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Hydroponic Farmers Federation Inc.

HYDROPONIC FARM NEWSLETTER

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President's Report



Welcome to our latest News Letter, and thanks again to Tony B for his undivided willingness in putting this all together. Our Last Grower meeting was on 25th June at Avia Produce, this event was very popular with both strong support from Growers (21) and also keen interest from the Industry sector with (16) in attendance with a total attendance of 37 plus late comers. Many thanks must go to Evan, Andy and Porter for opening there farm and sharing there experience with us. Thanks must also go to the guys from Easy Clean Chemicals who gave us some practical demonstrations in Hygiene applications and solutions. They also highlighted a range of Hygiene products that are available at this point, which was good timing for those growers in the process of pulling out and planning plant change overs. From the farm we moved to the venue for lunch at The Beach Hotel. The food was good, and the company even better! The networking opportunities that our meetings give us are fantastic and really allow us to develop our industry networks. Graeme Smith gave us all an insight into Industry News and Rick Donnan gave the group a brief on the up and coming PCA Conference. Dion Potter, Syngenta Australia gave an understanding on recent issues in bringing seeds into Australia, this has become a major issue for all of us, and was able to provide answers to the growers concerns. All in all its was a great day for networking and receiving worthwhile information that could be used in the future, thanks to all who contributed to the day well done. The next event on the calendar was the PCA Conference which was very well attended, and it was great to catch up with

Grower's and Industry people to share in triumphs and the not so nice things about farming. There was a fantastic mix of Guest Speakers with great topics. Well done to the PCA Committee for providing us with a great opportunity to further develop our Skills and especially to Rick and Rosemary for there enthusiasm in running the event. Coming up on our calendar is our next grower meeting on the 16th of October. Thanks to Go Tafe and especially Leigh Taig for providing the Venue and assisting the Committee it putting this together. We have a couple of guest speakers at this event including Jeremy Badgery-Parker, formally of Greenhouse Industry Development and Extension—NSW Department of Primary Industries. Jeremy will be presenting a workshop on "Energy Saving Solutions" for Growers and Industry. Through this workshop, participants will gain a practical understanding of assessing energy use throughout the farm and using this information to plan energy efficiency improvements. There is also a session on geothermal heat pumps and how this technology offers an alternate energy option for the industry. Participants will also receive an information guide and energy self-assessment book as well as a greenhouse heat energy estimator tool. Jeremy is well known within the Industry and has been involved in many projects, so the HFF is happy to support this activity. We will also be having a speaker from Boomaroo nursery who will be talking about their human resource management system and labour tracking technology. Should be good so hope to see you at the Grower Meeting.

CHEERS

John Elford

President

Hydroponic Farmers Federation

The Secretary



Firstly, my apologies for missing the recent Grower Day that was held at Avia Produce. By all accounts it was a great event, and I was only sorry that I couldn't be there. My excuse? Well for once I was actually on annual leave and enjoying a break with my lovely (and extremely long suffering wife) Karen who puts up with all the long hours that are involved in being married to someone in the Horticultural industry! The PCA Conference was a fantastic experience both in terms of networking and for myself, developing future training opportunities with the industry. We all need to say a special 'Thank You' to Emily and Simon from ASN Events who 'manned' the HFF stand at the PCA conference. This led to plenty of interest from growers who had no idea what HFF was about, and also saved members of the committee trying to be in two places at once. I am always struck by the very high calibre of people that are part of our industry, and the PCA Conference highlighted that perfectly in terms of delegates, industry exhibitors and presenters. You couldn't help but be impressed by the quality and presentation of all the trade stands, and as ever, the networking was outstanding. We should all feel very proud to be part of such an upbeat and dynamic group of people that make up our industry. Part of the conference was the



awards dinner and I was quite humbled to receive the 'Training Award' on behalf of Chisholm Institute. Being given an award by your peers is a great honour and this award goes a long way to recognising the extremely hard work that the team at Chisholm have put in to developing training for the greenhouse industry. The conference also highlighted to me that

