

Final Report

Taste Australia Retail Program

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Taste Australia Retail Program (MT18017)

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Summary

The objective of this retail training project was to provide resources to build a preference and priority by targeted international retailers to stock the 10 designated Australian fresh fruits and vegetables (apples, pears, avocados, citrus, table grapes, broccoli, carrots, lettuce, celery and sweet corn) participating in the project, through the provision of value-added retail training and education resources, highlighting Australia's reputation for quality, nutrition and safety throughout the supply chain.

Australia is well positioned to offer these services, which are much needed and requested by retailers. No other country or suppliers are currently offering the proposed level of multi-product services, creating a window of opportunity for the 10 participating products. Through Hort Innovation's "Taste Australia" program, industries have the opportunity to create a year-round presence with the trade, retailers and consumers in Asia, an opportunity not available to suppliers from other supplier countries, where the focus is on single seasonal commodities. "Fruits from Chile" is possibly the one exception.

Eleven retail training resources were developed for delivery by Hort Innovation, industry and third-party specialists to international modern retailers. These resources comprised five fruits (apples, pears, citrus, avocados and table grapes), five vegetables (broccoli, carrots, celery, lettuce and sweet corn), and a Generic module. Each module included a "Why Australia" video, developed as part of the project.

The resources have been designed to stand out in the competitive international market place, utilising the design criteria of "Taste Australia", the Australian industry-wide fruit and vegetable export brand. "Taste Australia" objectives are to increase the profile, sales and consumption of premium Australian fruits and vegetables.

The end products provide flexibility in delivery methods, including:

- Supplying the resources to retailers to customize to their own specific needs
- Delivery by "Taste Australia", Hort Innovation and/or industry representatives
- Delivery by third-party retail training specialists, such as Produce Marketing Australia

The resources can also be customized to suit the requirements of particular markets, specific retailers and different delivery situations, such as face-to-face and remotely.

A further outcome has been to provide a framework for other Australian products to participate in the retail training program.

The outcome of this project has been to create tools to develop a preference by international retailers and their trade partners for Australian fresh fruits and vegetables, under the banner of "Taste Australia", a key component of the Hort Innovation Asian Markets Fund.

Keywords

Retail, training, international, export, Taste Australia, fruit, vegetables

Introduction

Australian growers and exporters face increasing competition in Asia, as other southern hemisphere suppliers increase the activities in the region. South Africa, New Zealand, Chile, Peru, Argentina, and Brazil are all active in Asia across a wide variety of products, including those participating in the project. More recently European countries have become more active in Asia, as their traditional markets mature. Competing on proximity to markets and price is not an option. The alternative is to highlight Australia’s points of difference which are relevant to the market place – quality, nutrition and food safety for example – delivered in a format that best relates to retailers and their partners.

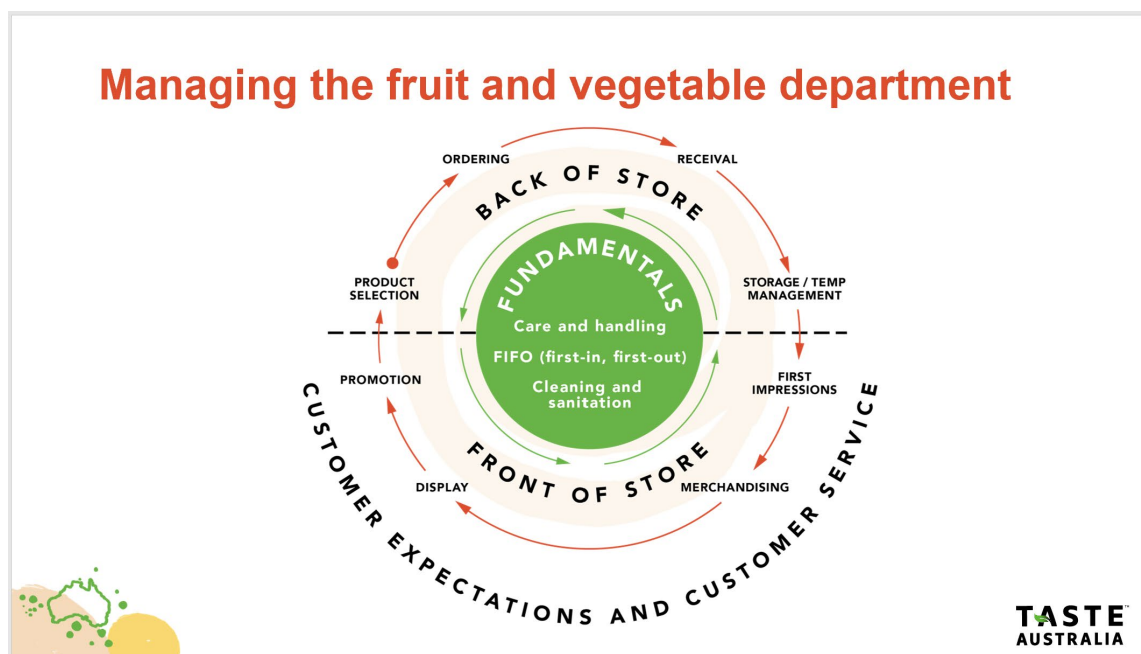
When Requests for Proposals were initially sought by Hort innovation, the scope of the project was to include content compilation and design using the “Taste Australia” format, along with delivery of the retail training. An amended RFP subsequently deleted the delivery component of the project.

