



# Hydroponic Farmers Federation Newsletter

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## **President's Report**



Dear Members, Welcome to our final edition for 2013. I'd like to start by recapping the years events for us. Firstly our AGM was held at Chisholm Institute of TAFE's Cranbourne Campus in March. Guest Speakers at the AGM included Kate George – who gave us a presentation of her recent trip to the UK and Holland with the VET Mobility project. This was a project that the HFF sponsored to assist the students to look at modern technology within the horticultural industry. David Forbes - gave an overview of what is required to employ an apprentice or trainee, which was highly informative. Ben Stapeley of Croplife spoke on Chemical registration in Australia, and how the APVMA looks at all new products that are bought in to the country. Finally we all had a look at Chisholm's Glass House with Tony B giving the group a tour of the facility. At the AGM, two new committee members were elected. These were Ian Mortlock (Grower) and Michael Tran (E.E. Muirs and who also acts as a representative for Asian Growers). Our First Grower Meeting for the Year was held at Avia Produce, and Porter, Andy and Evan were great host. This event was very popular and we had strong support from both Growers (21) and also keen interest from the Industry sector with (16) in attendance making a total attendance of 37 plus some late comers. Speakers included the guys from Easy Clean Chemicals who gave us some practical demonstrations in Hygiene applications and solutions. Graeme Smith was also on hand to gave us all an insight into the latest Industry News. Finally Dion Potter from Syngenta Australia gave an understanding on recent issues in bringing seeds into Australia. The PCA Conference was well attended and it was great to catch up

Industry where there was a fantastic mix of guest speakers with great topics. Our next Grower Meeting was at Go Tafe's Werribee Campus. Thanks to Leigh Taig for providing the venue and assisting the Committee in putting this event together. Speakers included Jeremy Badgery-Parker who presented a workshop on "Energy Saving Solutions" for Growers and Industry. Boomaroo provided us with a fantastic talk on issues relating to OH&S and different experiences that they had to deal with. General discussion from the floor included George Dobin explaining his experience with Bio Fuel, with Geoff Connellan also enlightened the group on the forthcoming IHC Seminar to be held in Queensland next year. This will included Scientist from all over the World. Finally Graeme Smith also updated the group on Industry News which included a Study Tour for the USA that is being put together scheduled for 2014. As most members will know ASN Events have been managing the HFF conference for the last six years, and over the last couple of years they have also picked up the management of Member Fees. The Committee is very pleased with their work and saw an opportunity to use their skills to update and maintain the HFF Web Site. ASN and in particular Emily have just released the revamped web site and its worth having a look. Just go to [hff.org.au](http://hff.org.au) The planning for the HFF 2014 conference is well underway, the venue will be Mulwalla and will be held in July 2014, keep an eye open for further details. Finally I would like to thank the Committee for their support and efforts to keep this show on the road, I believe we have had a great year, and it has been achieved through the efforts of you guys—THANKS. To the Members, we are here to represent you so please give us direction if you think we are walking down the wrong path? Have a great XMAS, and keep safe heading into the New Year. John

## The Secretary



Well once again it only seems like 3 months ago when we were putting up the Christmas tree—so another year had nipped past in record time with all the various dramas that are associated with growing. People often comment to me that running the Chisholm Greenhouse must be pretty easy as we have plenty of technology to assist us with the tasks. To a certain extent there is some truth in that observation, but to date I haven't seen the computer running up and down the rows performing all the crop tasks, so that aspect of growing still requires a fairly high degree of physical work. And whilst the technology is great, sometimes a small issue can become a major drama. The other weekend our Priva Integro decided that my 'Sunday off' in the City was apparently not deserved and decided to go in to alarm mode at around 10.30am. Now the wonders of technology mean that firstly my phone was ringing, and then a quick log in to the system showed that the irrigation system had stopped due to a lack of water flow—and of course it was a sunny 27C at this point. Restarting the system remotely failed to clear the issue so it was time to head home and go to work. Our irrigation system runs on delivering flow and also refers to a predetermined time frame for delivering the set amount of water. This is basically a 'protection' system so if we have a blown pipe, the flow rate will be delivered more quickly than planned and will signify an issue. So having arrived at work (having left the long suffering Mrs B to yet another weekend on her own thanks to greenhouse problems) I set about solving the issue. With no flow showing, this all pointed to air in the system, but after bleeding pumps and confirming water flow, the issue still remained. To make matters worse, the system then decided to run some times and then stopped a few minutes later. The short term fix was to delve in to the inner reaches of the Priva system which allowed me to turn off the protection system

