



Hydroponic Farmers Federation Newsletter

A0033906W

Volume 1, Issue 50

December 2016



Christmas 2016 edition



*Wishing a
very Merry
Christmas and a
Happy New
Year to all of
our members!*

The Secretary



I had no end of people commenting about my last report and in particular about the episode of my dear old Dad trying to burn down the restaurant we were at in the UK. Well this associated level of bedlam still seems to be following me around. Recently I visited Tasmania with Powerplants as part of my role as a Priva Trainer. I spent time with several berry growers showing them how to get better use from their Priva Compact and Nutrijet systems, and all went well on that score. I also took the opportunity of calling in to see Karen Brock at her establishment, and the main purpose was to look at Karen's needs for LED lighting with her tissue culture lab. Before entering the Lab we donned the customary over shoes, washed our hands, and I was then subjected to a quick spray of a sterilizing spray over my clothing that Karen swears by. To be honest I thought it was probably all for show, but there you go. Karen was her usual entertaining self and after some discussion I left the property. The next day I went to Launceston Airport to catch my plane, and lined up in the security queue. The laptop and ipad were unload-

unloaded from my bag, all metallic objects removed from my pockets, and I sailed through the scanning device. At the other end I was asked if I minded having my clothing swabbed for drugs and explosives—not a problem in my book, the more security the better in these dangerous times, and if the bad guys can be apprehended, even better. So you can imagine my horror when the machine that the swab was loaded into lit up like a Christmas tree and emitted load beeping noises! The airport seemed to instantly freeze and everyone was staring my way as they all tried to see who this terrorist/drug lord was. The look of despair on my face was not lost on the Border Force officer who told me she would recalibrate the machine and we would have another go. I was asked if I had been in contact with fertiliser or cleaning products? At this point I suddenly realised that the Brock secret sterilising formula was probably still impregnated in my jeans, and was to blame for my impending life behind bars. Thankfully the Border Force lady shared my belief. The machine also agreed and I was cleared to return to a life of freedom. Needless to say Karen Brock is still laughing about this episode! Have a great and safe Christmas everyone, and I am on duty with CFA on Christmas Day so hopefully I will retain my eyebrows! **Regards TB**

HFF Executive Details and Contacts

President:

John Elford johnelford@bigpond.com (03) 5341 7691

Vice President & VFF Representative:

Tony Spurling info@gatewayestate.com.au (03) 9739 0568

Secretary & Newsletter:

Tony Bundock tonyB@powerplants.com.au (03) 8795 7750

Treasurer:

David Pearson pearsons@countryfreshherbs.com.au (03) 5952 6870

Membership:

Ian Mortlock ian@morthydro.com (03) 5461 1111

Committee Members:

Evan Kakourous evan78@live.com.au (03) 5261 2618

Michael Tran mtran@eem.com.au (03) 9742 1903

In this issue:-

The Secretary	pg 2
Presidents Report	pg 3
Grower Day report	pg 4
Membership Report	pg 6
De Ruiter Tomato Experience	pg6
HFF Study Tour update	pg 8
New Research Facility	pg 8
WVVA Xmas Party	pg 10
Industry LED trial	pg 11
Powerplants Australia	pg 12