To ensure a consistency of approach in content and design, it was recommended to Hort Innovation to develop a Generic module first (one of the 11 modules in the project), to create a template for the ten product-specific resources (apples, avocados, citrus, pears, table grapes, broccoli, carrots, celery, lettuce and sweet corn). This approach meant that the resources ultimately developed incorporated a perspective from the point of view of retailers, plus there was flexibility in how the resources could be delivered.

The approved structure for each resource comprised:

- Introducing Taste Australia
- Why Australia
- Why Australian (the ten specific products)
- Managing the fruit and vegetable department
 - Fundamentals
 - Back of store best practices
 - Front of store best practices
 - Customer expectations and customer service

It also meant that a consistent format would be available for other products to participate in the future.



Methodology

Stakeholder Engagement:

The first activity was to work with Hort Innovation to establish a Project Stakeholder Group, comprising representatives from the industry peak bodies covering the ten participating products (apples, avocados, citrus, pears, table grapes, broccoli, carrots, celery, lettuce and sweet corn). The initial activity with the Project Stakeholder Group was to:

- Agree the structure for the retail training i.e. content areas/categories, and
- Arrange sourcing of information that industries may have, relevant to the content for individual products or groups of products, to create content.

The recommended retail training structure, which was approved, was based on Produce Marketing Australia's experience in delivering almost 150 retail training workshops to retailers in Asia, the Middle East, Central and South America and Europe.

Stakeholder engagement was later expanded, at the request of Hort Innovation, to include export-oriented industry members. These members were identified collaboratively by Produce Marketing Australia and the relevant industry peak body representative.

These stakeholders were invited to review and comment on draft content for the product-specific resources, where they may have expertise. Draft content was first approved by Hort Innovation for distribution. It was at this point where requests were made of industry for resources, particularly photography. This had limited success.

After industry feedback was obtained, content was then developed into the approved "Taste Australia" design format by the graphic design company designated by Hort Innovation. Approval was then obtained from Hort Innovation to circulate the draft design versions to nominated stakeholders again for their final review. Following receipt of feedback, final draft versions of each product module were submitted to Hort Innovation for approval.

For the five vegetable resources, industry representatives were consulted at one point only, a decision taken by Hort Innovation and Ausveg, the industry peak body. The draft content had been circulated to industry, then the process stopped by Hort Innovation. Near-to-final design formats were prepared and distributed to industry for review and feedback. A final review was undertaken by the Ausveg representative on the Project Stakeholder Group.

At the conclusion of developing the 11 resources, all the training was reviewed and updated. In particular, improvements made to later-developed resources were included in earlier resources. In addition, updated industry export data (2019-20) was available and incorporated. The updated product-specific training resources were provided to the relevant Project Stakeholder Group members for review and feedback, prior to submission to Hort Innovation for final approval.

Compiling Content

Following confirmation of the structure for the retail training, sourcing product-specific content was undertaken. The primary source of content was from Produce Marketing Australia, based on the development and delivery of earlier international retail training programs. Other potential sources of relevant generic and product-specific information included Hort Innovation, Industry Peak Bodies, government instrumentalities, Project Stakeholder Group members and nominated industry representatives.

Because the training will ultimately be delivered in a number of languages to people of varying levels of knowledge and skills, including visual retail images was essential to maximise the effectiveness of the training. For many of the product resources there was a lack of suitable retail photos available. As a result, two other sources were utilised. The graphic design company was able to source satisfactory stock photos in some instances. More usually, photos were taken in Australian domestic retail situations by Produce Marketing Australia to fill the gaps, on the understanding that international examples could be inserted as the retail training program was progressively delivered and opportunities were taken to source photos during training.

