



Hydroponic Farmers Federation Newsletter

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October 2020



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HFF CONFERENCE 2020

21 - 23 July | Hydroponics Tomorrow



INVITED SPEAKERS

- Jan de Groot, van der Knaap, Mexico
- Paul Higgins, Emergent Futures, Australia
- Scott Matthews, Syngenta Australia, Australia
- Levi Nupponen, Agrology, Australia
- James Pateras, Modular Farms, Australia
- Emily Rigby, Cannatrek, Australia
- Michael Russo, Fresh Herb Company, Australia
- Yoni Sharon, Monash University, Australia
- Paul Simmonds, Rijk Zwaan, Netherlands
- Trevor Steinthal, Althea, USA
- Toby Wright, Tom d'Aqui, France

MORE TO BE ANNOUNCED!

Join the HFF at all exclusive experiences at the Atura Dandenong in 2020, the 12th Biennial Conference is not to be missed!

EARLYBIRD REGISTRATION DEADLINE: FRIDAY 1 MAY 2020

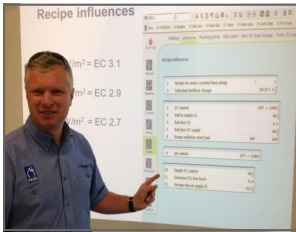


EXHIBITION ALMOST SOLD OUT!

ATURA DANDENONG, VICTORIA

www.hffconference.org.au

The Secretary



Usually at this time of the year I'd be writing articles in the newsletter about the Greentech exhibition in the Netherlands and all of the latest and greatest developments that were on display. But for obvious reasons that isn't happening! The Covid-19 issue has certainly not gone away, and those of us who live in metropolitan Melbourne have also had to endure six weeks plus of a Stage 4 lockdown. So that's basically meant that you can only leave your house for essential shopping (on your own as well), for medical or giving care reasons, for essential work or for one hour's exercise a day. On top of that facemasks are the new norm. Just think of the odds we would have got if twelve months ago we had placed a bet saying this was how the world would be in a year's time! But probably one of the biggest concerns is the mental impact this is having on people. Seeing businesses evaporate and being unable to visit loved ones is certainly taking a toll on many people, and sadly it seems that the

suicide rate amongst Victorian's is predicted to rise by 13.5%. So although there is obvious concerns about keeping jobs and businesses afloat, now is the time to ensure you look after the most important person in your life - you. Now those that know me well know that I've been in the fire brigade for nearly 30 years and I've seen the nastier side of that particular line of work. I've never been affected by what I've seen, (and it has been grim over the years), but that doesn't make me a hero, it's just that I have developed a mental mechanism to switch off from such things. However, I have to admit that the Covid issue has caused me to start to feel depressed and generally be 'off my game'. So what's the solution? Don't be afraid to talk to someone. The old 'problem shared is a problem halved' phrase is certainly true and there are some great organisations out there to help. Beyond Blue and the Blackdog Institute are available 24/7. On a lighter note, make some time for some physical exercise outside of work. I'm designed for comfort not speed, but I've been riding 100km a week on the old faithful pushbike and feel a lot better for it! Stay safe everyone—we will get out of this! **TB**

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The President



Hi everyone, and I hope that you are all keeping well in these ever changing times. Obviously the big news item from the HFF is the fact that we have reluctantly been forced into the decision to postpone our conference. Originally when the Covid issue raised its head we thought we would be able to stage the event in November, but with the 'second wave' having such an impact in Victoria it was becoming obvious that this would be unlikely, and the recent government control measures put the final nail in the poor old conference's coffin for the short term. I know that for many of you, attending the

conference is not just about gaining technical knowledge but also enjoying the company of industry members - especially at the bar! But the limitations imposed via social distancing and overall numbers would have made the event a very poor version of what we have all grown to know and like. However, all is not lost! We are planning to resume the conference program at the usual time around June/July in 2022 (get the diaries out now!) and we will be hosting the event at the Atura with the same joint sponsors. My thanks to Powerplants and Garden City Plastics for standing by the HFF and agreeing to remain as sponsors. I would also like to thank the majority of the trade that agreed to be sponsors for the postponed event, who have also agreed to allow the HFF to retain their deposits to ease our cash flow - it is very much appreciated. My thanks also go to Ruby and the team at ASN Events who have worked tirelessly to try and get an event off the ground, only to be faced by constant barriers - ASN will continue to work with us to run the 2022 event and make it even bigger and better than before. So what's happening before the revised conference? We will be hosting our AGM in a virtual mode via 'Zoom' and details of how you can join the event will be sent out to every member. Tony B has been working his magic on this one and as well as the virtual AGM, we will also have the capability for members to cast votes during the meeting for elected positions as required. And as soon as we can see some light at the end of the tunnel we are looking to host a number of grower days/farm visits across the state. Obviously this will dependent on Government restrictions but we need to make sure that you - our members - can get back to enjoying each other's company and seeing the latest and greatest in our industry. Finally my thanks to all the committee members who have been doing a huge amount of work behind the scenes in ever changing conditions. So stay safe everyone, and hopefully we will see you all soon! **Regards, John**

Membership

With COVID-19 giving everyone a hard time I had been expecting some of our membership numbers to decline, but I'm pleased to report that we are still attracting new members to the HFF. We are currently sitting at a total number of 63 members with a rough split of grower to trade memberships of around 50/50. We have also seen membership applications coming in from outside Victoria so that has also been encouraging. Traditionally we would have seen our numbers grow substantially in a conference year, but that is obviously a situation that won't be happening. However, it's good to see that we are not going backwards! The current situation is one that is putting a lot of pressure on all our members, and we are here to help. If you feel that the HFF may be able to help you in any way during this pandemic, then please feel free to give us a call. These are trying times and we as an organisation can help in any way then we would be keen to do so. Take care everyone, and we will get through this. **Ian Mortlock—Membership Secretary**



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Royal Brinkman

With constantly emerging viruses, pests and diseases in the greenhouse – hygiene and safe hygiene practices are important and help to protect the entire operation and prevent the risk of spread – clean hands, clean machines and clean water ensure a clean greenhouse and therefore clean crops.

