



Hydroponic Farmers Federation Newsletter

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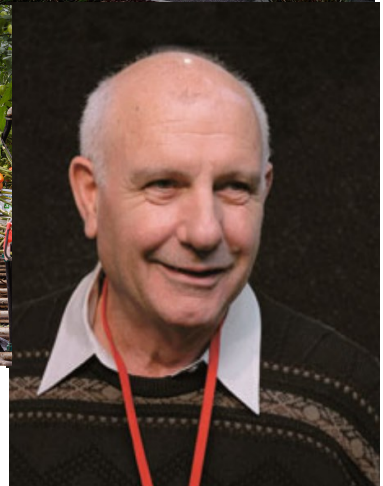


HFF CONFERENCE 2022

Hydroponics Tomorrow • 12-14 July

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The Secretary



Well it's been a busy time since the last newsletter and it certainly seems that we have moved as a country towards 'Living with Covid'. I am sure many of you were glad to see the back of a lot of the restrictions but we still have to be mindful that this thing is still with us. I recently attended the Hort Connections conference in Brisbane and out of the four people I was with two returned a positive test when they got back home - so we not out of the woods just yet. And now the flu has made a return to our lives - seems we are destined to keep facing uncertainty on the general health front! But now we are looking ahead to the HFF conference and the associated good times. The speaker program is all but finalised with some great topics and presenters. And we will even be able to welcome back some overseas visitors - something we had not been able to do for a very long time. And course there is the social side to the conference. I think it is fair to say that the HFF

membership don't mind the odd drink, and I am sure that those attending the conference will highlight this fact for me! It's effectively been four years since the last conference so it will be great to get back to what you knew as 'normal' before. For those of you who attended the conference launch with Brian Nankervis, you will be pleased to know that Brian will be the MC for the dinner, so the entertainment side of things is well and truly sorted! But back out in the industry we are seeing good and bad things happening. The retail price of vegetables has certainly been on the up - who would have thought Iceberg lettuce would sell for \$15.00 at one stage? But we have also been hearing stories of growers seeing their gas price triple which will certainly have a major impact on the bottom line of farms. Add to that the skyrocketing price of fuel then this effectively has an impact on everyone. And we thought things were turbulent with Covid? So hopefully you are all well and surviving these ever changing times, and it will be great to get back to face to face conversations and socialising once again, and I'm looking forward to catching up again! **Tony B**

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The President



Hi everyone, and we are now very close to meeting up again at our conference - and what a journey it's been to get here! We've gone from the heartbreak of having to cancel the 2020 event thanks to Covid to the new found excitement of once again running the great event that is the HFF conference. There has been a huge amount of work going on behind the scenes and I must really acknowledge the efforts of all the committee members who have worked so hard to get us to this point.

The team at ASN events have also been working tirelessly away in the background and their hard work is now set to pay dividends as we prepare to welcome everybody back to an HFF Conference. I personally feel that most growers are just keen to getting back to a good old fashioned face to face event, which represents some sort of normality in our world. The Atura is going to prove to be a great venue, and the HFF have taken over sole occupancy of the hotel for the duration of the event - so we won't be upsetting any of the neighbours! Our speaker program has a full and varied list of presenters and will also include a really interesting grower panel led by Chris Millis - make sure you don't miss it! And we will also be running our AGM at the Conference which is a first for us! My thanks also go to the trade who have been working hard to get the grower passes out to individuals which gives many growers the chance to attend the event at a greatly reduced cost - well done everyone. But special thanks have to go to Simon Gomme of Powerplants and Gary Edwards of Garden City Plastics who are leading the joint major sponsors team. Without their support and continued efforts we would be hard pressed to get the conference to the high level of readiness that it now enjoys - thank you very much Simon and Garry. And finally I'm so looking forward to catching up with everyone again - it has certainly been a long time between drinks and I'm pretty sure we can make up for lost time at the bar! So here's to a great event and I'm sure we will all make it a great success - see you all on the 12th of July! **Regards, John Elford**



Membership

Our membership numbers are on the rise as we approach the conference once again, and individuals take advantage of the trade grower passes for the conference and the associated benefits. Whilst this is a good thing for HFF, our real challenge is going to ensure we keep these new faces once the 12 month period elapses after the conference. But with a return to grower days and other events that make an HFF membership more of an attractive value proposition I'm fairly confident we can retain these new members. But we also need to ensure that we have some new 'blood' coming onto the organising committee. We are going to be looking to tap a few people on the shoulder to consider joining the committee across the next few months. Any organisation needs new ideas and people to keep it fresh and the HFF is no different. So consider joining the committee - we would love to see you!