and run the irrigation based on time. Setting i411.1 for the technically minded amongst us (If you don't know what this is I'm happy to run you through one of our Priva courses to explain all!) Anyway, this kept the plants with a ready supply of nutrient and water, but as there was no flow being registered, my drain values disappeared from my slab graphs— but in the scheme of things this was the least of my worries. Now most growers are pretty practical people, and having established a process for making the irrigation system work I was still keen to get to the bottom of the issue. The actual cause of the problem was located by less technical means. I noticed that when the irrigation changed valve groups, the flow meter stopped working, but started again if you tapped the meter with a hammer! - that wasn't in the Priva manual last time I looked. I did toy with the idea of a hammer on a spring that activated after each irrigation but gave the idea away as somewhat impractical. The real reason for the issue was that the flow meter had a small filter in it which had become blocked up with a fair amount of sediment. 'Don't you clean your filters?' I hear you say? Well actually we do on a weekly basis but this filter is located in the main pipe work, so the only way to reach it is to dismantle the whole irrigation system—something I don't usually do on a weekly basis. Further investigation into the meter found that the impeller that causes flow rates to register in the meter was also pretty full up with sediment, and was also not turning as effectively as it might have been. So basically two parts with a value of around \$2.00 had conspired to stop the \$1.5 million machine from working effortlessly! The end to this story is that after cleaning the said parts, the system went back to working in its usually efficient way. So that none of you fall in to the same trap, I am happy to share this information with you so that you don't suffer the same issues down the track! So that just leaves me to wish you a merry Christmas and all the best for 2014!



## Merry E Christmas from the President



*Our illustrious leader has been in training to bring you a special Christmas entertainment item. So click on the link or paste it in your browser to see the results of John's hard work.*

[http://www.jibjab.com/view/wMcfABZgQmuA3DUCSQ8MAQ?utm\\_source=StrongMail&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=email&utm\\_content=elf\\_dance\\_app\\_1&utm\\_campaign=tx\\_jj\\_email\\_elf\\_dance\\_app\\_owner\\_confirmation](http://www.jibjab.com/view/wMcfABZgQmuA3DUCSQ8MAQ?utm_source=StrongMail&utm_medium=email&utm_term=email&utm_content=elf_dance_app_1&utm_campaign=tx_jj_email_elf_dance_app_owner_confirmation)

## PCA Water Testing Offer



*"AgVita - Monitor to Manage"*



In recognition of the long standing relationship between PCA and HFF, the PCA is inviting all HFF members to enjoy the same discount privileges as PCA members, through AgVita Analytical Laboratory Service. In October 2013, following a nationwide and international tender process, PCA named AgVita Analytical Laboratory in Devonport, Tasmania as its preferred supplier for nutrient and water analysis services for its members for the next 2 year period. The PCA encourages growers to adopt regular monitoring and analysis of their hydroponic nutrient solutions as well as their fresh water supplies.

AgVita has specialised in a variety of plant, soil, water and hydroponic solution analysis since 1984, and has recently moved into a new state of the art facility. They are ASPAC and ISO accredited, and involved in rigorous inter-lab proficiency testing. Complementary sample bottles and label books are available on request and AgVita take pride in the speed of analysis, personal service and level of support. They have a large collection of 'desirable ranges' to compare against your analytical results, for well over 100 crops and several varieties within these. Further details can be found at <http://www.agvita.com.au>

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Michael Ruffels, who looks forward to receiving your samples for analysis.

**Contact Details:**

Michael Ruffels,  
AgVita Analytical, General Manager  
PO Box 188, Devonport, TAS, 7310  
Ph: 03 64 209 600

## Advertise with Hydroponic Farmers Federation in the HFF newsletter

**COLOUR** *(member)*

Full pg - \$175  
1/2 pg - \$110  
1/4 pg - \$70

**BLACK & WHITE** *(member)*

Full pg - \$110  
1/2 pg - \$70

*All prices are not including GST*



**BLACK & WHITE** *(non member)*

Full pg black & white - \$132  
1/2 pg black & white - \$84  
1/4 pg black & white - \$54

*All prices are not including GST*

To become a member visit <http://www.hff.org.au/membership/>  
For further information please contact Emily: [eg@asnevents.net.au](mailto:eg@asnevents.net.au) or Ph 03 59 832 400

## De Ruiter Living Proof Centre



De Ruiter Seeds have recently formed a partnership with Chisholm Institute of TAFE to develop what is known as in the Living Proof™ experience centre.

“The Living Proof™ experience centre provides us with a location for us to showcase and learn about all current and future varieties, It really allows our customers to experience our products firsthand, and enables us to share our innovative knowledge with our customers”, said Rachel Palumbo, Sales and Marketing Lead, Monsanto ANZ.

