Community Trust in Australian Horticulture

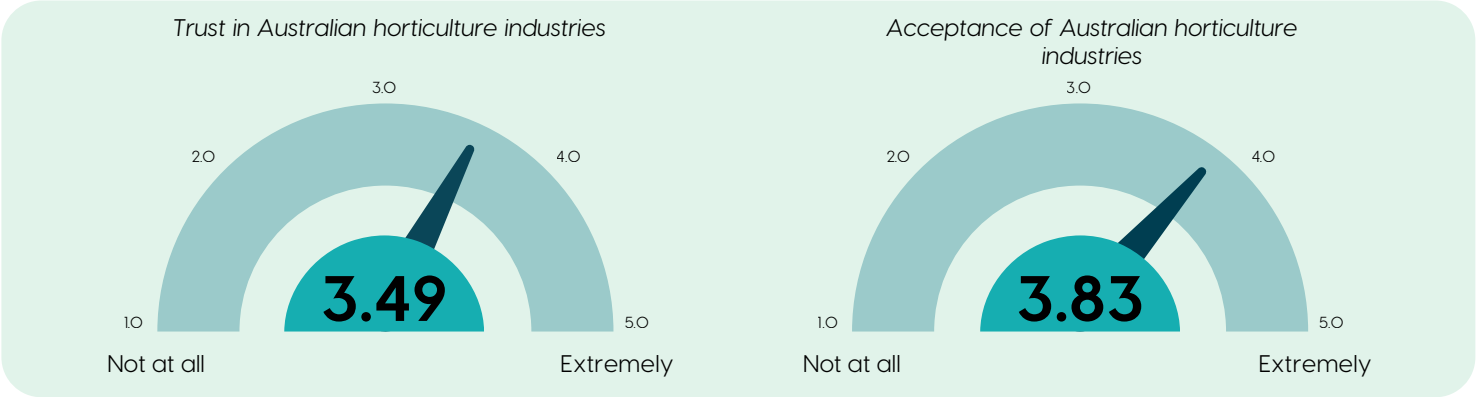
Australia's first national baseline of community trust in horticulture

About the project

The Community Trust in Australian Horticulture project gathered the views of 1,791 Australians on their perception of the horticulture industry through a nationally representative survey. Understanding how the community thinks and feels about horticulture provides the industry with a solid foundation on which to strengthen its relationship with the Australian public.

Why trust and acceptance?

Building on the broader Community Trust in Rural Industries project, this research is the first of its kind to establish a baseline of community trust and acceptance in Australian horticulture. For industry, this research reveals important insights into horticulture's social licence to operate. Trust is the primary driver of acceptance, with acceptance acting as a proxy for social licence to operate. Identifying what drives trust, and therefore acceptance, reveals what matters most to the community and where industry can make the most impact in response. Participants were asked to rate how much they would trust and accept horticulture on a 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely) scale:



What drives community trust and acceptance in Australian horticulutre?

Using a method called path modelling, we can identify what drivers are most influential in strengthening trust and acceptance in Australia's horticulture industry.