The President



As we draw to the end of 2016, I can honestly say that it was a fairly busy time for me! From the HFF perspective we had a sensational year and the conference was probably the crowning glory on the year. Whilst those that attended saw a smoothly run and interesting event, there was one hell of a lot of activity going on behind the scenes let me assure you! Every one of the committee members had a large input in to the conference, and all the hard work certainly paid off. But the activity has not slowed down, and we are already researching a suitable venue for 2018. At this stage we still haven't made a firm decision on an exact location but we can say that we will be returning to a Melbourne City based venue. It is always hard to select a venue that suits everyone and wherever you go, someone feels that they have to travel further than they really want to. The return to a city based venue will hopefully make us more central for Victorian growers and trade, and will also provide a close proximity to the airport for our interstate and international delegates and speakers as well. We are working closely with Simon and the team at ASN events on the project, and we will also be inviting our trade delegates to have direct input in to the planning process—without the trade there is no conference, so they are vital players in this process. So stay tuned for more details in 2017! As it is the end of the year I really do have to highlight the considerable input of the HFF executive who donate huge amounts of their time to the organisation. My thanks as always to Tony B for the hard work he puts in to collating the newsletter, and the theory is that we all give him content for the newsletter and he collates it, but the reality is that he pretty well writes the whole thing and just adds in reports! Thanks Tony for all your hard work. David Pearson is our quiet achiever, and he keeps a close eye on all things financial and gives the banks a hard time to give us a good interest rate on funds—good work David! Ian Mortlock will go down in history as the greatest membership secretary we have ever had after taking us to 250 members! (well he did have a large helping hand in this achievement due to the complementary membership deal at the conference, but we won't let that fact cloud his glory!) Thank you Ian. And finally Tony Spurling, Evan Kakourous and Michael Tran - the remaining three Musketeers - have worked tirelessly to serve you, our members in all aspects of the HFF's operations—thank you all gentlemen. I am sure like many of you, I have found that this Spring has been a trying time for growing, what with low light levels and cold temperatures and plants growing slowly and delaying production. And while we battle to get product to the market we see the supermarkets trying to force the prices down as much as possible, with the growers footing the bill for the price reduction. On a personal note I find it sad that the perception out there is that food should be cheap. As growers we invest large amounts of money and technology in to constantly striving to increase our efficiency and production levels only to have prices forced down by the supermarkets. This doesn't seem to be the case in other markets—if you want a high quality product such as a Ferrari, then you accept that you will need to pay a higher premium for that product, so why can't we have the same rules applying to food? Some growers, myself included, have started to taking to attending farmers markets to sell our products. At these events, the prices are certainly better but it does mean that you have to put more effort into getting your product to the market place and then selling it. For small growers this is an option, but for the large growers this is not an avenue that they can explore. So my New Year's wish is that we can convince the public, and more importantly the supermarkets, that they recognise the quality products that we supply and reward us accordingly - but this may be a wish that will be a long time coming true! Finally, may I wish you all a safe and happy Christmas (hopefully you have been well behaved and Santa will leave you some nice presents) and all the best for a prosperous 2017.

Regards, John

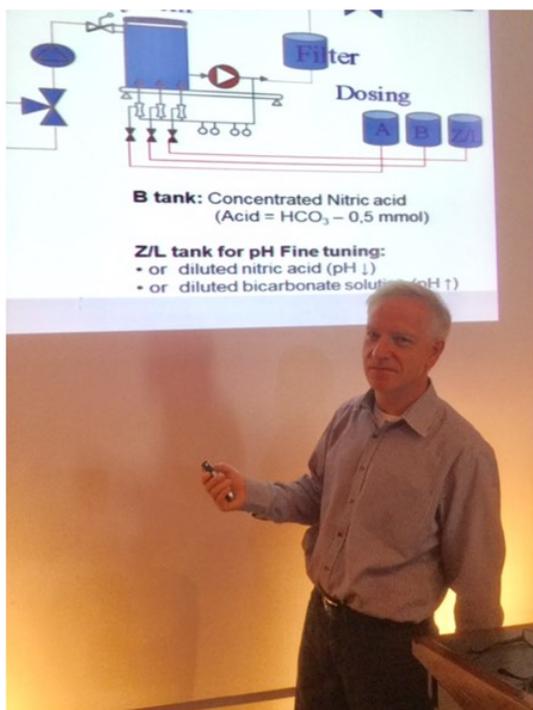


HFF Spring Grower Day



On Wednesday the 19th of October, we held our spring grower day as a partnership arrangement in conjunction with YARA Fertilizers and Chisholm Institute of TAFE, at Chisholm Institute's National Precision Growing Centre at the Cranbourne Campus. The event allowed for the HFF members to conduct the usual business meeting, as well as participating in a technical seminar delivered by International speaker – Peter de Vries. Peter is one of YARA's lead agronomists in the Netherlands and his visit to Australia provided a timely opportunity for HFF members to 'learn from the master'. Peter delivered a program entitled 'The important of a balanced nutrient program' which

covered both the fundamentals and advanced considerations for a developing a hydroponic based nutrient recipe. Over 40 HFF members and allied traders attended the event which had something for everyone, no matter what their prior experience level was. The fertilizer seminar was conducted in two parts with the formal seminar session being held in Chisholm Institute's auditorium, followed by a practical session on fertiliser calculations at the adjacent National Precision Growing Centre greenhouse. This allowed the participants to put the theory of the earlier session into practice and also build confidence in their fertiliser calculation processes. Staff members for YARA were also on hand to guide the growers in the process. In general the day was a great opportunity for growers to learn new skills as well as building on existing knowledge that could be translated to their own crops when they returned home.



Peter de Vries (left) and back to the classroom for growers!