Hygiene measures

The importance of cleaning, sanitising, and disinfecting



Hygiene from the start.

A disinfection gate (or hygiene station) is one of the most important tools in the greenhouse. When any employees or visitors proceed through the disinfection gate at the entrance of the greenhouse, you minimize the chance of diseases getting into the greenhouse. In the hygiene station, both the hands and shoe soles are disinfected with a disinfectant.



Disinfecting hands

Washing hands is arguably one of the most fundamental ways to prevent the spread of viruses and diseases. During work it is essential to regularly disinfect the hands to ensure employees are working hygienically. It is especially important in seedling plant nursery operations that good company hygiene is maintained.



Disinfecting feet

Flexxomat disinfection mats strategically placed at entry/exit points used to disinfect footwear – are used to limit the risk of spread when workers, visitors enter or exit each zone or working area.



Menno clean

The machines and tools that are used in the greenhouse will also have to be thoroughly cleaned regularly. Menno Clean is ideal for this. A powerful cleaning detergent based on benzoic acid this product is especially developed for the horticultural market. Menno Clean has a long effectiveness, is environmentally friendly and is non corrosive.



Menno disinfection foam gun

The Menno clean disinfectant foam gun is the best solution to quickly disinfect the greenhouse in combination with a spraying trolley. The foam gun is easy to mount at the end of the hose compared to a standard spray gun. Similarly, the Menno foam disinfectant applicator can be used to efficiently cover smaller areas in disinfectant foam.



Huwa-San

Huwa-San helps to deal with diseases of viral, bacterial and fungal origin. It has proven to be very effective in helping your crops recover quickly from such diseases as grey mould, powdery mildew, anthracnose, white leaf blotch and many more. Huwa-San TR-50 is the original silver stabilized hydrogen peroxide disinfectant. It's a chlorine-free, ecological and biodegradable technology with a long-lasting, controlled effect due to a stabilizing agent. The unique formulation makes Huwa-san an effective, powerful broad spectrum disinfectant that is both stable and safe.



Establish a hygiene plan In order to guarantee good hygiene in the greenhouse, it is advisable to identify the risks and draw up a hygiene plan. A hygiene plan describes which measures are taken within the company and when these must be observed. Of course, hygiene must be checked periodically to tighten the hygiene protocol where necessary.

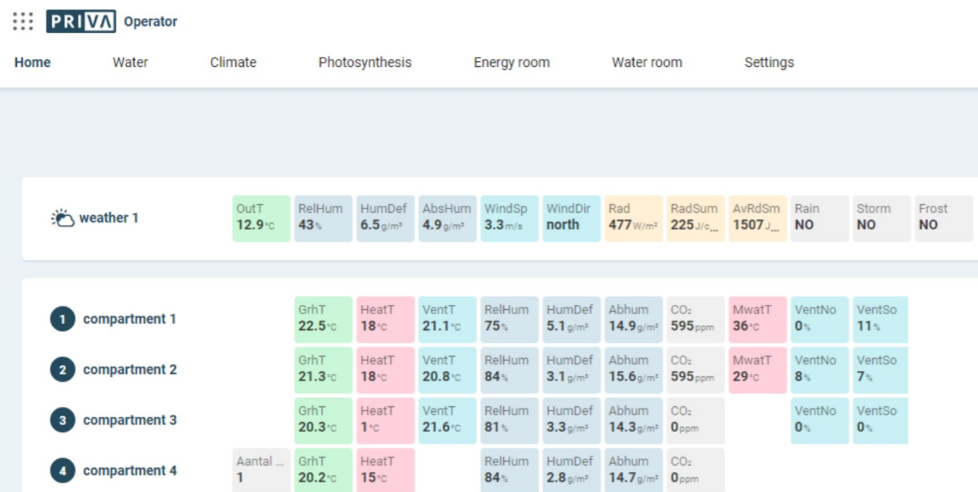
Priva Connected

Priva NL have recently announced that the Priva Cloud Services will be introduced in September 2020 as part of the "Priva Connected" subscription service. Priva Connected will be available for clients with Priva Compass, Compact CC or Connex systems. A really useful addition is the easy operation with dashboards included in Priva Connected is "Priva Operator". Priva Operator you will be able to get insight into the current status of your process computer, because the data is available via the cloud anytime, anywhere.