Ian Mortlock - Membership Secretary

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Time to think about Shading Agents!

Hang on a minute - we have just been through the shortest day, it's Winter - low light levels, why do I need to think about shading agents? No we haven't gone mad at Royal Brinkman!, but as many of you are aware, International shipping times are becoming increasingly uncertain so we are keen to ensure we have the shade agent stocks to keep you covered for the warmer months. Our specialised Q range of shade agents offer growers an extremely weatherproof and adjustable shading product, with which the optimal shading conditions can be created to protect your crops against heat and excessive sunlight. Because the Q White products are liquid, the desired shading percentage can easily be achieved by diluting the product with water to suit the needs of your crop. Whilst our range of shading agents will give optimal shade to crops during the growing season, there will come a time when the agent needs to be removed. This is easily achieved by quickly removing the paint by using Removit. A mixture of 250 litres Removit diluted with approximately 1750 litres of water is sufficient for removing one hectare of shading agents and coatings from any greenhouse surface (glass, polycarbonate, foil, acrylic). However, depending on the thickness and age of the coating layer you may adjust the concentration. Removit solution can be sprayed onto a dry layer of shading agent or coating and left for at least 30 minutes, after which it can be removed manually with a hose or roof cleaner, or before rainfall is predicted. For more information on the full Q range of shading paints, please feel free to contact the team at Royal Brinkman on 03 9587 2566 and we

will be only be pleased to assist you with identifying the product that is right for you.



Hydroponic Farmers Federation AGM

Dear Members,

As per The Hydroponic Farmers Federation Constitution, the Committee would like to advise of the up and coming Annual General Meeting of the Hydroponic Farmers Federation.



The meeting will be held at the Atura Hotel, 1 Doveton Avenue, Dandenong 3177 on Tuesday the 12th of July at 5:30pm.

This meeting will be on the first day of the HFF Conference.

The Committee would like to see as many Members as possible attend our AGM, and also ideally attend the conference as well to Learn, Network and Share.

Full details of the conference can be found at <https://www.hff.org.au/conference>

The minutes of the last AGM have been circulated to all current members.

Below is Committee Nomination form. The HFF are always seeking New ideas and Fresh outlooks for our Industry, so if you are that person or know a Member that you think would be a good contributor. please feel free to fill out the Nomination Form.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the Conference and AGM.

John Elford.

HFF President.

0417035956

'Proxy Form For Committee Nomination'

Annual General Meeting of the Hydroponic Farmers Federation

12th July 2022

HFF Executive Nomination

I hereby nominate.

Name :..... for the position on the HFF Executive Committee for two years as of the year 2022.

Signed

Date

Nominee Name.

Signed

Date

Powerplants



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Playing with fire

Congratulations to HFF Secretary Tony and his wife Karen Bundock, who were both recently presented with 30 year service medals with Country Fire Authority (CFA) as active fire fighting volunteers - a great effort. On top of this Tony has been awarded life membership of CFA for his contribution to the authority. Between them our firefighting duo have attended over 5000 fire calls. (And yes, that has included a cat stuck up a tree if you wondered!!)



Horticulture and Rockwiz!!

The ABC 'Rockwiz' television program was recently on the road and held a show at the Narre Warren 'Bunjil Place' venue. The event itself was a ticketed affair and contestants were drawn from the audience. So it was something of an irony that Vice President Tony Spurling won a place in the preliminary rounds as a contestant, and was also joined by Ball Australia's Product Manager - Gideon Cox. What are the chances of having two key industry players at such an event! And making a guest appearance - even though she didn't answer one question but still made her presence felt - was Debbie Spurling! However back at the main contest things were getting serious and despite a valiant effort, Tony didn't make the finals. But Gideon did, and his team went on to win the event! And as they say, the camera never lies.....