Designing Content

The graphic design company used in the project was designated by Hort Innovation, because of their experience with the design requirements of the "Taste Australia" program. The company initially nominated and included by

Hort Innovation as a sub-contractor with allocated budget within the project was Bastion Effect. Before the project was under way the company was changed to Elevencom, one of the reasons for necessitating a later change in the project contract.

All resources were developed in Power Point format, to facilitate later changes and updates, plus allowing flexibility to translate the content into relevant languages.

At the suggestion of Hort Innovation, the “Why Australia” resource was created as a short video, which was then inserted into the Generic resource and each of the 10 product resources.

The final content and standard design meant the separate resources could be used in any combination. This provides flexibility for the materials to be used in a range of scenarios, including:

- Ability to tailor the presentations to different priorities in different markets
- Ability to cater to the specific circumstances in different markets for each product
- Ability to cater for different delivery methods e.g. resources supplied to retailers, face-to-face workshops
- Ability to cater for additional products to seamlessly participate at a later stage

Outputs

The primary outputs were the 11 completed retail training resources, incorporating an overarching narrative “Why Australia” video. Five fruit-specific and five vegetable-specific training programs were developed in Power Point. The resources were:

VIDEO

- “Why Australia” video

GENERIC:

- Generic retail training resource

FRUIT:

- Apple retail training resource
- Avocado retail training resource
- Citrus retail training resource, with a focus on oranges and mandarins
- Pear retail training resource
- Table grape retail training resource

VEGETABLES

- Broccoli retail training resource
- Carrots retail training resource
- Celery retail training resource
- Lettuce retail training resource, incorporating both head lettuce and value-added leafy packaged salads
- Sweet Corn retail training resource

The Generic resource, which was the first to be developed, provided a framework for the structure of content for the subsequent product resources. This content framework consisted of:

- Introducing Taste Australia
- Why Australia
- Why Australian (Product)
- Managing the fruit and vegetable department
 - Fundamentals
 - Back of store best practices
 - Front of store best practices
 - Customer expectations and customer service

All 11 resources were submitted as part of Milestone Report 111. They are also included as Appendices 1 to 11 with this report.

The other main outputs were records of industry consultation undertaken at various stages of the project. These outputs were submitted progressively according to Milestone Reporting requirements. Progressive and final industry consultation is reported in Appendices 12 and 13.

Outcomes

In summary measurable outcomes expected from this project include:

1. Hort Innovation, “Taste Australia” and participating products have a suite of flexible resources to deliver to the international trade, contributing to a preference and priority for the participating Australian products with participating retailers and their supply chain partners.
2. The resources provide flexibility to be delivered by various means (e.g. face-to-face and remotely) and to different audiences (e.g. retailers, trade show attendees) create a platform for negotiating other “Taste Australia” market support activities with key international retailers.
3. The retail training resources create a platform for negotiating other “Taste Australia” market support activities with key international retailers.
4. Additional Australian fruit and vegetable products can be seamlessly incorporated in the retail training program.

To confirm these outcomes will require implementation with international retailers, beyond the scope of this project.

Hort Innovation and the participating fruit and vegetable industries now have available resources that can assist in export sales growth and build the profile for the “Taste Australia” program with international retailers. These resources should be seen as a component of integrated offerings that “Taste Australia” can provide in international markets. One advantage Australia has, as a collective year-round supplier of fresh fruits and vegetables, is the ability to create a continual presence with the trade, retailers and consumers in international markets, through the umbrella of “Taste Australia”. Very few other countries support their export industries with training resources for retailers, creating a point of difference for Hort Innovation and its participating products.

The resources also provide steps in the process to build a preference for Australian fruits and vegetables in international markets.

The structure of the training resources is such that they can be delivered across a range of formats. While face-to-face delivery is the most effective, it does come at a higher delivery cost, and delivery is also currently restricted in most markets, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fortunately, the resources could be delivered remotely, via Zoom or Teams etc, with only minor changes.

Produce Marketing Australia added value to the development of the resources through its experience in delivering training to international retailers across 14 countries, including target markets for Hort Innovation and the Australian fresh produce industry. While previous training by Produce Marketing Australia has focused primarily on fruit, many international retailers also asked for training in managing fresh vegetables at retail. This is a gap and a request that Hort Innovation and the participating vegetable products are in a unique position to fill.