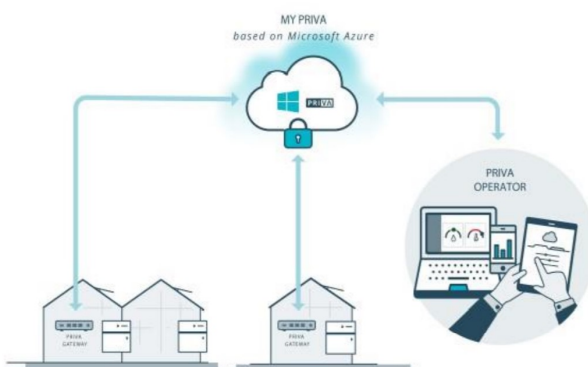
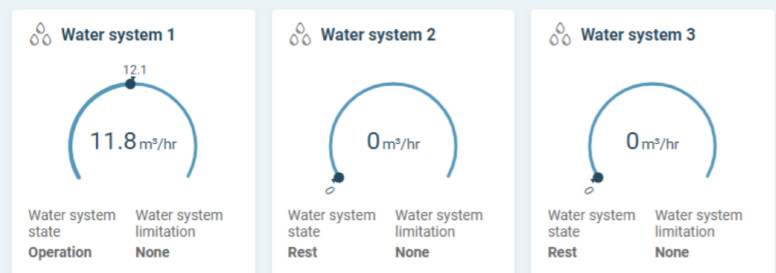
The most essential adjustments to your Priva systems can be made at any time and anywhere, using a smartphone, laptop or tablet. So how does it work? Firstly you register with Priva for the "Priva Connected" service. Once subscribed, you will have your own secure online account called "My Priva". Via My Priva you have access to your subscribed online Priva applications, including Priva Operator, Access Control and Priva Alarms. Access Control gives you control over who can access which information. With Priva Alarms you will be notified of any active alarms via the Priva Alarm App (available on Android and iOS). To connect your Priva Compass, Compact CC or Connex with the online applications in My Priva, a Priva Gateway is required (note, a Priva Gateway is standard with all

Priva Compass systems but optional with Priva CompactCC and Connex systems). This is because the Gateway securely shares the data from Compass/Compact CC/Connex with My Priva. Priva have developed the Gateway so that it can only connect to Compass/ Compact CC/Connex and not to other systems within the your network. This guarantees a secure, reliable connection. Priva provides the Gateway in a complete 300mmx400mm cabinet with two additional switches to make the connectivity very easy. Your Priva Dealer can supply and install the gateway for you. After installing the Priva Gateway, you can share data from your Compact CC/Connex with online apps and services in My Priva at the touch

of a button. In short Priva Connected will give you guaranteed continuity of your business: You always have the latest software version, your Priva system is reliable, secure and you always have the latest functionalities. You can always check the status of your greenhouse, whenever and wherever you want, using your personal smartphone, tablet, laptop or desktop. Access to Priva support 24/7 and no additional charge: all services for one fixed amount per month. For further details about Priva Connected please contact your local Priva Dealer.



Water system



Covid and Labour Shortage

A by product of the issues that Covid - 19 has brought with it is the fact the horticulture industry is facing a worker shortage across the board. With changing border controls, different States are looking at different solutions. However, one consistent theme is that all State governments have an expectation that all growers will make genuine efforts to employ suitable locals and they must be part of the workforce solution. The Australian government has stated that they will restart the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) and the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) but that it is up to each State to formally opt-in and is up to the State Chief Health Officers to



determine the quarantine requirements. At this stage, there are significant up-front costs to cover quarantine and flights as well as all of the usual pastoral care obligations. These workers are not the only solution however it will take the pressure off the dwindling numbers of backpackers and for those growers who have already invested in the scheme the high productive capacity of these workers makes them an attractive option. The Victorian state government has announced it will provide targeted funding to attract seasonal workers to the regions. Agriculture Minister Jaclyn Symes says a \$17 million package will help address seasonal workforce shortages, brought on by the pandemic. "These jobs are



**Victorian Agriculture
Minister Jaclyn Symes**

hard work - but they're also some of the most rewarding and could be the start of a really fruitful and exciting career in agriculture," Ms Symes said "I urge Victorian farmers to look at the funding available and register with Working Victoria - to connect with workers keen and able to help them get their product to plate." The package includes more than \$6 million to boost the supply of COVIDSafe accommodation for seasonal workers, including working with councils and local accommodation providers like motels and caravan parks to explore accommodation options for regional seasonal workers. The government will also employ new Seasonal Workforce Coordinators, along with Engagement Officers, who will link local industry groups, employers, labour hire agencies, local

government and other stakeholders. The Engagement Officers will also provide additional support to culturally and linguistically diverse communities, who traditionally make up a significant portion of the seasonal agricultural workforce. Farmers and agribusinesses will be further supported with \$10 million from the *Agriculture Workforce Plan* to extend the Business Adaptation Grants - helping workplaces meet health and safety requirements and adapt to distancing changes imposed by the pandemic, with grants of up to \$300,000. Upcoming employment opportunities in the agriculture sector include fruit and vegetable picking and packing, grains harvesting, grain receival centre work, and other roles essential to seasonal harvest. The Victorian Government has advocated strongly for the commonwealth to lead a national approach to support farmers ahead of the harvest and shearing seasons, beginning across the country. The Victorian Government will join other states in helping local employers take part in the Commonwealth's Seasonal Worker Programme and Pacific Labour Scheme Ms Symes said Victoria would continue talks on what greater role the commonwealth could play in assisting Victorian agribusinesses to find workers. The Victorian Government led the development of the Agriculture Workers Code with NSW, to give certainty to farmers and agricultural workers that border closures will not stand in the way of their vital work. Jobseekers can register now and be alerted when opportunities in the sector appear on the site. To do so and to find out more about the Agriculture Workforce Plan, follow the e link shown and go to agriculture.vic.gov.au/agworkforceplan.