Horticulture - developing careers

There has been a long time misunderstanding as to what a career in horticulture entails by secondary schools. Indeed, as a youngster of sixteen when our Secretary announced to his careers teacher that he wanted to enter horticulture, he was marched off to the headmaster's office where he was asked if it was a proper career? We think TB may have proved him wrong! So, we have been really encouraged to learn of a fantastic new initiative by the Goulburn Murray Local Learning and Employment Network in Victoria to develop a bespoke online digital platform, loaded with Virtual Reality experiences, that will allow students to engage in workplace



experiences and scenarios to build work readiness skills and build aspirations into priority industries, including protective cropping. Led by Tania Pearce of the Goulburn Murray Local Learning and Employment Network, the project is aiming to help to create the future industry workforce, by creating a virtual reality platform VIC-VICE 'Your Career in Sight', VR experiences will allow secondary students to engage in workplace experiences and scenarios to build work readiness skills and build aspirations into priority industries. Supported by Victorian State funding, the platform will roll out across the state into every secondary school, with the support of the VicLLEN. The project will be aiming to enable school-aged students an opportunity to explore careers that they may not otherwise have considered, or had exposure to, such as protected cropping. To enable the project team to obtain suitable content and locations for filming (showcasing training and growing facilities etc.), the team are reaching out to the Victorian industry to connect with any suitable enterprises or individuals that could assist with the project. Assistance is also being sought around guidance on developing Virtual Reality content to ensure interactive and engaging tasks, stories and imagery aligning to current careers (and VETDSS course content) and showcase entry level work skills that industry look for when recruiting young people. Access to suitable employees who have worked their way up or have just completed their studies who would like to share their success stories would also be welcomed.

'This is a great initiative that the HFF are very keen to support – we have a great industry that is largely a hidden secret to the general public, and if we can start to introduce young and talented individuals into horticulture it has to be a good thing for our industry,' said HFF Secretary Tony Bundock. Tania Pearce added 'We see this is a great opportunity to allow young people to gain a foothold in this exciting industry as well as working towards easing industry labour pressures. We are really excited about taking this project forward with the assistance of PCA members so that we can showcase this wonderful industry'. The GMLLEN ran a VR pilot, and to obtain a feel on how VR can be used to explore careers feel free to click the following link <https://bit.ly/3GttPCQ>

If you would like to assist in this dynamic program, please feel free to reach out to either: -

Tania Pearce – Stakeholder and Relationship Manager

E: tania.pearce@gmlen.com.au

M: 0402 271 844

OR

Tony Bundock – Secretary HFF

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M: 0409 007 610



HFF Conference Program 2022

TUESDAY 12TH JULY 2022

9:00 AM	REGISTRATION AND EXHIBITION
11.00am	OFFICIAL OPENING AND PRESIDENTS WELCOME
11.10am	HON. GAYLE TIERNEY MP MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE
11.30am	Keynote: Paul Higgins Emergent Futures VIC
12:00PM	LUNCH IN EXHIBITION AND TRADE NETWORKING
1:30pm	Aart Slobbe Light and Plant interactions
2.00pm	Paul Simmonds, Rijk Zwaan, Netherlands (Virtual) Trends in the World Tomato Market Session hosted by Phil Ritchie
2.30pm	Sue Pickering, New Zealand Organisational leadership and change management in Horticulture
3:00PM	AFTERNOON TEA IN EXHIBITION AND TRADE NETWORKING
3.30pm	Graeme Smith Verticle Farms - The missing bits
4.00pm	Future High-Tech Panel with Growers and Q and A Moderator Chris Millis - CEO Flavorite Group Panalists: Will Millis - Head Grower, Flavorite Group, Steve Marafiote - CEO, Sundrop Farms, Peter Ven Den Goor - Owner/Operator, Kayunga Fresh, Naresh Singh - Head Grower, Perfection Fresh, Nicky Mann - WHS & Labour Manager, Family Fresh Farms
5.30pm	HFF AGM
6:00PM	WELCOME RECEPTION IN EXHIBITION AND TRADE NETWORKING Welcome reception sponsored by South Pacific Seeds