to me that there a good number of new entrants coming in to the industry. And this was highlighted by many of these new growers looking for assistance in some of the basic skills of growing. New growers are a good sign as far as I am concerned as it means that there is 'growth' in the sector. The HFF was originally formed as a help group for many such growers who have now gone on to be the leading exponents of protected cropping. Hopefully this new wave of entrants will follow in their predecessors footsteps. The networking of growers is a key element for all of us in the industry. However, we can all be somewhat secretive on how we grow plants with growers unwilling to divulge to many 'trade secrets' In Holland, grower groups meet on a fortnightly basis to swap ideas, computer settings and general information. Their philosophy is that the more knowledge they can share, the more the total industry will benefit. The competition is not seen as the growers, but other commodity producers that are vying for the customer dollar. But Australia is not a small country, and our European colleagues have a greater advantage on us in terms of lack of distance to meet face to face. But if we want to share information, there are now plenty of electronic forums that dispel distance. Even the HFF Committee now adopt technology (and the president is the lead agent in this—believe it or not!) Our committee meetings are now held via SKYPE which means that we all get to have a comment on issues without travelling vast distances. So I would throw open the invitation to anyone that wants to share information to give me a call. I am sure that we can all still learn a new trick or two, and it would be great to help one another in perfecting our growing techniques. If any of you want to chat to me about this idea, I will be at the next Grower meeting so feel free to have a chat. So can I wish you all well as we move in to the improved light conditions and wish you all 'Good Growing'! **Tony Bundock.**

Membership



I am pleased to report that the HFF Membership is currently running at 46 currently financial members, this is made up of 26 growers, 16 industry 2 life, 1 affiliate and 1 supporter member.

Remember that only financial members can take advantage of the benefits conferred by HFF membership, including free grower meetings and discounted registration at both the HFF and AHGA conferences to name a few.

Happy growing, Tony Spurling. Membership secretary.



Grower Meeting Wednesday 16th October



Victorian Hydroponic Farmers Federation

Grower Meeting

Seminar Room—GOTAFE/NCDEA

Gilbert Chandler Campus

3 Research Close, Werribee, VIC 3030

COST:- FREE FOR HFF MEMBER—\$30 NON MEMBER GST inclusive

- 9.30 AM Registration Tea / Coffee
- 10.00 AM Welcome and introduction by the HFF President—John Elford
- 10.05 AM *Greenhouse enterprise use and energy assessment workshop*—Jeremy Badgery Parker
- 12.30 PM Lunch/Network/Meeting
- 01.30 PM Boomaroo Nursery *Human Resource Management at Boomaroo*- covering topics such as recruiting, performance management, skills and training development and recording, daily labour management, etc.
- 02.30 PM Graeme Smith Industry update
- 03.00 PM General Business and Discussion requiring Members Input
- 03.30 PM Meeting Closure

✂

FOR CATERING PURPOSES PLEASE RSVP BY MONDAY 7TH OCTOBER

PLEASE EMAIL RSVP TO John Elford — johnelford@bigpond.com
with the following details:-

NAME/S.....

NAME OF BUSINESS/COMPANY.....

PHONE NUMBER/email address.....

HFF MEMBER YES/NO.....



PCA Conference Review

For those of you that attended the PCA conference, you will fully appreciate what a great event it was.

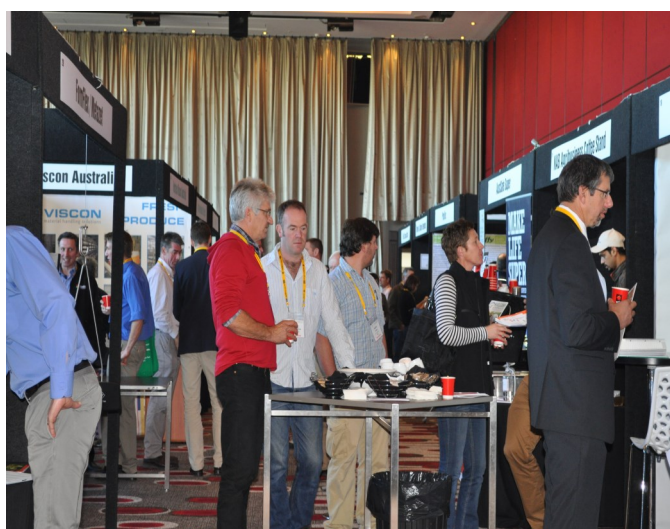
The next edition of PCA Soilless magazine will have a full report on the conference, but here are some statistics about the event and some images of both the conference and some of the field trips.