The glasshouse at Chisholm Institute was built in 2010 and is the only purpose built training facility of its kind in the southern hemisphere with state of

the art facilities. The centre offers accredited courses in production horticulture as well as specialized industry training courses, and has a range of students who train either full time or via blended learning, offering on the job training and skills recognition.

“We first started having discussions about a potential partnership De Ruiter in 2012 with De Ruiter Business Manager, Josip Balint. We both felt that there was some great potential for us to work collaboratively. We planted our first De Ruiter tomato crop in March and this was followed in June with a further planting of twenty further varieties of tomatoes. The concept will allow growers to visit the glasshouse and see how the varieties respond in Australian conditions. Our end aim is to work collaboratively with De Ruiter and establish the glasshouse as a 'Living Proof' centre for glasshouse tomatoes said Jessica Cook, Horticulture Manager at Chisholm Institute.

“De Ruiter’s partnership with Chisholm will enable us to show case our varieties to local growers in our own state of the art environment. It also provides the opportunity to test shelf life, conduct trials and get to know the capabilities of our varieties intimately”, said Josip Balint, De Ruiter Business Manager, Monsanto ANZ.

Chisholm also see great benefit in the partnership. “Josip has been involved from very early planning stages and has had hands on involvement, from the planting of the crop onwards. He provides technical advice on the requirements of each variety and works with our consultant, Ronald Dyvestijn, to get the best results out of the plants.” “We view the partnership as an ongoing project and aim to work with De Ruiter to establish a world class demonstration centre, whilst also up-skilling the industry in all aspects of greenhouse crop growing. We see the project as a win, win situation for both parties”, said Jessica Cook.

“The facility also has the capacity to highlight difficulties with growing crops and we are able to provide a ‘warts and all’ view of the issues associated with growing. Like all growers, we don’t get it right all the time!” said Controlled Environment Teacher Tony Bundock. We have had great support form industry in solving issues and it’s refreshing to see large players in the industry freely giving advice to the smaller growers’ said Tony.

If you would like to visit the 'Living Proof Centre' feel free to contact Josip Balint on e mail at [josip.balint@monsanto.com](mailto:josip.balint@monsanto.com)

## Joint Farmer of the Year



Godfrey Dol from the Guyra tomato farm, was named as a joint winner for this year's NSW Farmer of the Year award. Mr Dol is Technical and Business Development Manager at the 20ha Blush Tomatoes glasshouse enterprise. He oversees the high level of technology incorporated into the glasshouses to provide the best climate possible for the plants, resulting in record yields.

He joins merino breeders Matthew and Cherie Coddington from Dubbo in winning the award. NSW Minister for Primary Industries, Katrina Hodgkinson, made the announcement last week, saying that the judges had faced a challenging task in selecting the winners from an

extremely diverse field of quality farmer applicants.

"These farmers are pushing the boundaries in their fields – through genetics, value adding, marketing and the latest technologies," Ms Hodgkinson said. "They are great ambassadors for agriculture, showing innovation and drive to run profitable enterprises while managing their natural resources."

President of NSW Farmers Fiona Simson, said this year's applications highlighted the impressive range in the scale of operations and the different industries represented across agriculture in NSW – from horticulture to beef production, dairying, sheep and lamb production, cropping, viticulture and mixed farming.

"There were certainly some great stories about continuous generational farming, the focus on sustainability, meeting market specifications, benchmarking, energy efficiency, safety and lots more," Ms Simson said. "The state of our industry is healthy given the quality of the applications and the finalists we've selected. The different ages of the applicants, the way they were responding to challenges and the different focuses they have in their enterprises was inspiring."

"The Farmer of the Year initiative has produced some excellent industry champions in the last eight years – and we look forward to the Coddingtons and Mr Dol joining that impressive network."

The NSW Farmer of the Year award recognises outstanding achievement, focussing on management skills, use of innovation, profitability, environmental sustainability and community involvement.

The Award is an initiative of NSW Farmers and NSW Department of Primary Industries, with support from The Land, the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW and WorkCover NSW.

Source: [guyraargus.com.au](http://guyraargus.com.au)

## 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.

## GroSens® - Wireless Meters

Users of Grodan substrates will be interested in the latest development from Grodan. The patented GroSens system is an ideal measurement tool for growers, making precision irrigation possible through accurate measurement and detailed display of the water content (WC), electrical conductivity (EC) and temperature levels in the stone wool substrate.