WEDNESDAY 13TH JULY 2022

8:00 AM	REGISTRATION AND EXHIBITION
8:30am	Perfection Fresh Sponsored Breakfast Session John Zeigler
9:30am	Soham Gandhi Biomass Saves Business Emergent Futures VIC
10:00 AM	MORNING TEA IN EXHIBITION AND TRADE NETWORKING
10:30am	Sue Pickering, New Zealand A Practical Workshop for Horticultural Leaders
11:00 AM	Greg Carrick Garden City Plastics
11:30AM	EXHIBITION AND TRADE NETWORKING
12:00PM	LUNCH BEFORE TOUR DEPARTURE Lunch sponsored by Priva

WEDNESDAY 13TH JULY 2022 - EVENING EVENT

6:15pm	Buses depart Atura to Bunjil Place
6:30pm	Conference Dinner Hosted by Brian Nankervis at Bunjil Place Sponsored by A & D Weighing (Transfers included)
10:00pm	After Party at Brownstone Brewery, Atura Sponsored by Enza Zaden

HFF Conference Program 2022

THURSDAY 14 TH JULY 2022	
8:00 AM REGISTRATION AND EXHIBITION	
8:00am - 8:15am	PCA Extraordinary General Meeting - Amendment to constitution
9:00am	Emily Rigby Medicinal Cannabis: From Seed to Patient - a Grower's Perspective
9:30am	Arie Bealde, Rijk Zwaan, VIC The transformation to vegetable greenhouse and plant factory production in Asia
10:00am	Patrick Ulloa Process Control: The 'Holy Grail' of Quality Management
10:30 AM MORNING TEA IN EXHIBITION AND TRADE NETWORKING	
11:00am	Juxi Leitner, Monash University, VIC HM (Human Machine Interaction) and Future Automation in Farming/Protected Farming
11:30am	Simon Dornauf Shaping an evolving Berry farm into a berry enterprise
12:00pm	Tony Murphy Risk Mitigation in a Post COVID World
12:30pm	Sheree Marris, Marine Biologist, Author What can octopus sex teach us about the future of hydroponics? Why are cross dressing cuttlefish lessons in innovation and what can corals teach us about the power of partnerships?
LUNCH IN EXHIBITION AND TRADE NETWORKING	
1:00PM	Presentations for Best Presented Booth, Most Engaging Booth and Grower Lucky Draw. Final Close to Conference by HFF Committee.

The Hydroponic Farmers Federation Executive Committee are excited to host their 12th Biennial HFF Conference from Tuesday 12th July - Thursday 15th July, 2022 at the Atura Hotel, Dandenong, Victoria, Australia. The three day conference will feature 15 invited industry experts, half day of farm tours, social functions, and ample networking opportunities. We are delighted to share that Brian Nankervis from Rockwiz will host the conference dinner at Bunjil Place before you get your glow on for the after party. We hope to see you at the Atura Dandenong .



