Change Flagship:** [www.csiro.au/org/ClimateAdaptationFlagshipOverview.html](http://www.csiro.au/org/ClimateAdaptationFlagshipOverview.html) **Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology:** [www.bom.gov.au/climate/change/](http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/change/) **NSW Government Climate Change website:** [www.environment.nsw.gov.au/Garnaut](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/Garnaut) **Climate Change Review:** [www.garnautreview.org.au/](http://www.garnautreview.org.au/)



This fact sheet was compiled with the assistance of Industry and Investment NSW. The input of Mark Hickey is gratefully acknowledged. It is funded by Horticulture Australia Ltd using the banana levy and matched funds from the Australian Government.



Know-how for Horticulture™

# SUBTROPICAL BANANA GROWERS BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

## Irrigating Bananas in the Subtropics Part 1.

While some information in this Factsheet is useful to all growers, it has been produced specifically to assist growers on the east coast. Future irrigation fact sheets may look at new technologies in irrigation systems to assist all growers.

Many subtropical banana growers on the north coast of NSW and south east Queensland do not use irrigation systems. Why would a banana grower even consider spending all of that money and time to install irrigation?

But studies have shown that water deficiencies in a banana crop can lead to reduced bunch size, weight and plant vigour, as well as affecting the rate of leaf development and number of fruit. So are the benefits of irrigation greater than the costs?

If you are still reading this fact sheet it may be that you might be considering irrigation, or more efficient irrigation, as an option for your bananas.

Here is the basic information necessary for the successful irrigation of bananas using weather based methods. (Another method of deciding when to irrigate is soil based scheduling, not discussed here.)

Most of the published information comes from tropical bananas where rainfall is minimal between March – November but the principles and benefits of irrigation remain the same.

Being a crop with a long growing season, the total water requirement of bananas is high - requiring around 2000 mm distributed evenly through out the year. Bananas can grow with less water than this, but this amount will ensure the crop can be finished to the correct quality and specifications.

Bananas, like all other plants, use differing amounts of soil moisture during various stages of growth. To try and rationalise this, each crop is given a crop co-efficient which determines the amount of moisture used relative to the local climatic conditions and is given in a daily or monthly form.

The crop coefficient (kc) is used to calculate how much water has been used by a specific crop and is applied to the reference evapotranspiration (ET<sub>o</sub>) obtained from a local automatic weather station. The amount used is then referred to as the crop evapotranspiration (ET<sub>c</sub>). If this figure is not readily available, then a figure of 80% of the local pan evaporation from the Bureau of Meteorology may be used.



Under tree sprinklers are efficient and minimise evaporation losses when used at night

**Table 1 kc values of bananas, second ratoon subtropical climate.**

kc											
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1.0	0.8	.75	.7	.7	.75	.9	1.05	1.05	1.05	1.0	1.0

As an example, in January the crop coefficient (kc) value is 1.0. If we have ET<sub>o</sub> of 5.7mm for one day this whole amount will need to be applied to replace the amount of water used yesterday. After a week about 40mm will be needed from either rainfall or supplementary irrigation to replace what has been used.

To convert irrigation in mm (of rainfall equivalent) to volumes of water requires the area dimension. With bananas, use the planted area only to give volumes used (ML per hectare).

We can now determine maximum water requirement in megalitres per hectare for January using long term average weather data.

Monthly ET<sub>o</sub> x kc (Jan)

160mm x 1.0 = 160mm

1 mm over 1 m<sup>2</sup> delivers 1 litre, so over 1 hectare for the month 1,600,000 litres or 1.6ML is required (160mm x 10,000 m<sup>2</sup> in a hectare)



## Long term water needs

Of interest is the comparison of crop water requirements for each month of the year and long term average rainfall data to determine when potential water deficits may occur.

**Table 2 Rainfall and evaporation monthly figures and deficit surplus indicators**

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Kc	1.0	0.8	.75	.7	.7	.75	.9	1.05	1.05	1.05	1	1
Monthly requirement (evaporation)	177	140	136.4	105	84	75	87	108	135	158	165	189
Rainfall	176	227	263	196	186	157	92	77	55	100	133	149
+ / -												

It would appear that Nth Coast NSW bananas require supplementary irrigation for at least 6 months of the year. From August to January the long term average rainfall figures are insufficient to supply the plants with all of their water requirements.