Value added to the project included structuring the content from a retailer perspective, proposing training templates that could be customized to a range of circumstances, delivering content in Power Point so it could be translated into other languages, and using visual images to more effectively communicate key messages. The majority of the images were supplied by Produce Marketing Australia. A significant number of additional retail photos were required, and Produce Marketing Australia shot these in stores of Australian retailers, on the recommendation that training deliverers source international photos for inclusion, when training was being delivered on the ground.

Developing a Generic resource first had a number of advantages. It provided a template for a common approach with the ten subsequent product-specific modules. It meant the resources could be ‘mixed and matched’ according to market and retailer requirements. The approach also meant that the resources ultimately developed incorporated a perspective from the point of view of retailers.

A significant benefit of involving nominated industry representatives in the consultation process was increasing their awareness of the project and the broader “Taste Australia” program. Equally important was gaining their contributions, supply of resources and buy-in to the consultation process and interest in this important aspect of international marketing.

Lessons for the future include utilising industry organisation leaders to communicate to industry representatives where feedback is sought, introducing the project and giving it and Produce Marketing Australia credibility.

An adverse outcome relates to delivery of the program internationally. It is not clear who will be responsible for

this aspect, whether it is Hort innovation, particular industry representatives etc. Whatever the decision, consideration should be given to how deliverers of the resources are trained to competently do so. For example, while the vast majority of industry representatives consulted during the course of the project had good knowledge to provide in relation to their industries, most had less exposure working directly with retailers in international markets.

An unintended and positive outcome for Hort Innovation was the development of two lettuce resources, when only one was specified in the project brief, where the scope of “lettuce” was not defined. Loose lettuce and packaged leafy salads are two very different categories, requiring different growing and marketing. More importantly, they are managed quite differently as separate categories by retailers around the world. Although allowance had been made to develop only one resource, Hort Innovation demanded the development of resources to cover both categories.

Monitoring and evaluation

This was a difficult project to monitor and evaluate, due largely to changed expectations and requirements by Hort Innovation and not helped by twelve different Hort Innovation staff and multiple Project Managers being involved at various stages during the development of the project. It was staff changes and changed expectations that contributed to the delays in achieving Milestones. These changes impacted adversely on both Produce Marketing Australia and Hort Innovation's designated graphic design company.

Produce Marketing Australia is probably unique in the breadth of experience and expertise it has achieved through the retail training programs it has developed, executed and evaluated in 14 international markets. Clients have continued to utilise Produce Marketing Australia's services because of the results it has achieved on their behalf.

Produce Marketing Australia has a record of delivering programs and activities, such as international retail training, on time, to budget, to a high standard and meeting agreed Performance Measures. Content, delivery and form of presentation all contributed to success of these earlier training programs, namely:

- Content satisfied what retailers wanted; it was developed from a retailer, not supplier, perspective
- The target audience included not only store staff, but also HR, category managers, senior management and their importer/suppliers
- Retailer evaluations indicated the value of the content, delivery and presentation style
- Retailer evaluations also provided new ideas, new sections (e.g. Customer Service) and other improvements.

Despite this record, Produce Marketing Australia was often treated as a servant in a master-servant relationship by people who had little or no experience in practical international retailing and no experience in international fresh produce retail training.

As far back as 4 July 2019, a number of issues were identified and articulated to Hort Innovation, in particular the need to clearly define target audiences, outputs required and the formats for delivery, plus the sourcing of resources – content, images, artwork and design templates. Responses to questions and recommendations were often not received during these formative stages or subsequently.

In addition, Hort Innovation made continual on-going changes to the project, beyond what was contracted. For example, the design company designated by Hort Innovation was changed after the contract was signed and the new appointee was not advised of their budget within the overall project. This was left to Produce Marketing Australia to advise and manage.

On-going changes were also made in relation to industry engagement and consultation directives. Initially industry consultation was specified as being through the Project Stakeholder Group. It was then expanded to include relevant key commercial interests. An indication of these changes is reflected in a Hort Innovation email in February 2020:

“Also I reviewed the stakeholder reference group and it only contains the industry body representatives – they don't hold all the information and it needs to include Hort staff including R&D, Industry relationship and marketing and brand managers for each product or category; key commercial exporters/an or packers; State Government representatives and Austrade BDMs – managed through 1 key contact in Australia. So I can reach out to Austrade who will be able to reach out to their representatives in each country and we can discuss this – but can you please revise the list based on this information. There is a lot of work that has been done in this space and this project needs to gather this intel through as many stakeholders as possible.”