Attendance numbers

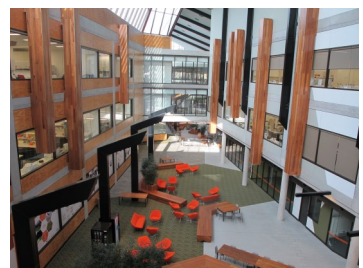
Full delegates	268 (includes those coming for 2 single days)
Single day delegates	96 (Monday 31; Tuesday 65) (up 27 on Adelaide)
Total delegates	364 (up 31 on Adelaide)
Free delegates	56 (similar to Adelaide)
Paying delegates	308 (includes exhibitor and sponsor delegates)
Exhibitor delegates	90 (total) (down 46 on Adelaide)
Other delegates	218 (mainly growers) (up 77 on Adelaide)



Delegates by state: Includes only 'other delegates'. NSW 48; NT 1; Qld 26; SA 15; Tas 5; Vic 90; WA 10. **Delegates by country:** Includes only 'other delegates'. Mongolia 2; Netherlands 3; New Caledonia 2; NZ 12; Singapore 1; Sri Lanka 1;



PCA Conference Review



Minimum Superannuation Guarantee

With changes happening in relation to the minimum superannuation guarantee, Sarah Portanier, who is the Marketing and Communications Assistant at Prime Super has provided the following advice for growers:-

Pay super right or risk the penalty:- Employers should be aware by now that as of 1 July 2013 the minimum Superannuation Guarantee (SG) amount increased from 9% to 9.25%. What hasn't changed is an employer's obligation to pay SG correctly and on time or else risk penalty from the Australian Tax Office. So here are a few points to help employers keep their SG payments in order.

Know how much SG you have to pay:- The SG rate is currently 9.25%. It will increase to 9.5% on 1 July 2014 and then is set to rise incrementally to reach 12% by July 2019.

For most employees the minimum SG percentage will be based on their Ordinary Time Earnings. Generally this includes any over-award payments, commissions, allowances and bonuses but not overtime.

Know who you have to pay SG to:- 1 July 2013 saw the removal of the SG age limit of 70 years. This means that now all employees, including contractors and temporary residents, aged 18 years and over who earn \$450 or more (before-tax) in a calendar month on a full-time, part-time or casual basis are entitled to SG. Under-18s have the additional requirement of having to work 30 hours or more in a week.

Know when you have to pay SG:- You have to pay contributions for SG eligible employees from the first day you employ them and you must pay the SG contribution at least four times each year, by specified cut-off dates. For the 1 July to 30 September quarter, the cut-off date is 28 October.

Know your electronic contributions deadline:- By 1 July 2014 employers with more than 20 employees will have to pay super contributions online. This is not a rule that has been set by super funds. It has been set by the government and is non-negotiable. Failure to comply may result in large financial penalties.

Don't like transacting online? Don't have a computer? Unfortunately the new legislation does not consider that this will prevent you from complying with the new rules. If you have more than 20 employees, you will have to pay your super contributions online from 1 July 2014.

For employers with less than 20 staff, it is proposed that the deadline for electronic super payments will be 1 July 2015.

Know about the SG charge

The SG charge is paid to the ATO by an employer if they fail to meet certain super obligations, including not paying the correct amount of super contributions for their employees and not paying super contributions by the quarterly payment cut-off date. The SG charge is made up of three parts, including SG shortfall amounts, interest on that amount (currently 10% per annum), and an administration fee (\$20 per employee per quarter). The super guarantee charge is not tax deductible and neither are most late payments.



Minimum Superannuation

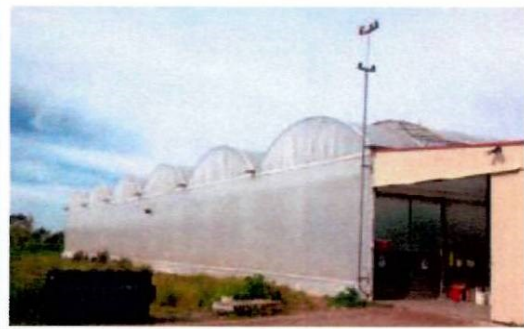
If you need any assistance, you can contact the ATO via phone number 13 10 20 or visit their website www.ato.gov.au/super for further information.

Know how to get help

Your Prime Super Regional Manager Rod Stewart can help with all super obligation issues, including setting you up for online transacting. Contact Rod Stewart on 0428 558 158 or rstewart@primesuper.com.au.

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Rooftop Greenhouse



Nothing's more down to earth than farming, but a new urban farm in Montreal, Canada is inspiring designers to think of growing in the clouds. Lufa Farms, on the roof of a commercial building near Montreal's Marché Centrale, is a 32,000-square-foot hydroponic greenhouse that's producing more than 453 kilograms of vegetables every day, all year round.

With demand growing for local produce and a shortage of open fields in urban areas, the concept is attractive. But Lufa Farms founder Mohamed Hage has found that it is way more complicated to be a rooftop farmer than setting up a glass house and planting seeds. It took him five years just to find a suitable building, convince the owner and the city building department to allow it, and to design and build it. And it took an investment of almost \$2-million to get it off the ground and into production.