### Factors which also must be considered are:

- During months where rainfall is sufficient, rainfall events may not occur consistently through the month leaving dry periods between falls.
- Variability in weather conditions.
- Major storms/rain events can produce large amounts of water, but only a small amount may be absorbed by the soil within the root zone of the crop.

## Water Budgets

Water budgets allow growers to determine frequency of irrigation, identifying the available moisture content in the soil, depending on soil type and the evaporation and transpiration losses.

Table 2 shows the long term average daily evaporation data for the year. Loam soils typical of the Alstonville Plateau will hold about 167mm of available moisture in the top 1 metre of the soil profile. Banana plants typically have a root system down to about 500mm therefore having access to only 84mm of this moisture when at field capacity. We then plot the moisture used against each day to calculate irrigation events (See Table 3). Replacement irrigation should occur at about 60 % field capacity, or 40 % depletion. This is equivalent to 34mm depletion in soil moisture. In other words, replacement irrigation should be applied when soil reserves reach 50mm. If we take a starting point from September 2009, and assume the soil is at field capacity on September 1 the following scenario would have occurred.

**Table 3 Water budget for bananas for September 2009 based on Alstonville weather data**

Date	Rain mm	Irrigation mm	ET <sub>o</sub> x kc = ET <sub>c</sub> (Amount of mm used by crop)	Balance (mm)	Remarks
Sept 1			4.2 x 1.05 = 4.4	84.0 – 4.4 = 79.6	Soil at field capacity
Sept 2			3.8 x 1.05 = 3.9	79.6 – 4.0 = 75.6	
Sept 3			4.0 x 1.05 = 4.2	75.6 – 4.2 = 71.4	
Sept 4			4.2 x 1.05 = 4.4	71.4 – 4.4 = 67.0	
Sept 5	0.2		3.7 x 1.05 = 3.9	67.0 – 3.9 = 63.1	Rainfall below 1 mm not effective
Sept 6			3.4 x 1.05 = 3.6	63.1 – 3.6 = 59.5	
Sept 7	10		4.3 x 1.05 = 4.5	59.5 – 4.5 + 10 = 65	
Sept 8			4.4 x 1.05 = 4.6	65 – 4.6 = 60.4	
Sept 9			6.4 x 1.05 = 6.72	60.4 – 6.7 = 53.7	Hot, dry winds
Sept 10		35	4.0 x 1.05 = 4.2	53.7 – 4.2 + 35 = 84.5	Irrigation applied to return soil to field capacity
Sept 11			4.2 x 1.05 = 4.4	84.5 – 4.4 = 80.1	
Sept 12	5		3.4 x 1.05 = 3.6	80.1 – 3.6 + 5 = 81.5	Rainfall 5mm and above is effective

Where excess rainfall occurs above the amount required to raise the budget to field capacity it is assumed that the excess is lost to runoff or seepage. Water budgeting is only concerned with available moisture to the plant roots.

Remember - maximum benefits from irrigation will only occur when other aspects of crop management such as crop nutrition and pest and disease management are in check.

### For further information:

**Crop evapotranspiration** - Guidelines for computing crop water requirements - **FAO Irrigation and Drainage Paper 56** <http://www.fao.org/docrep/s2022e/s2022e07.htm>

**Soil water monitoring and irrigation scheduling** <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/resources/water/irrigation/scheduling>. **Tropical Banana Information Kit, Agrilink Series, DEEDI (formerly Queensland DPI)**



This fact sheet was compiled with the assistance of Industry and Investment NSW. The input of Jeremy Bright is gratefully acknowledged. It is funded by Horticulture Australia Ltd using the banana levy and matched funds from the Australian Government.



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## Banana field day


A field day addressing soil conservation on steep banana lands will be held on the property of Garry Fetherston at Montecollum on Wednesday July 29 from 10am till noon.

The day will be an informal 'farm walk' looking at some recent works on Garry's property that demonstrate good practice in controlling surface runoff over the plantation, considered essential in sustaining the plantation's soil resource in hostile conditions of steep slopes and high rainfall.