COVID-19 Business Continuity Guideline

Integrated Emergency
Management
and **Recovery**



One of the biggest challenges facing industry in general during the Covid-19 pandemic has been sourcing some form of guidelines that assists enterprises in dealing with the ever changing face of this issue. Apart from the threat of bushfires and general bio security issues, it is probably fair to say that the Horticultural Industry has not had to consider emergency planning 'on the run' until now. Melbourne based Nuffield Group are heavily involved in planning for Emergency Management, and in conjunction with Craig Lapsley (ex Victorian Fire Services Commissioner) have developed a document called "Integrated Emergency Management and Recovery" which they have kindly made available free of charge. Also available from Nuffield are some excellent guidelines for developing a COVID safe plan for Micro, Small and Medium business. These resources can be obtained online from the website located at <https://www.nuffieldgroup.com/iemr/> These documents are being constantly updated to reflect the various changes that are being implemented in the fight against Covid-19. Our thanks to Jayston Small and Laura Sullivan of Nuffield, and Craig Lapsley for making these documents available to our industry.

Integrated Emergency
Management
and **Recovery**



COVID-19 Business Continuity Guideline

Revision No 1

Integrated Emergency
Management
and **Recovery**



**Micro, Small and Medium Business
COVID Safe Plan**

Edition 1, 13 August 2020



Jayston Small



Laura Sullivan



Craig Lapsley

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Coronavirus and the Glasshouse Industry

The last time a significant virus outbreak occurred that enveloped the earth as rapidly as the Coronavirus, was the Spanish Flu in 1918. The industrial revolution had just starting. As a result, there is no precedent of how the industrialized world must deal with the Coronavirus outbreak. So what do we do when we manage a glasshouse? In this article, leading industry expert **Godfrey Dol** gives his thoughts on management practices .



What do we do? In the new world of Covid-19, one thing is for sure, the safety of our employees comes first. Infecting them through fellow employees endangers their health and that of their friends and families. Due to the longevity of most crops, sending staff home is not an option. Not maintaining a crop for two weeks is a death sentence for a crop and the business. In a world during and past Covid-19, people still have to eat. Like the brave doctors and nurses, who care for the many people affected by Coronavirus, food production must also go on. So what can we do? Aside from everything we already know about washing hands, protecting your sneezes, and the 1.5 metre rule, let's think specifically about the glasshouse. Most glasshouse operations already have hygiene procedures. We can build on these hygiene procedures, this time focussing on staff health. If uniforms are not provided at work, ask staff to bring a fresh set of clothes for work use. It limits the possibility of bringing the virus from home to the workplace. Changing back to their home clothes when they go home also limits the possibility of bringing the virus to their homes. Put a disinfectant spray bottle near the entrance doors to and from the glasshouse. Ask the staff to spray their hands before and after they touch the door handle or pull the rope to open doors. I recommend having two spray bottles, so the trigger of the other spray bottle can also be disinfected. Designate trolleys, transport devices, and forklifts to staff individual staff. Every time they leave the equipment, ask them to wipe down contact areas. Picking trolleys that are used by everyone need to be wiped down before harvesting starts and before it is sent to the packing shed. Wipe pipe rail trolleys down in between rows. If a labour registration system is in use, ask the staff to pull on fresh gloves before touching the buttons. Wipe down the buttons multiple times per day. Apply the same rules to the use of mobile phones. Ask staff to respect the 1.5 metre rule and encourage them not to have lunch in the canteen but in the glasshouse, in isolation. A supervisor may be tasked with bringing the food out. Cleaning hands before and after eating is vital. Disinfect toilet seats before and after use, including the door handles (inside and out) and the flush button. Imagine the panic that breaks out if a team member is found to be positive for Coronavirus. It sends shockwaves through the staff, and they may refuse to come to work. In this light, it is essential to communicate with our employees. As we look for leadership in politicians to lead our countries, so do staff look for leadership in managers and owners. It is imperative that a sick person, says so, and is allowed to go/stay home. Measuring staff temperatures before they enter the facility reassures all employees that care is taken not to let sick staff come to work. Postpone all visitors to the glasshouse. If their physical presence cannot be avoided, make sure they know they must dress up in full protective gear. Truck drivers should be kept from the premises and should stay in their trucks when they pick up produce. If they need access to the packing shed, they also need to wear protective clothing. Arrange all meetings, even internal ones, to be done through media-communication software. Let's work together to keep our staff safe. Please feel free to forward and share your ideas and suggestions.

If you like to be copied in on future articles or would like to know more and have questions, follow Godfrey on LinkedIn Godfried Dol, or email Godfrey@glasshouse-consultancy.com or go to his website; <http://www.glasshouse-consultancy.com>. You can also download previous posts from this website.

Community College Gippsland

Situated on the outskirts of Warragul, Community College Gippsland (CCG) provides Horticulture training for Certificate II and III students, both on-campus and on-the-job. CCG is located on extensive grounds spanning 8 hectares, with computer controlled greenhouses for crop production, as well as community gardens, orchard and pastures.

According to Julie Thomas, Director of Education and Training, the horticultural training is designed to create graduates who can hit the ground running. "We have a big focus on industry relevant training, with highly experienced accredited trainers who can upskill our students with the latest industry knowledge and techniques." While getting students job-ready typically involves participants getting their hands dirty, the challenges of COVID-19 have called on CCG to be innovative in creating a virtual classroom experience. "Our horticulture trainers have continued to keep the student crop projects growing, providing students with virtual crop inspections and insights through technology, looking at how the climate control systems are impacting production," Julie said.