HFF CONFERENCE 2022

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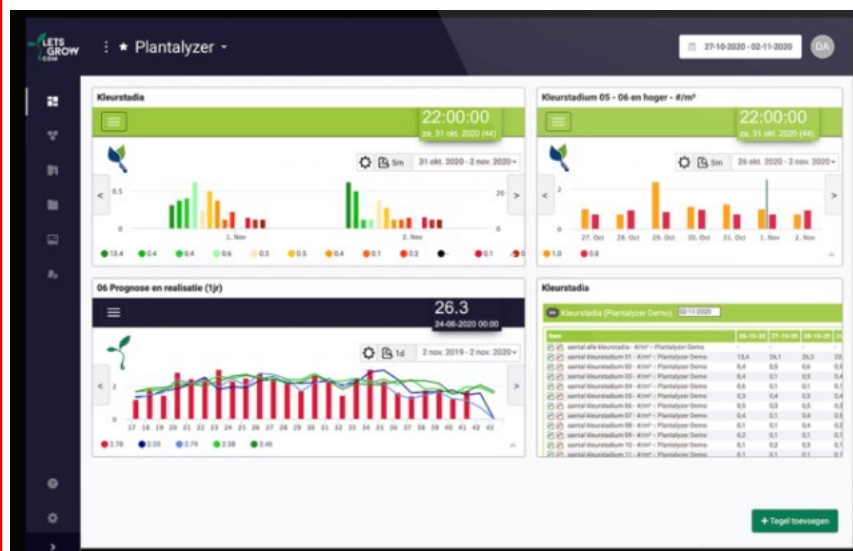


Robotic crop analysis

One of the major challenges for tomato growers is providing accurate crop forecasting for marketing purposes, especially when crops can extend across large areas such as are used in the protected cropping industry. It takes a great deal of time to walk through the paths and count the tomatoes while assessing them for maturity. Moreover, both during cultivation and with the harvest, you want to be sure of enough of the desired quality for sale. Berg Hortimotive have been developing a product known as the Plantalyzer® which



is a unique tool for accurate crop estimation. It was developed in close collaboration with Wageningen University & Research (UR) and Letsgrow.com. Whilst it may not win any prizes for its looks!, the Plantalyzer® is a unique combination of A. autonomous robot, B. vision which counts and classifies tomatoes on the plant, and C. intelligent forecasting software. The result is reliable information for the most accurate crop estimation. The Plantalyzer® is fitted with the Greenhouse Positioning System allowing you to move itself fully autonomously through the greenhouse. The system automatically drives onto the pipe rail from the concrete path, and moves itself from path to path. So there is no need to install any new facilities. The Plantalyzer® can assimilate measurements during the day as well as at night, which therefore it not need to disrupt other day to day activities. The Plantalyzer® photographs the bottom two to three, leaf-free, hanging trusses of fruit on the plant. The system maps out the clusters, the number of fruits per cluster as well as the colour of each fruit. These are subsequently assessed locally and classified with special software. The robot only assesses the fruit in the path where it runs. That gives insight into numbers with the additional bonus of information on the colour stages. This is the basis for the most accurate crop estimation. The Plantalyzer® photographs the bottom two to three, leaf-free, hanging trusses of fruit on the plant. The system maps out the clusters, the number of fruits per cluster as well as the colour of each fruit. These are subsequently assessed locally and classified with special software. The robot only assesses the fruit in the path where it runs. That gives insight into numbers with the additional bonus of information on the colour stages. The Plantalyzer® has a constant prediction level, and therefore has no



human deviations. By linking the plant data to the algorithms integrated by LetsGrow, you will get accurate control information of the harvest. So as a grower, you know exactly when and how many tomatoes you can harvest to meet your marketing agreements. Although the Plantalyzer® is only available overseas at the moment, Berg plan to introduce the unit to the Australian market in the latter part of 2022. The unit will be initially trialed by the larger industry growers to see how it performs under Australian conditions with the expectation that it will excel.

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TOM-System is the new, quick, and easy working method for trellising greenhouse plants such as tomatoes, cucumbers, and capsicums/peppers to string lines. The AgriFast V-46 ring clips are fastened using the Model TT235 electronic application tool. These metal clips support similar or heavier loads than other tying methods, do not hinder plant growth and support formation of the stem. The Model TT235 allows the user to apply ring clips to string line up to 50% faster than standard clipping methods and requires no specialised training. The clips are designed to rust away after composting. The period depends on the conditions but there have been some reports here in Australia of clips disappearing after only 7 months

What are the benefits of TOM System?