The field day will also focus

on the value of ground cover in protecting the soil surface and providing long term soil health benefits. Attendees will also have the opportunity to meet recently appointed District Horticulture Officer for NSW Dept. Primary Industry, Jeremy Bright.

Enquiries to Gerry Ryan, Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority, 66 270 125, gerry.ryan@cma.nsw.gov.au, or Northern Rivers CMA, Alstonville Office, on 66 270 170, margaret.campton-jones@cma.nsw.gov.au.



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## Kayak firm helps out marine friends

Byron Bay's GoSea Kayak is now donating money from every kayak paddle to two groups that fight to save our marine friends. One dollar from every customer who comes out for a paddle on their sea kayak tours in Byron Bay will go to whale and dolphin conservation. The money will be donated to Southern Cross University's Whale Research Centre and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society.

GoSea Kayak is donating this money on an ongoing basis to help protect the future of the marine environment which plays such a critical role for Byron Bay's tourism industry.

GoSea Kayak works closely with Dr Liz Hawkins from the Southern Cross University



Whale Research Centre, who is conducting ongoing research on the Byron Bay dolphin population.

GoSea Kayak part-owner, Mitchell Phillips, said, 'Liz will paddle occasionally with us as a guest expert on our tours and advise us on Byron's resident dolphin group. She is a great asset, helping us to provide a sustainable, low-impact activity in the Cape Byron Marine Park.'

The next scheduled paddle with Dr Liz Hawkins is this Sunday, July 26. Call 0416 222 344 to book this trip.

During whale season GoSea kayakers are thrilled by the numbers of whales resting and playing in the calmer waters of Byron Bay, which is an important resting ground for whales, particularly mothers and calves, during their southern migration.

## PCOs enjoy the trade show treatment at Byron Bay

Story & photo Victoria Cosford

The Byron at Byron Resort recently played host to a special two-day event entitled Byron Bay Familiarisation, flying twelve of Australia's largest Professional Conference Organisers (PCOs) into the region to attend it. According to Russell Mills, CEO of Northern Rivers Tourism, 'This... is a great example of how the local industry is working cooperatively to attract new markets at a time when it is most needed.'

With PCOs always looking for new destinations to direct their conference business, this initiative was a comprehensive attempt at showcasing the Byron Shire and what it could offer to visitors. To that end, a mini tradeshow was held on the second day in the conference rooms, with fifteen local operators on hand, including Byron Farmers Market, Vision



Leah Roland from Bangalow Cooking School, centre, was part of the trade show.

Walks, Crystal Castle, Bangalow Cooking School and CircusArts, to answer questions about their respective businesses.

Resort Manager Lyn Parche summed up her two main beliefs to *The Echo*, saying that 'no-one is successful in isolation' and 'We're all collectively responsible for the success of

this region' – certainly, if this event is anything to go by, the Byron at Byron Resort is meeting its responsibilities with

flair, imagination and the sort of warm generosity for which they are increasingly becoming known.

### Artists: don't work for free

Apparently the Epicentre developers mentioned in last week's *Backlash* don't intend to pay artists for their work on the 'gateway' project, just for the cost of materials. *The Echo* believes artists should be paid for their work.