But it's an example that is inspiring other rooftop farms, says Aaron Quesnel, founder of Sky Harvest Inc., a startup in Vancouver that's also planning a rooftop greenhouse farm. While roofs represent as much as 30 per cent of the surface areas of major cities, only about 10 per cent of commercial rooftops in Canada could support the weight of a greenhouse farm, Mr. Quesnel says. In a study of urban farming Mr. Quesnel co-authored while a student at a technical institute in Sweden, he found that even those buildings whose roofs can carry the load are often off limits because they're already built to the maximum height for their zoning.

But he sees great potential for using what's basically wasted space at this point. "In cities where you have astronomical real estate costs it makes increasing sense to use this amazing resource," he says. Growing locally is also preferable because of the monetary and environmental costs of shipping food long distances.

Sky Harvest has been doing engineering studies on a number of buildings but has yet to choose the site of its first greenhouse in Vancouver. "Every building is different, so you can spend a lot of time doing engineering assessment only to find out it's not feasible. While some buildings could be retrofitted to bear the load, in most cases that's not economically viable," Mr. Quesnel says. The rooftop farming movement is being pioneered in Montreal and New York. He knows of groups in Calgary, Boston, New York and Seattle as well as abroad in London that are looking at rooftop farms.

"The costs are still relatively high but as worries grow about the risk of the sustainability of the food-supply chain it will become more of a trend," Mr. Quesnel predicts. Sky Harvest co-owner Dirk Gibbs says he's found there is a great deal of investor interest in funding rooftop farms. That's important because the development costs add up even before a site is chosen. With a farm on the ground, it's relatively easy to begin cultivating. But the costs of doing engineering studies on rooftops, for example, can be astronomical even before you start installing equipment, Mr. Gibbs explains.

Rooftop Greenhouse

“There are very few ideal spaces in a city. You need to have a roof built with materials that are designed to carry at least 10 per cent more weight, depending on where water and crops are stored.” Engineers also have to take “live load” into account; that’s the ability to carry the number of people moving around the roof to tend the crops.

Construction costs can also go beyond the fabrication and lifting of components onto a roof that may be in a crowded urban area. Building codes for workplaces generally require more than one exit, and the tops of commercial buildings are designed for machinery and don’t often have elevator access for moving people and equipment to the greenhouse, Mr. Gibbs notes.

But he predicts that as greenhouse roofs become more mainstream, new buildings will be engineered to accommodate the trend.

One under-utilized source of strong roofs is parking structures, which are built to hold the weight of cars and trucks. One community garden in Seattle has set up on the roof of a parking garage, he adds.

The urban farm concept is different from existing attempts to grow vegetables on “green roofs,” Mr. Hage explains. Being in operation year-round, a hydroponic greenhouse on a roof provides environmental benefits of cooling a building in the summer and holding in heat in the winter.

The green pluses include being able to grow with natural pest control, such as using ladybugs to eat aphids.

Lufa Farms’ glass enclosure produces 40 types of vegetables and herbs in a variety of growing media, moisture and lighting conditions. There are two macro-zones and several micro-zones. Tomatoes, for instance, grow best in the sunny south-facing part of the greenhouse while lettuce does better in the cooler, northern portion of the roof.

Crops are harvested each day by six employees who work in the greenhouse. The produce is boxed and taken to pick-up points for customers who have pre-ordered custom selections of vegetables. (A small basket suitable for one or two people is priced at \$22, and a large one suited for three or more sells for \$44.) Lufa Farms employs 30 people, including sales people and logistics staff.

So far, demand for the produce is growing faster than supply. Mr. Hage says the company hopes to open two more greenhouses, another in downtown Montreal and one in Laval, Que.

“This is an idea whose time has come,” Mr. Hage says. “Big cities like Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa are basically food deserts; most of the year you can’t find locally grown sustainable food and we have to rely on imports.”

Lufa Farms facts

- Greenhouse completed in 2011.
- Dimensions: 80 by 43 metres, and 4.2 metres high.
- Weight of greenhouse: 1.8 kilograms per square foot.
- Load capacity of building roof that supports it: 45 kg per square foot.
- Modifications needed: Two staircases from the floor below to the roof and a small freight elevator; a water supply and irrigation pipes.
- Number of plants: About 3,000 plants of 40 types of vegetables and an herb garden.
- Yield: 450 to 680 kg of food per day.
- Number of farmhands: Six work daily in the greenhouse.

Story courtesy of Hortidaily.

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