- Reduces labour costs by 40% or more
- Reduces damage to the plant caused using other trellising methods
- User friendly with no specialised training required
- Adjustable tension to suit different string thickness
- Compatible with eco-string
- Clip closure between 22mm and 23mm
- TOM-System can hold plants more than 8kg
- Reduces transport costs compared to other clips
- Reduced fatigue on the operator
- Battery will last up to 2 days



For a demonstration or quotation, feel free to contact

Michael Tran at EE Muirs - 0418 899 586

AgNova Technologies



Brad Johnson
AgNova Area Sales
Manager

Powdery mildew is the most common and widespread disease in Australian cucurbits. Powdery mildew infection occurs when spores are blown onto leaves, with symptoms appearing 3 – 7 days later. The disease infects green tissue and appears as white fluffy growth on either side of the leaf. Heavy disease infection leads to leaves becoming fragile and yellow to brown in colour. Any stresses to the crop will favour the development of powdery mildew, which includes the stress associated with fruiting. Flute and Kusabi are protectant fungicides which control powdery mildew. They perform best when applied to a clean crop and used alternately. Kusabi is ideally suited to follow Flute in a fungicide spray program from flowering until harvest (as shown in the table below). Flute and Kusabi offer strong vapour action when applied with optimal spray coverage. The performance of powdery mildew fungicides can be improved with Du-Wett, especially when lower spray volumes are used. Flute (Group U6) and Kusabi (Group 50) are compatible with a wide range of commonly used insecticides and fungicides. They offer strong vapour action when applied with optimal spray coverage and have 1 and nil day WHPs respectively, which provides great flexibility around picking time. Both products have a proven track record of successful use in crops where IPM is practiced. For further details, please visit the AgNova Technologies website - agnova.com.au

DOMINANT DISEASE	CROP STAGE					
	ESTABLISHMENT	FLOWERING	FRUIT SET		FRUIT MATURITY	
Powdery mildew	Group 3, 7, (7+11), 11 or 13	Group 3, 7, (7+11), 11 or 13	Flute ⁵⁰ EW FUNGICIDE (U6)	Kusabi ⁵⁰ (50)	Flute ⁵⁰ EW FUNGICIDE (U6)	Kusabi ⁵⁰ (50)



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Greentech and beyond

The international horticultural event that is known as Greentech recently concluded in Amsterdam. This is truly a massive event and it returned to a face to face event in true style across the 14th - 16th of June and featured over 500 stands showcasing a wide range of technologies and products. And Australia was well represented with some well known faces (pictured below)

amongst many others making an appearance at the event! So with International travel now back on the agenda, we have been wondering if we might look at the potential of organising a an HFF trip to the Netherlands and Greentech 2023? The event is scheduled to take place between the 13th and 15th of



June at the RAI exhibition building in Amsterdam and there would be potential to visit farms in the Westland area as well. If you think this might be of interest, feel free to have a chat with the committee members at the conference.

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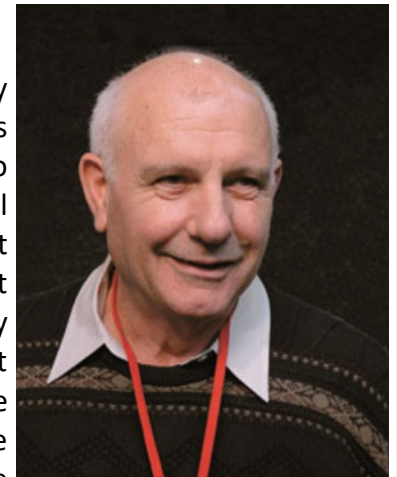
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Vale Rick Donnen