## Rockets away at Bruns

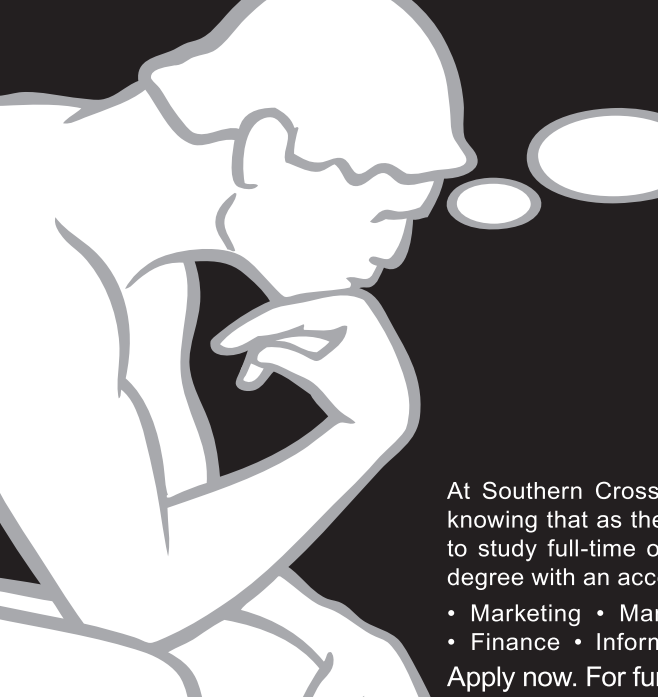
From front page

Of the moon landing in 1969, said Philip. 'All of the kids love the launches. It creates a lot of excitement while at the same time teaching them about rocket science and space travel.'

Charlie from Mullumbimby was one of the lucky kids to send a solid fuel powered rocket into 'space'.

'It was really fun,' said Charlie. 'It took a while for us to get it going but when it took off, it was awesome.'

More information about the International Year of Astronomy can be found at the Australian website: [www.astronomy2009.org.au](http://www.astronomy2009.org.au) and to contact the Cosmic Couple visit: [www.starrynight.com.au](http://www.starrynight.com.au).



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**AUSSIIES  
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## Minister hears farmers' concerns



**PRODUCE ON SHOW:** Banana grower Kurt Lindsay, from Snake Gully Bananas, with federal agricultural minister Tony Burke. Story page 6. Photo: Brett Workman/cl4530k

# COUNCIL DIGS IN OVER PROJECT

## Mayor stands firm on decision

By MEGAN MACKANDER

THE final say in the \$626 million marina and business precinct development on the Caboolture River known as North Harbour looks set to lie in the hands of the state government – not the Moreton Bay Regional Council.

During today's council meeting, a letter from infrastructure and planning minister Stirling Hinchliffe will be discussed. It seeks to declare North Harbour a "prescribed project".

The declaration would mean Mr Hinchliffe would appoint the coordinator general as the ultimate decision-maker to override, cancel or amend any council decisions.

The letter from Mr Hinchliffe stated there would be no right of appeal on the coordinator general's decision.

But Moreton Bay mayor Allan Sutherland said he would stand by his council's move to refuse the development of the eastern side of North Harbour.

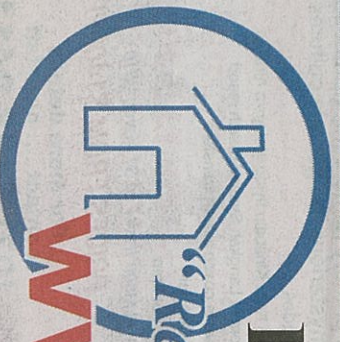
This included the major marina facility and a residential precinct for up to 5500 residents.

Mr Sutherland said the planning and environment council would have been a more suitable avenue to appeal a council decision, without political intervention and unnecessary court costs.

"I'm confident our decision was the responsible one for the environment and health of Moreton Bay," he said.

"The advice and evidence presented to councillors and myself is something that I believe will stand up to scrutiny by the Planning and Environment Court."

To Page 4



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**HEALTHY CROPS:** David Peasley from Bunchy Top National Project with Agriculture Minister Tony Burke at Snake Gully Bananas last week.  
Photo: Brett Wortman / c15430n

# Minister hears farmers' issues

By **SHEREE ECHLIN**

TONY Burke, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, visited the Caboolture region last Tuesday, taking the time to hear the concerns of local farmers.

Mr Burke's last stop was the Lindsay family property, Snake Gully Bananas, at Rocksberg.

Mr Burke stood back, listened intently and asked questions where appropriate as the Lindsay family and the National Bunchy Top Project team discussed diseases that affect banana plantations in south-east Queensland and the far north coast of New South Wales.

During the discussion owner Kurt Lindsay and his father Greg outlined for the minister the ins and outs of running a banana farm and the detrimental affect disease could have on a banana plantation.

Particular mention was made of Black Sigatoka, a banana disease brought into the country from imported bananas, and how Australia was one of the first countries to get rid of it.