For further details on training opportunities with CCG, or employment opportunities for students, please feel free to contact Julie Thomas at email julie.thomas@ccg.asn.au

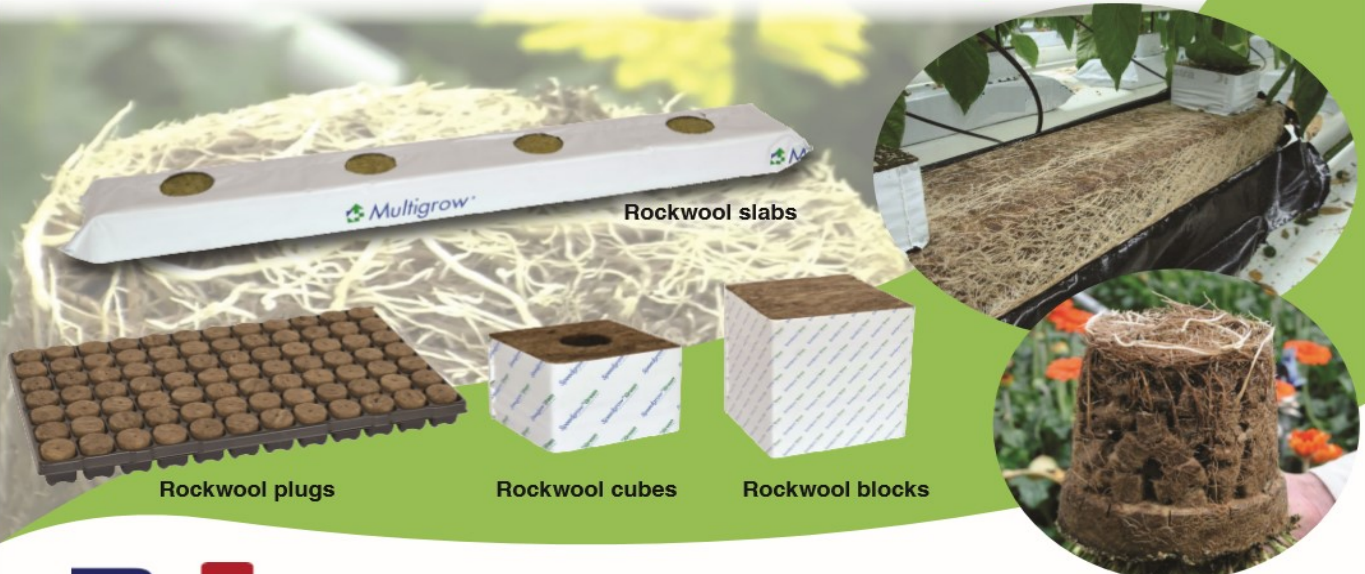


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**WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY**

A photograph of a woman with brown hair tied back, wearing a white lab coat, standing in a greenhouse. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a gentle smile. The background shows green plants and the structure of the greenhouse.

BE A SECTOR LEADER IN PROTECTED CROPPING

GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN PROTECTED CROPPING GRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN PROTECTED CROPPING

The Graduate Diploma/Graduate Certificate in Protected Cropping will educate future leaders for the Australian horticultural sector via an innovative and flexible industry-supported training model.

Be part of the fastest growing food producing sector in Australia and join the only protected cropping course delivered at a postgraduate level in Australia. Western Sydney University offers a unique Graduate Diploma/Graduate Certificate course in Protected Cropping providing exciting learning opportunities. Extend your knowledge and further develop your expertise in the areas of science, technology and business with a strong focus on high-tech and intensive horticulture.

This course is designed to comprehensively cover both Australian and international challenges in sustainable greenhouse production in a changing global climate. Students will learn how protected cropping utilises cutting-edge technologies in the core areas of crop production, plant physiology, biotechnology, pest management, postharvest, climate control systems, integrated data intelligence, and business management and logistics. Additionally, students will learn best-practices from the protected cropping industry experts to equip graduates for employability and mobility.

The Graduate Diploma/Graduate Certificate courses in Protected Cropping are funded by the Hort Frontiers Leadership Fund, part of the Hort Frontiers strategic partnership initiative developed by Hort Innovation, with co-investment from Western Sydney University, key industry partners (Flavorite, Costa Group, Perfection Fresh, Australian Fresh Leaf Herbs, and Greenworks) and contributions from the Australian government.

The industry partners will host students for their industry research projects. Therefore, engaged students will be job-ready to start in the protected cropping industry following completion of the course.

ACCREDITATION

Both the Graduate Certificate and the Graduate Diploma in Protected Cropping are recognised by the two industry organisations – Protected Cropping Australia and the Hydroponic Farmers Federation.

WHAT YOU'LL STUDY

The course includes a combination of flexible online learning modules and practical on-site workshops to allow you the flexibility to work while studying.

The highlight for your learning journey is the Masterclass experience, where you will meet with industry experts and work on real life industry challenges in a world-class, high-tech greenhouse facility. Themes within the workshops for the Masterclass include software and hardware systems, crop and produce management, integrated pest management and fertigation systems.

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

The Graduate Diploma/Graduate Certificate in Protected Cropping courses are a key education and training component of National Vegetable Protected Cropping Centre, jointly funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia and Western Sydney University. The Centre encompasses 1800sq. m. over 9 independently controlled growing spaces designed with the world's very best glasshouse infrastructure and sensor controlled systems, to offer research, education and training opportunities in modern protected cropping horticulture.

The practical experience gained during this course will allow you to be part of the sustainable solution that focuses on resource management, reducing agricultural pollutants and environmental footprint, and using technology to advance production.

Graduates of this degree can look forward to career opportunities, such as; Horticultural Business Managers, Crop and Nursery Managers, Business Consultants or High-tech Growers.

HOW TO APPLY

Postgraduate course applications are processed online and can be made directly to Western Sydney University at westernsydney.uac.edu.au/ws or alternatively through the Universities Admissions Centre (UAC) at uac.edu.au/postgraduate.

Students are eligible to apply for one of the 65 **scholarships** (up to \$5,000 each) and **internships** (up to \$17,500 each) generously provided by the five industry partners. The applicants need to submit an Expression of Interest form and the Project Reference Group will make the selection.