Vale Richard (Rick) Donnan

It is with great sadness we advise of the passing of Rick Donnan on Sunday 10th April after a battle with cancer. Rick was born in 1940 and began his illustrious career as a chemical engineer with CSR in 1962 and quickly rose to the Manager of CSR's R&D division and from 1982, he led the commercial development of Australia's own rockwool horticultural growing media that became known as Growool. This project led to many growing trials that proved beneficial for Australia's wider protected cropping industry for many years as a proven reference guideline for a range of crops. Rick was President of ISOSC from 1991 to 1999 and this International Society for Soilless Culture was an important body to support hydroponic researchers and distribute research information to a global audience. In 1982, Rick began his private career as a horticultural consultant specialising in managing hydroponic systems and nutrition and over time, Rick became a Protected Cropping industry giant and contributor for many years in many, many ways as evidenced by his elevation as inaugural AHA (Australian Hydroponic Association) President from 1988 to 1993, first AHA recipient of the Most Outstanding Contribution to Industry Award in 1999 and a AHA Life Member in 2001. Additionally, Rick was honoured in 2005 as the recipient of the Hydroponic Farmers Federation (HFF) biennial award for outstanding contribution to the Victorian State Industry. Rick had a prolific work ethic that included the period 1992 – 2018 as the 'Readers' Inquiries columnist, for the Practical Hydroponics & Greenhouses magazine, and in 1999, authored "Hydroponic Questions and Answers" Casper Publications, and in 2003, was editor of the English version of 'Nutrient solutions and water quality for soilless cultures', on behalf of Applied Plant Research, Naaldwijk Research Station, The Netherlands, and presenter of over 40 technical presentations at Australian and overseas conferences,



seminars and workshops and was Managing Director of Growool Horticultural Systems from 1986 Rick was always known to support many R&D projects through HAL (Horticulture Australia Ltd) and other research bodies, such as co-presenter of the 'National Greenhouse Waste Water Recirculation Project' in 2010 that had the capacity to save Australian hydroponic growers an annual total of \$25million in water and fertiliser costs and was co-presenter of the 'Greenhouse Technical Management' training course held 36 times in Australia, 4 in India, 3 in New Zealand and once in the UK. Rick also contributed to the AHA, AHGA and PCA association as a committee member, conference convenor, budgetary controller and provided a steady hand with sage advice for a whole cavalcade of association committee members over many years. Rick Donnan will be much missed by the industry for his long and important contributions, friendly demeanor, professional support to anyone who asked, and a life of continuously giving freely to others and we extend our sincere condolences to Rosemary and the extended family

Gas prices soar across the globe

In the past few weeks we have seen gas prices in Victoria rise by as much as three fold leaving growers with a major headache in terms of dealing with elevated fuel costs. The situation almost seems to be mirroring the same issue that UK growers started to face in the early part of this year. The Lea Valley is the biggest salad hub in the UK. With more than 110 years of history, over 100 growers, and a cultivation area of approximately 142 hectares, cucumbers and peppers are the most important vegetables grown there - except for this year. Lee Styles of the National Farmers

Union commented in March that “The gas price and the lack of workers make it impossible to grow. Some growers are looking to possibly start a crop next month, but with the gas price changing daily, they can’t fix a price at the moment. It’s too much of a gamble. Leaving the greenhouse empty also costs money, but you’ll probably lose more money if you plant. Economically it makes sense to do nothing, which sounds rather counterintuitive. No one seems to be able to achieve higher prices to fresh produce. Retailers don’t want to pay that for local production. Their attitude has always been ‘If you can get it cheaper somewhere else, get it there’. We can grow year-round under LED lights, but with increased costs. Yet, retailers haven’t been willing to pay, which is why we always stopped during winter and imported from abroad: it’s cheaper from Morocco. Whilst the situation was affecting UK growers, Dutch growers were also faced with the same challenge and the same scenario was being experienced by Spanish producers using heat. Lee added that he had seen some companies go into administration already, one in the Lea Valley. “Other growers have rented their facility at a loss to growers growing cold crops, targeting different markets as the wholesale markets or food service, who don’t necessarily need heating for cultivation. Growers that can’t get the right amount of staff had to cut back on their orders, meaning that their turnovers were reduced.”