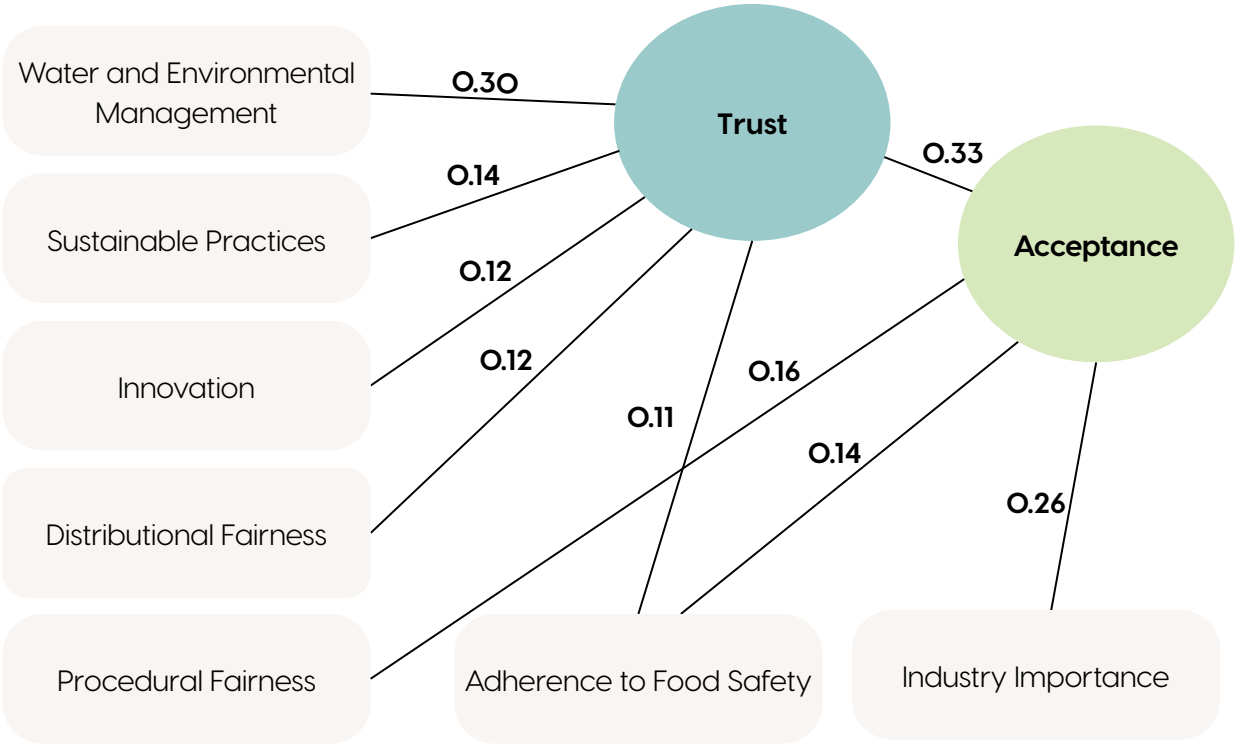


Figure 1: Path model showing the drivers of trust and acceptance in Australian horticulture industries. Values are beta weights, which indicate the relative strength of each relationship.

What Drives Trust and Acceptance?

Water and environmental management was the strongest driver of community trust. More than half of Australians agreed that growers manage impacts effectively (55% agree), use water responsibly (55% agree), and have confidence in regulation to monitor water quality (53% agree).

Perceptions of sustainable practices was the second strongest driver of trust, underpinning water and environmental management. Overall, 63% of Australians agreed that the industry is committed to ethical and sustainable practices, while 63% also agreed that growers are responsible stewards of land and sea.

Innovation was a key theme in improving trust. The community were focused on the role of innovation in improving productivity and workforce conditions. Areas to focus on included the use of new technologies to address labour shortages (62% agreed technology is beneficial) and how the use of technology helps improve efficiency and productivity (67% agreed).

Fairness was a significant driver of both trust and acceptance. This included **distributional fairness** (perceptions of sharing the costs and benefits) and **procedural fairness** (perceptions around responsiveness of the horticulture industry). Overall, 52% agreed that Australia receives a fair share of the benefits from horticulture industries in Australia. More than half of participants agreed that horticulture industries listen to and respect community opinions at 52%, while slightly less saw the industry as willing to change their practices in response at 48%.

Food safety was the only driver of both trust and acceptance. Almost three in four Australians agreed that horticulture products adhere to strict food safety standards at 73%, highlighting both the critical role of food safety and the confidence the Australian community has in the food produced by the horticulture sector in Australia.

Industry importance was the strongest individual driver of community acceptance, reflecting the community's recognition of horticulture's value to the country. Positively, 86% agreed that horticulture industries overall are important to our way of life, while 83% agreed that horticulture is essential for ensuring Australians have reliable access to food.



How do different horticulture industries compare?

To date, we have looked at Australian horticulture overall and importantly, there are some key differences between vegetables, nuts, nursery and turf and fruit industries.

Fruit	Vegetables	Nuts	Nursery and turf
88% agreed that the fruit industry is important.	**88%** agreed that the vegetable industry is important.	**81%** agreed that the nut industry is important.	**78%** agreed that the nursery and turf industry is important.
87% had knowledge of the fruit industry.	**85%** had knowledge about the vegetable industry.	**67%** had knowledge of the nut industry.	**72%** had knowledge of the nursery and turf industry.
Food safety standards and regulator oversight of water quality were most important for the fruit industry.	Listening and responding to community concerns, particularly around environmental management, is crucial for the vegetable industry.	A commitment to sustainable and ethical practices alongside effective environmental management was important for the nut industry.	Responsible use of water and importance of the industry to Australia were the strongest drivers of trust in the nursery and turf sector.

Table 1: Summary of category specific measures.

Trust in the industry's sustainable and ethical practices across regions

Managing environmental impacts and sustainability were two drivers consistent across all horticulture industries. Looking at these through regional versus suburban and metropolitan persepctives highlights how location can influence trust and acceptance of the industry.

Metro, suburban and regional participants all scored the industry's **commitment to sustainable and ethical practices** between 3.68 and 3.81 out of 5. Those living closer to production (farming and non-farming regions) agreed slightly more strongly, but overall location has only a small influence on trust in this area.