For more information about studying this course, please contact

Professor Zhonghua Chen

0466 544 696

z.chen@westernsydney.edu.au

Visit our Protected Cropping course pages for more information.

westernsydney.edu.au/graduate-certificate-in-protected-cropping

westernsydney.edu.au/graduate-diploma-in-protected-cropping



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AIS Greenworks

Gutter Solutions - Environmentally Friendly Recirculation To Save Water, Fertilisers and Your Livelihood

In tough times we need to protect our assets, livelihood, plants and harvest - Water and fertiliser resources should not be wasted down the drain as it can pollute our waterways and neighbours downstream. Maximise your (return on) investment by collecting and recycling your nutrient rich irrigation water.

Isolate to Exclude Pathogens - It is important to create distance and get away from the dirty ground. Soil or contaminated water can harbour pathogenic fungi, pests and diseases that can infect or infest your planting. Rain or machinery can splash muddy soil and pathogens onto the crop and decimate your livelihood.

Elevate your crop - Being up off the ground is both hygienic and labour saving as planting, pruning and harvesting is more accessible and efficient for crop workers. Raised or hanging gutters can collect the nutrient rich drain water for recycling through a series of storage tanks before it is dosed back into the irrigation feed. Each storage tank is measured, tested, and treated before being blended back to the ideal recipe for optimal steering. Good air flow circulation beneath the plants reduces disease risk such as powdery mildew and botrytis.

Our gutter rolling machine comes to you - Greenworks can roll steel growing gutters directly inside your greenhouse, with our mobile rolling machine anywhere in Australia. Seamless, infinite lengths mean smooth drainage back to your storage tanks. We have many profile designs and widths available to suit all types of crops. The GM-18 and GM-19 shapes suit soft fruits such as strawberries because the fruit is lifted away from the rootzone for ventilation and easy picking.

BEWARE - Inferior Steel, Poor Drainage and Corrosion - Poor drainage from sagging steel creates pools of stagnant water leading to corrosion and disease. Greenworks galvanized steel gutters are engineered and constructed to the highest quality standards. Our steel is coated in zinc, primer and polyurethane for durability and efficient drainage.

Environmentally Friendly Recirculation - Advantages of Greenworks elevated steel gutters:

Efficient irrigation, drainage and recycling. Protect and position your crop away from soil-borne diseases, ground dwelling insects or critters. Labour-saving, ergonomic efficiency for crop workers and machinery

Greenworks can roll steel growing gutters inside your greenhouse.

Our rolling machine is flexible enough to modify a profile even when rolling on-site. Suit many types of crops as there are varied profile designs and widths available.

Greenworks work closely with their partners in the chain to provide you with a recycling system to save water, fertilisers and your livelihood. **Call today for a quote and stay ahead of the rest.**



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Flavorite set for future growth



Flavorite are pleased to announce the merger of their three business entities (Flavorite Hydroponic Tomatoes Pty Ltd, Flavourwave Pty Ltd and Flavorite Marketing Pty Ltd) into one business to be known as the "Flavorite Group".

Flavorite has seen significant growth since founders Warren Nichol and Mark Millis started the business in 1988, with 1200m² of greenhouses built in Warragul, Gippsland Victoria, with the intention to produce the best tasting Australian grown tomatoes 12 months of the year. This vision has since expanded into new product segments with the introduction of specialty tomatoes, capsicums, cucumbers and recently blueberries. The plan is to build on this production base, with further expansion and diversification into exciting new products and segments within the fruit and vegetable stable. With all production now in state of the art glasshouses and protected cropping environments, and a second major growing facility in Katunga, Victoria, Flavorite now spans 420,000m² in growing area and another 200,000m² of external growers contributing to supply all major retailers and Central Markets nationally, as well as Asian export markets.

Flavorite Group CEO Mike Nichol said "the merger will enable our three successful businesses to join forces to create a consolidated powerhouse which is well positioned to maintain our long-held family values, whilst unlocking the full potential of our talented people, growing and marketing expertise and world class asset base. By streamlining the way we operate and interact internally and externally, we will be able to respond quickly to the market, our customers and new opportunities."

Flavorite have also taken the opportunity to collaborate with Roc Partners, a Sydney-based investment group who have been chosen to manage the Victorian Business Growth Fund, a partnership between First State Super and the Victorian Government. Flavorite will be the first business to benefit from the \$250 million Fund, providing capital that will see the business significantly expand its operations and realise it's growth potential. This funding, coupled with Flavorite's streamlined business model and Roc Partner's strategic investment capabilities, will create new employment opportunities and provide for the rapid expansion of the business into new product segments and channels.

Roc Partners' Managing Partner Michael Lukin said "We have worked up an exciting partnership with the Flavorite Group, they were pioneers in the protected cropping industry in Australia and have a proven record of innovation and first-in-market experience. Flavorite has a vertically integrated structure and strong management team which makes them an ideal platform business on which to further grow and diversify within the Australian produce industry that is crying out for a more robust and reliable supply chain, which is what consumers rightly expect".

About Flavorite:- Flavorite is one of Australia's largest glasshouse producers of fresh fruit and vegetables. Family owned, and with three generations of experience growing and supplying premium fresh produce both nationally and internationally.

Flavorite set for future growth

About Flavourwave:- Flavourwave was conceived as a business to supply specialty tomatoes previously not available during the Australian winter and spring. The Katunga site, through geographic diversity presented the perfect mix of high winter light and a high-quality production environment to compliment the existing production from southern Victoria and sister company Flavorite.

About Flavorite Marketing:- Flavorite Marketing has been the leading marketing and distribution business for produce in Australia over the last 30 years, working with growers across multiple produce categories to sell all their produce and develop strong annual selling programs throughout Australian and international sales channels.