Mr Burke, who took up his position during the time of the equine influenza, said he had learnt how easily one disease could destroy an industry. "We can never reduce the risk completely down to zero unless we stop imports and take every precaution," Mr Burke said.

The Lindsay family farm produces between 12,000 and 14,000 cartons of bananas every year, which are sold at markets or go to an agent to be sold elsewhere. Kurt said during his discussion with Mr Burke the biggest point he made was that "we don't want imports".

"We check all the time for disease, it's not a set routine, your eyes are always open," Kurt said. "You can pick something wrong on a plant a mile away."

"We've never had any problems here but any disease can spread quickly and of course it's going to have an effect."

Earlier, Mr Burke had also visited strawberry and pineapple farms where he said farmers expressed over changes to visa conditions.

"Since the mining boom took off, there have been problems getting workers onto farms," Mr Burke said. "I had one grower say that last year's harvest would have been half the size without the visa decision."

**PARKING CONCERN:** The car park on the corner of Matthew Terrace and James Street at Caboolture is always full. It is a three-hour council car park, but is used by rail commuters, leaving no space for customers hoping to visit the nearby shops. Deputy mayor/Div 3 councillor Greg Chippendale said the parking problem had been an issue for some time. He said he understood the problem caused concern for businesses and that random checks of the car park were conducted three times a week. Mr Chippendale said those caught were issued fines but it still didn't stop people. "If we could wave a magic wand and create more parks, we would," he said. Mr Chippendale said even if the car park was fenced off and had an attendant it still wouldn't deter people, instead they would probably go elsewhere.

Photo: Brett Wortman / c15437b



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## All-out assault on bunchy top    TWEED DAILY NEWS    8/7/09

8th July 2009

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### Local banana plantation near Murwillumbah.

WELL-known Murwillumbah horticulturist David Peasley has been appointed to head a team of NSW experts aiming to completely eradicate bunchy top disease which has cursed the banana industry for decades.

The team has embarked on a three-year national project to begin elimination of the disease in subtropical bananas as the first stage towards the complete eradication of the virus in Australia.

Mr Peasley, co-ordinator for the NSW part of the project, said the team's strategy will focus on containing the virus to affected areas, reducing the level of the virus in those areas and setting the scene for the eradication of the virus

"The strategy will involve a number of measures based around increased surveillance," Mr Peasley said.

"More frequent inspections are planned and the detectors will be looking around, as well as in plantations.

He said two specialist detectors had been employed to find infected plants, and growers were assisting by keeping an eye out for the symptoms.

The program would also use aerial surveillance to find possible infected plants in scrub or forest areas.



## Coffs Coast Advocate

### Project aims to halt banana virus

8th July 2009

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A NEW three-year national project to begin the elimination of the Bunchy Top virus in the subtropical banana industry began on July 1, as the first stage towards the complete eradication of the virus in Australia.

The project is being funded by the national banana industry levy which is managed by Horticulture Australia Limited, with matched funding from the Australian Government.

Well-known horticulturalist David Peasley has been appointed co-ordinator for New South Wales and the project is being managed by the Australian Banana Growers Council.

The only places where Banana Bunchy Top virus (BBTV) is currently found is in far northern New South Wales and into the banana growing areas in South East Queensland, but it has been found in the Nambucca Valley in the past.

Affected plants do not produce fruit, resulting in significant loss of production if allowed to spread,

either by affected plant material or banana aphids. It is considered one of the most devastating virus diseases of bananas worldwide.

“If the Bunchy Top virus were to spread to the main growing regions in Far North Queensland it would be disastrous for our industry, so we aim to prevent its spread and eradicate it completely,” said the Chairman of the Australian Banana Growers Council, Nicky Singh.

NSW co-ordinator David Peasley said now was the best time to tackle the virus, as plantations were fewer and further apart, which meant a much greater opportunity to control its spread.

The aim of the three year program is to focus on commercial plantations and to contain the virus to known affected areas; reduce the level of the virus in these areas and establish the platform for the eradication of the virus.

“More frequent inspections are planned and the detectors will be looking around, as well as in plantations,” said David Peasley.

Two specialist detectors have been employed to find infected plants; aerial surveillance is being used and growers are looking for the symptoms and reporting them to the detectors.