The GroSens system enables 24/7 real-time insight into the WC, EC and temperature of the stone wool substrate. The system can be connected to most climate-control computers, to provide an instant, continuous display of the data in graph form. Besides this, it also enables more detailed information to be displayed on any external computer connected to the grower's Internet / Ethernet. This provides valuable, timely information and guidance for optimising the irrigation strategy, allowing growers to improve the yield and quality of their crops. In combination with GRODAN stone wool substrates and advice, the GroSens system makes it possible for the grower to optimise production and identify cost savings. In short, using the GroSens system enables Precision Growing. The GroSens system, in combination with GRODAN stone wool substrate products and advice, is the best way of achieving optimum results.

### Benefits

<b>1</b> Highly accurate WC measurement	<b>2</b> Highly accurate EC measurement	<b>3</b> Highly representative WC and EC figures	<b>4</b> Flexibility in measuring	<b>5</b> Custom made configurations possible
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#### 1. Highly accurate WC measurement

Highly accurate, 24/7 insights into the WC. Based on statistically reliable trials, the GroSens system measures the WC at least 5 times more reliably than existing water content meters (WCM). The GroSens system, with its highly improved WC measurement, is an indispensable instrument for growers who want to use professional precision irrigation to achieve optimal yield and quality.

Accurate WC measurements in the stone wool substrate – supplied throughout the day and night - allow growers to exert great control over their crops. The measured values are immediately displayed as graphs on the climate-control computer and/or any external computer, providing the detailed, accurate information that enables precision irrigation. When connected to an external computer, connected to the grower's network, the GroSens system makes it possible to read the detailed values for each sensor.

# GroSens® - Wireless Meters

## 2. Highly accurate EC measurement

Highly accurate, 24/7 insights into the EC. Based on statistically reliable trials, the GroSens system measures the EC at least 5 times more reliably than existing WCM's. Highly improved EC measurement takes accurate control of EC levels to the next level. For growers who want precision EC management, the GroSens system will enable this, opening the way for further yield optimisation and improved quality. Accurate EC measurements in the stone wool substrate - supplied throughout the day and night - enable growers to exert greater control over their crops.

## 3. Highly representative WC and EC figures

More measurement points lead to more representative WC and EC figures in the irrigation section. The GroSens system starts with 3 sensors. However, the more sensors you install, the more accurate your insight into the WC and EC situation in the greenhouse will be. Additionally, the GroSens measures with double the amount of measuring points, providing more reliable data. This combination leads to much more representative WC and EC figures on the irrigation section that the crop is steered on. Accurate figures are crucial for determining the right precision irrigation strategy. The optimum irrigation strategies for each irrigation section lead to optimum results.



## 4. Flexibility in measuring

The wireless sensors allow tremendous flexibility in where you can measure in the greenhouse. They are easy to install and easy to replace. With the GroSens system, it's extremely easy to position the wireless sensors in any pre-defined irrigation section in the greenhouse whenever needed. Changing the position of the sensors during the growing season can be done in a few seconds. This makes it possible to read WC and EC data from any pre-determined location in the greenhouse at any time. Measuring representative slabs leads to better WC and EC management. Moreover, this flexibility in positioning the sensor will not lead to additional installation costs. The wireless systems also eliminate the risk of accidentally cutting electricity cables during the growing season.

## 5. Custom made configurations possible

Because the GroSens system is modular, it can be scaled to multiple configurations. The GroSens Basic Set has been designed to guarantee reliable, representative WC and EC figures for one watering section. Depending on the size of the greenhouse, and if the grower wants to take the next step in precision irrigation, all of the components in the GroSens Basic Set are available separately. This makes it possible to configure the GroSens system perfectly for each grower, individually.

The patented GroSens system will be introduced to the market gradually and will eventually replace the current GRODAN WCM's. For more information, please visit the [GroSens page](#)



# Accredited training for the Hydroponic Industry



Education for  
Precision Growing



## THE NATIONAL PRECISION GROWING CENTRE

Chisholm's National Precision Growing Centre is proud to offer Hydroponic industry accredited training via blended learning. This allows participants to study via a combination of online learning, workplace assessment and practical workshops at Chisholm's specialist facility. Study from anywhere within Australia, or overseas if required.

The National Centre for Precision Growing is located at the Cranbourne campus, and is the only purpose built glasshouse training facility in the Southern Hemisphere. The centre offers growers the opportunity to gain new skills and knowledge, as well as having existing skills recognised.

### Accredited training (full time and part time)

- Certificate II in Horticulture (Production)
- Certificate III in Horticulture (Production) – apprentice training
- Certificate IV in Horticulture (Production)
- Diploma of Horticulture (Production)
- Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) training
- Chemical User Course -Agricultural Chemical Users Permit (ACUP).

### Specialised short courses

- Crop Technician Course
- Specialist Priva Courses.

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