About Roc Partners:- Roc Partners is a leading alternative investment manager specialising in private equity and agricultural investments in the Asia Pacific region. Roc Partners was established as an independent, alternative investment management firm following the management buy-out of the Macquarie Group's private markets business unit by its senior executives in June 2014. The Roc Partners business is headquartered in Sydney and has been in continuous operation since 1996. The team comprises over 35 staff located across Sydney, Melbourne, Hong Kong and Shanghai, and has current funds under management of more than A\$6.5 billion.

Aerial view of Flavorite's production facility in Warragul, Gippsland Victoria



Covid-19 closes training facility



Chisholm Institute’s world class greenhouse training facility has had to temporarily close it’s doors under the latest level of Covid-19 restrictions in Melbourne. Education and training was moved to remote and distance learning in line with the recommendations of the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Health and Human Services. This move was understandably made to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students. The Glasshouse facility was unable to continue operating as neither staff, nor students have been available to manage and maintain the

resource. However, Chisholm see the facility as part of their extensive infrastructure that provides students with quality education and training aligned to industry needs. During this time, Chisholm are taking the opportunity to review the utilisation of this facility, and we will be consulting with key industry stakeholders and peak bodies, to seek feedback and advice to have greater alignment to the needs of industry and ensure graduates are job ready. This review will take the form of a remote ‘roundtable’ at which Chisholm will aim to explore options and seek industry input in to the training of future generations of employees within the sector. If you would like to participate in these discussions to help further develop this great facility, please email your details to the secretary - tony@genesis-hort.com.au

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Rijk Zwaan - Sun City Produce

Bao from Sun City Produce walks through the fields, through the wind and rain, multitasking as he observes the crops during their mid-season harvest, while generously offering his time. "It's good. I love it." Bao was only 2 months old when his family migrated to Australia after being in a refugee camp in Thailand for 2 years. Upon arriving in Australia, his family moved to the coastal city of Geraldton in Western Australia, approximately 424 kilometres north of Perth, along with another group of refugees. Farming was an obvious choice for Bao's parents as it didn't require fluency in English. They believed in having a simple life, growing crops and sending them to market. *"They needed to find work where they could and farming also required less qualifications"*.



Bao La & Bao Duy with Rijk Zwaan cucumber variety RZ4

His parents began their farming journey as labourers, rented and leased their own farm and found that things were harder than expected, as competition was fierce. *"It is still pretty hard, nowadays with high competition and demand volatile at the moment. We thought it would be easy and had the opportunity to grow with technology, but it's still difficult."* Bao is a geotechnical engineer by trade, his brother is an accountant and his sister is a medical scientist. Bao worked as an engineer for eight years before returning the farm. He has now also spent eight years in farming. *"I'm also Chairman of the Midwest Horticulture Group which is a good group of 20 – 25 family owned businesses. We're not as big as Carnarvon. They have about 100, but we are also one of the largest producers of cucumbers in Australia for the winter season"*. When asked if being a technical engineer has helped in his farming career, Bao stated that the discipline has helped him understand the benefits of *"software and technical skills in improving efficiencies and establishing a professional approach towards paperwork, business development, marketing and employee management"*. When asked what an average day looks like on the farm, Bao said his brother *"does the harvesting, beginning his day around 4.00am, pruning, harvesting, packing, picking."* Bao starts his day by *"checking and fixing irrigations, checking fertiliser is consistent and the status of trials."* He also does the paperwork, conducts research, organises any repairs needed and often travels to conduct research. Bao took part in the Nuffield Australia Farming Scholarship, a program that awards selected primary producers with the unique opportunity to travel overseas and study an agricultural topic of choice. Bao travelled with a group to tour universities, cooperatives and other agriculture and farming enterprises, then elected to focus his personal research project on efficient practices in low tech greenhouses including hydroponics. Bao chose to visit Rijk Zwaan breeding stations in Spain and Holland to view trials and see advanced breeding techniques in action. Through his research, Bao found that hydroponics resulted in improved quality of produce. He saw some low-tech greenhouses were converting to hydroponics, was impressed by their results and chose to do the same here. After discussing these thoughts with Rijk Zwaan team members, Bao was then introduced to some Vietnamese growers who worked with hydroponics. They later hosted him at their farms and Bao was able to see first hand how they were converting from low-tech greenhouses to hydroponics and the efficiencies that could be achieved. Bao says this opportunity *"opened my eyes. It gave us "the confidence to explore hydroponics as a viable option and opportunity for growth. I was willing to take some risks"*. After growing in the ground for over 30 years, in 2020 Sun City Produce invested in hydroponics, growing Rijk Zwaan truss varieties. Starting by converting one farm initially, trials are now underway. Over the next 2 – 4 months, they will start seeing results. *"We will continue trialling now and also trialling some varieties"*

Rijk Zwaan - Sun City Produce

during winter.” It’s a significant financial investment, but if hydroponics work well for them, Bao says they may also look at converting their second farm in the future. They use desalinated water and are now competitive in this market, creating demand using sustainable and efficient methods. In a competitive market, *“It’s hard to keep your business going and this gives us a point of difference. I think we were always going to do it, but seeing the Rijk Zwaan breeding stations overseas and meeting the Vietnamese growers gave us the confidence to go ahead and try it, rather than waiting a couple more years.”* Three to four years ago, cucumber green mottle mosaic virus (CGMMV), which belongs to the family of viruses known as Tobamoviruses wiped out