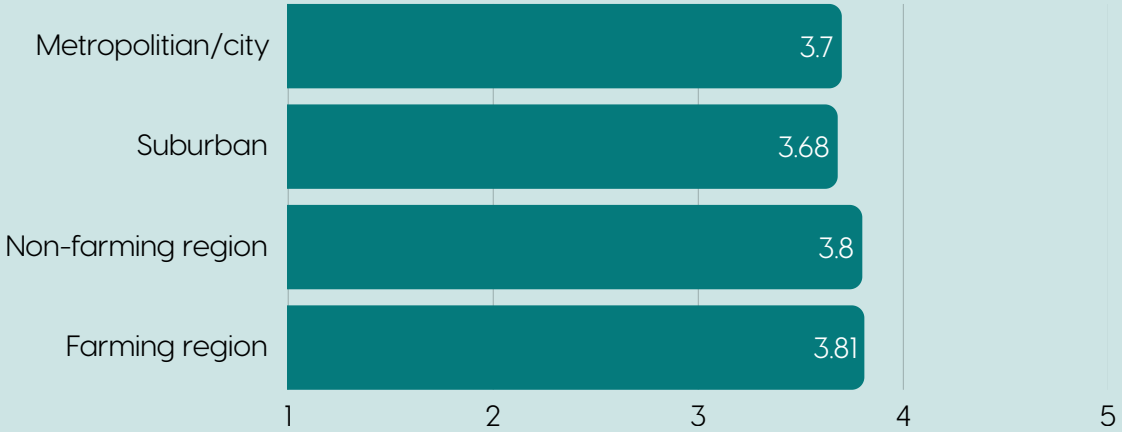


Figure 2: Average scores on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to sustainable and ethical practices question, split by region type.

Where to from here?

Environmental management is seen as a shared responsibility everywhere

Agreement that managing environmental impacts is a shared responsibility across horticulture was consistently high across all regions. While farming regions felt this most strongly, agreement remained high from city to farm.

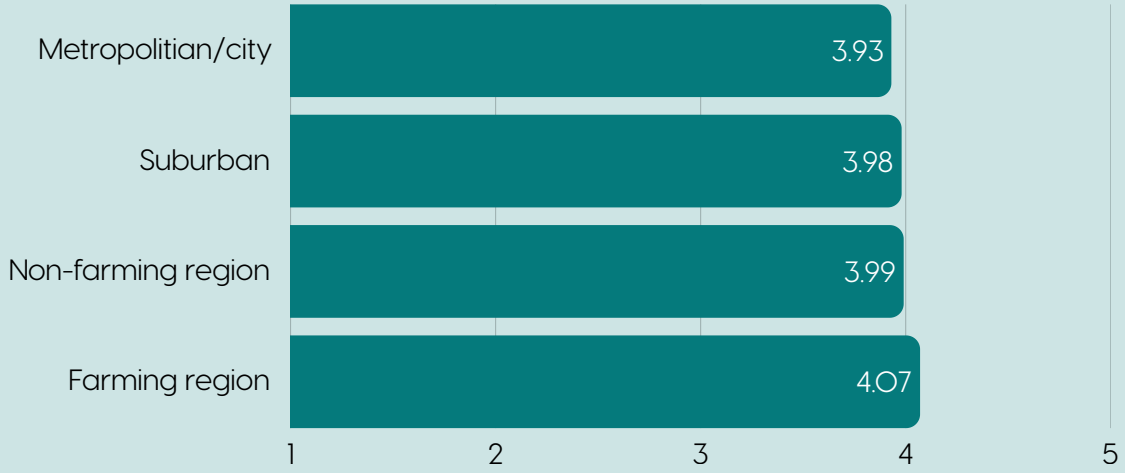


Figure 3: Average scores on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to the environmental management question, split by region type.

What this means for us:
Community concerns around environmental impact need a coordinated industry response, tailored to regions where those impacts are felt most keenly.

The Community Trust in Australian Horticulture project highlights that trust and acceptance of the industry is **driven by perceptions of environmental management, sustainable practices, food safety, distributional and procedural fairness.** To strengthen the relationship between the Australian community and horticulture, the industry must display performance in these areas and visibly respond to community concerns when they arise.

Understanding the differences between horticulture industries, as well as how perceptions of performance change between locations, also plays an important role in the community-industry relationship. Industry and location-specific approaches can help demonstrate industry responsiveness to what matters most for these groups.

This research provides baseline evidence for Australian horticulture to involve the community in industry decision-making on the issues that matter most to them. Future research can help track trends to understand how the relationship changes over time, and **support further collobration between the horticulture industry and the Australian community.**

CITATION
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