Despite the offer to provide relevant contacts with Austrade and state departments, nothing was forthcoming – another lost opportunity for information and building “Taste Australia” relationships.

Finally, commodity steering groups were deemed necessary. Initial consultation and responses from industry representatives for three resources on the draft content was well under way before the commodity working group directive was issued. The latest change the consultative process mid-stream was not supported, as it could have created confusion and reflected poorly on the engagement process.

Priorities for development of resources was also changed mid-stream, with apples, then pears, being promoted to the top of the list. Ostensibly this was to test these resources with a retailer in Thailand. This would have been a good opportunity to evaluate not only these two resources, but all the resources. However, Produce Marketing Australia was not invited by Hort Innovation to participate. Ultimately the test did not occur, due to yet another

Hort Innovation staff change, and the opportunity was lost.

Attempts were also made to change the scope of the project. In October 2019, the development of an Australian cherry export quality guide was requested by Hort Innovation, with the expectation it would be covered within the project budget, even though cherries were not a project participant. The guide was ultimately developed by Produce marketing Australia, as a separate exercise.

In relation to training delivery generally, it remains unclear who will be responsible for this aspect, whether it is Hort innovation, particular industry representatives etc. Whatever the decision, consideration should be given to how deliverers of the resources are trained to competently do so.

Despite the numerous changes outlined above, it was possible to satisfy the ten achievement criteria associated with corresponding Milestones.

The following monitoring and evaluation activities included:

1. Project Stakeholder Group and industry representative contribution and approval of each product resource draft content
2. Hort Innovation approval of content for each resource module
3. Project Stakeholder Group and industry representative contribution and approval of each product resource draft design
4. Hort Innovation approval of design for each resource module
5. Project Stakeholder Group contribution to updated product resources
6. Hort Innovation approval of the eleven updated resources

Recommendations

1. **Project scope**
A key learning for the future for similar projects is to have clear definitions of, and mutually agreed, processes and outputs, prior to project commencement. This would help address different expectations when there are staff changes.
2. **Delivery**
Determine who will have access to utilizing the resources. For example, will delivery be the sole responsibility of Hort Innovation, or will it extend to others, such as specific industry representatives, commercial operations, Austrade and other similar organisations? Will the resources be made available to retailers to customize for their specific use?
3. **Train-the-Trainer**
Ensure whoever is delivering the workshops on behalf of “Taste Australia” and/or specific industries does so a credible manner. In other words, they need to understand what they are delivering. Potential delivery has been discussed with some of the Project Stakeholder Group and all agree there is a need for a “Train-the-Trainer” component.

Draft notes to accompany the Generic resource have been developed and inserted in a copy in the “Notes” section of the slides. These can be customised for each product. They have not been provided to Hort Innovation, as they are outside the scope of the project. In addition, training via Zoom or Teams for potential workshop deliverers could be considered.

4. **Develop Supporting Resources**
“Taste Australia” resources which would be of value to retailers, especially in-store staff, would include Back of Store and Front of Store summary hard copies and Product Information charts, with Australian seasonality product features and benefits, storage and handling, and simple product uses included.
5. **Updating Resources**
When face-to-face training resumes, collect retail photos when workshops are delivered, so they can be incorporated in the resources, highlighting best practices and different approaches. One of the best ways of communicating practical ideas is through photos at retail. Currently there is a lack of photos available from industry and Hort Innovation. As a result, Produce Marketing Australia sourced photos from their own collections, which did not cover all participants in the project. Where there were gaps, photos were taken in Australian retailers to reinforce messages.
6. **Photo Libraries**
Some industry bodies had excellent photo libraries, particularly of growing, harvesting and packing operations. Ready access was provided to these libraries. Other industries did not have the same level of resources. Hort Innovation initially offered access to their libraries, but this did not eventuate. Having comprehensive and accessible photo libraries is recommended
7. **Industry Introductions**
The industry representatives on the Project Stakeholder Group provided assistance in introducing the project to the nominated industry representatives, resulting in credibility for Produce Marketing Australia, stressing the importance of the project and encouraging feedback and contributions with resources. This approach is endorsed for similar projects.

Refereed scientific publications

Not applicable

Intellectual property, commercialisation and confidentiality

Produce Marketing Australia completed Hort Innovation's IP Register in June 2020, pertaining to existing Intellectual Property.

"IP register: Part 1 -Pre-Existing/Background IP (BGIP) and Third Party IP (TPIP) to be used in the Project"