From left to right—Bao Duy, Nghi (Mum) Bao Duy & Bao la (brothers)

some crops in Geraldton. As a very important disease for cucumber growers, CGMMV resistance is a key focus for Rijk Zwaan's breeders. Sun City previously grew Scotinos RZ for 12 years and were happy with the fruit size, but couldn't take the risk CGMMV posed. This season they have replaced Scotinos RZ and now only grow Rijk Zwaan cucumber varieties resistant to CGMMV. They have switched to the new Rijk Zwaan varieties, Tantalos RZ and Maritmo RZ which both feature the BlueLeaf trait as well as CGMMV resistances. In the first year they saw a big difference with BlueLeaf and growing these crops. Bao continually observes other varieties coming through from Rijk Zwaan and is currently monitoring results of Insula RZ, which also has Blueleaf and CGMMV resistance, and is being grown in Adelaide. Sun City have just planted Insula RZ for the first time and are looking forward to seeing the fruit quality. Fusarium represents another reason why Sun City is moving towards hydroponics. In 2019, after growing in the ground at one farm for over 30 years, Fusarium affected Sun City crops. *“We had a bad year. We're still trying to catch up.”* One way in which they are now combating this disease is by undertaking trials of Fusarium resistant varieties including Forada RZ along with managing general crop hygiene. In the tomato category, Bao says Endeavour RZ truss tomatoes are *“working really well, with better fruit colour, consistent size and we’re quite happy with Endeavour”*. They plan to continue with this variety, having just planted a few weeks ago. Bao sees Endeavour RZ as his favourite truss variety and believes it should do well with hydroponics also. Approximately 50% of Sun City’s crops are from Rijk Zwaan, reinforcing the strong relationship established and Rijk Zwaan’s seed quality. Trials of tomato variety Adventure RZ are underway for the summer market. Sun City is also undertaking capsicum trials with variety, Fabris RZ that has provided them with a smaller sized capsicum option. Of the relationship, Bao says *“what definitely helped us was when Rijk Zwaan introduced us to other growers like those from Vietnam. I could ask questions and see what they were doing with their crops. That really opened my eyes. It was really good and gave us the confidence to try some of their methods. With Rijk Zwaan, there is constant communication and we are willing to take risks and trial new varieties.”* Bao says *“you need a point of difference to grow quality produce and pursue opportunities including marketing to export markets. We need to keep our quality up. I think there is a trend towards growing with hydroponics and using desalinated water will give us better quality produce. We aim to pursue efficient opportunities, while maintaining consistent produce.”* It’s a significant investment, but Bao believes being young, interested in computers and technological advancements, as well as being willing to take some risks will go far in ensuring the farm can constantly evolve in efficient ways, while staying *“on track”*. *“moving into [hydroponics] will help with some of the challenges that may come, like environmental challenges*

Rijk Zwaan - Sun City Produce



From left to right—Be (dad), Cam (sister, Nghi (mum) Bao Duy and Bao La (brothers)

including climate change, while being sustainable. I think with hydroponics it's more efficient. You can monitor what the plants need and stay on track to determine soil moisture and nutrient levels, providing more control where needed."

Ideally, consumers will focus on maintaining a healthy lifestyle, including healthy eating and Sun City Produce want to be at the forefront of providing healthy and nutritious options. The key to success appears to be in finding good quality produce and a buyer that's willing to pay for that quality. Sun City Produce try wherever possible, to use natural methods to ensure quality products are available for consumers. This often comes at an increased cost to them such as methods

including integrated pest management, *"using good bugs to control bad bugs"*.

Bao mentioned *"if people are overproducing low quality produce, it brings down the price of high quality products."* Often consumers make their decisions based on price, whereas if they paid a slightly higher price, they may be rewarded with a higher quality product featuring better flavour and longer shelf life. *"We have to keep an eye on the market and be cautious. You always have to look a step ahead of you so you don't end up getting blindsided. I think that's wise. I look forward to seeing what we can put in place now to address any future projections, like what we're doing with hydroponics and trialling different varieties. We take calculated risks."* When asked about what he enjoys most about his work, what motivates him to get up each day and work in an environment that can be challenging, Bao says he loves working in nature, in a "calm atmosphere, watching things grow, trialling new crops and growing good quality, healthy produce" for consumers. Something Bao focusses on is developing good business skills. Some farmers lack the business skills necessary to grow and develop. *"My parents always thought you just grow it and then you sell it."* These days, growers often need to become project managers, requiring skills including marketing, accounting, administration and human resource management. They need occupational health and safety skills to look after and manage workers, ensuring everyone is working in a safe environment. Bao believes growers need to be innovative and operate efficiently and get the message out there that *"cheaper produce doesn't necessarily equate to better value"*. Bao is constantly reviewing and assessing their farming approach and methods and aiming to benchmark against others performing well in the industry. *"It can be a difficult at times and hard to know if the public appreciates everything that goes into producing good quality produce and what it costs farmers, but you still want to keep it going because that's your only source of income for that that month or that season. Every year we're trying to find something that we can grow in summer, but it does get very hot here. Maintaining cash flow is always a consideration too"*.

If he wasn't in this industry, Bao says he probably would have stuck with civil engineering. Observing his brother as a 'workaholic, working seven days a week' Bao didn't think that was a healthy lifestyle. This is what prompted him to pursue the Nuffield Scholarship initially. *"I thought 'Something has to give. Something has to change. Now we're thinking more about marketing and incorporating technology to change things for the better and increasing efficiency. That was one of my projects to increase efficiency."* Having just purchased a house, Bao is kept busy even when not at work and says he also enjoys crossfit in his downtime. He doesn't consider himself a workaholic and with a laugh says *"I take Sunday's off."*

Rijk Zwaan



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