Meanwhile in Australia the spike in gas prices has been described as “apocalyptic” and “a perfect storm”. And now the market operator has been forced into a rare intervention to prevent winter blackouts by forcing energy producers to fire up. On June 15, it took the extraordinary step of taking control of the wholesale electricity market. But Australia’s energy troubles didn’t come from nowhere. A confluence of short-term and longer-term economic, geopolitical, political and even weather-related forces have sent prices soaring. The consequences for households and businesses are now unavoidable. Energy prices were rising before the Russian invasion as the world economy accelerated out of a pandemic-induced slump. But the conflict triggered a sudden and dramatic global supply shock as businesses and governments around the world spurned Russia’s enormous oil and gas supplies. As Russia’s invasion of Ukraine ramped up, millions of barrels a day of Russian oil were withdrawn from global markets, There have also been domestic forces at work. Australia’s ageing fleet of coal-fired power plants has been plagued by unplanned outages. This has cut the supply of electricity to the energy grid, adding to the pressure placed on gas, which (unlike coal) can be cranked up at short notice as an alternative source of electricity generation. About 85 to 90 per cent of Australia’s gas market is covered by long-term contracts between suppliers and businesses known as gas supply agreements, according to the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association’s acting chief executive, Damian Dwyer. That has limited the impact of the extraordinary price surge – for now. Dwyer says the remainder of the market is covered by more volatile immediate “spot” prices, subject to the whims of global markets. One way or another, high spot prices tend to flow into higher costs eventually as new contracts are negotiated. So sadly the bottom line for growers is not looking good. For some growers there may ultimately be difficult decisions to be made in terms of planting or not planting, or even diversifications in terms of cropping. In all a very difficult time for growers attempting to ride out the storm with little or no hope of having any control over the situation.



(Thanks to Hortidaily and The Sydney Morning Herald for content reference)

New Training Facility takes shape

A brand new protected cropping training facility is under construction at Melbourne Polytechnic's Epping Campus. Designed and built by Powerplants Australia the fully climate controlled facility features a number of small compartments that showcase differing styles of growing including Aquaponics, NFT, Ebb and Drain, and Drip irrigation. A larger compartment is also allocated for high vine crops with the associated equipment, as well as spacious training room adjacent to the crop area. A designated dosing unit and day tank service the nutrient requirements of the facility. We were able to gain a sneak preview of the facility just prior to commissioning and we are hoping to visit the site as part of a forthcoming grower day.



Growing again - thankfully!

Definition of Resilience - the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness. Well that's what the Dictionary tells us, but if you want a real life example of this look no further than our President - John Elford. As you are all aware John had a catastrophic issue when one of his sheds blew over in a gale leaving him with a massive headache. So what did he do? What he always does, got on with solving the problem, and after a fairly long and protracted battle, John was planting again. Well done John and all the best for the new crop!



Alternative growing media

In the current climate of growing media supply, where ingredient sourcing and cost is becoming an issue, a new high-quality advanced substrate has become available from Profile® Products in America.

HydraFiber® is manufactured with a unique Thermally Refined® process that combines wood and bark and refines them in a pressurised vessel. This creates singulated, small-diameter, long, thin strands with large surface area that can be blended at various percentages into media recipes and is a

proven replacement for coir and perlite. Because this product is an engineered, manufactured substrate, it is not subject to many of the harvest and production variables that can limit the availability of peat, coir and other mix components. “We are thrilled to bring HydraFiber to Australia so growers can begin to experience all the benefits, from reduced operational costs to impressive plant health,” said Jennifer Neujahr, director of business development for HydraFiber. “It won’t take long for them to start seeing better margins and better plants.”

The substrate has enjoyed a large take-up in America with most of the large production nurseries adding it to their media blends. It arrives in Australia in wrapped, compressed 50-pound bales and is ‘spun back out’ using a specialised machine supplied by AgriNomix in Oberlin, Ohio.

Growers using HydraFiber blends report equal or better root structure compared to other mixes on their bedding crops, succulents, tropicals, perennials, vegetables, hemp, woodies and more. It delivers higher air space than other popular substrate ingredients and creates a superior, root zone environment while providing more available water for plant uptake.



HydraFiber’s tremendous surface area makes water work more efficiently. Water is held on the surface of the fibre and is more readily accessible when the plant needs it. The pot may look dry from the top, but below the surface, it may be clear the plant does not need watering.

HydraFiber is imported into Australia by Transplant Systems in Melbourne and has gone through production nursery trials successfully. It’s available on the east coast in custom blends from Go Grow in Ballina.

For further detail contact sales@transplantsystems.com



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