HFF Spring Grower Day



The day also allowed for the HFF members to have a sneak look at the latest De Ruiter Tomato varieties that were being grown as a trial within the greenhouse area. At the time of the grower day, the trials were well established and were set to form a major part of the De Ruiter Tomato Experience day to be held in November. (a report on this event appears within this newsletter)

Also of interest at Chisholm was the establishment of an LED Interlighting trial in Tomatoes that is being initiated by Philips and Powerplants Australia. More to follow on that exercise too!



The final part of the day was spent informing the HFF members of the potential to attend a proposed study tour to South Korea. HFF Committee member Michael Tran is organising the tour that will see 20 HFF delegates tour a number of key horticultural sites in South Korea between the 30th April and 7th May 2017.

The tour will be fast paced but will allow growers a unique opportunity to observe the Horticultural industry in South Korea. At this stage there are limited places which will be offered to HFF members first. Again, details of this event are listed in a further article in this newsletter.

Joint Tour leaders Michael Tran and Jung Kim explain the tour details



At the end of the day, HFF President John Elford gave formal thanks on behalf of the HFF to Colin Bednarz from Chisholm Institute for facilitating the event. The HFF has worked closely with Chisholm in the past to assist the Institute in being one of the fore runners in the delivery of quality horticultural training programs.

In conclusion, it was an excellent day, and those members that did attend certainly got a great deal out of the event. The committee are always looking for new ideas and venues for the grower days and we would welcome your suggestions for events for the 2017 calendar year, so that you, the growers, get more out of these events.

Membership Report



Hi everyone, well it certainly was a great year in membership and we finished up the year with some 250 members! All of this was down to my amazing marketing skills, my dynamic and charismatic personality and (well OK, I agree I was dreaming a bit there) and the complementary membership event at the conference. This was a strategy that we used to boost numbers to the conference and boy did it work well! It is also good to see that a lot of these members have renewed their memberships, so we are certainly retaining some of these newer members. But any organisation needs new blood and I would encourage you to spread the word and get other growers to join the HFF. The old phrase of 'strength in numbers' certainly applies to us, and the more members we have, the broader our appeal and strength as an industry body becomes. Can I add my best wishes to everyone for the Christmas period. Have a happy, and above all else, as a safe Christmas, and I look forward to seeing you in 2017! All the best, **Ian**

De Ruiter Tomato Experience Day



The De Ruiter Tomato Experience day is now a well established event in the commercial Tomato growers calendar. This was the third year for the event and once again it was held at Chisholm Institute's National Precision Growing Centre. These events don't just happen by chance and a lot of hard work had gone in to the growing of over 30 Tomato varieties by De Ruiter's Josip Balant, Aart Slobb, and Chisholm's Colin Bednarz, Doug Oldaker and the Chisholm's students to get the plants in premium condition, so that growers could see first hand how the various varieties were performing. Flavour and quality

are the two characteristics driving ongoing innovation in the highly competitive tomato sector, and Martin Kneebone, Managing Director of Market Research firm Fresh Logic, told 80 growers, suppliers, retailers and educators gathered at the annual event that with fresh tomato sales exceeding \$1 billion a year, the maturity of the market and large selection, it is a strong indicator of the potential of the fresh produce industry. "It's the closest category that resembles a fast moving consumer good and is an indicator for how the fresh produce sector will evolve in the future," Mr Kneebone said. "It's a mature category with more than 15 stock keeping units in a typical supermarket so it is highly competitive and consumers are increasingly looking for flavour and quality" he said. It is this demand for flavour and quality which is driving Monsanto, De Ruiter's parent company, to invest significantly into consumer insights as part of its tomato research and breeding programs. Significantly, this investment has shown that of all the factors associated in product selection, taste is the one that stands out. Taste, according to Chow-Ming Lee,



De Ruiter Tomato Experience Day

Consumer Sensory Lead at Monsanto, is a complex chemical interaction between sugar and volatiles. He explained that this complex science was used as part of a broader picture into the development of new varieties. “Understanding what drives flavour and the combination that provides the most enjoyable experience for consumers is core to understanding how we can ensure these characteristics are present in new hybrids,” explained Mr Lee. Tomas Lomas, a Tomato Breeder for Monsanto said the company had invested in the mapping of tomato genes that express flavour. This mapping has allowed the company to use traditional breeding methods to select for these genes in the development of new varieties. “Monsanto has completed field trials in Australia to commercialise varieties that will bring Australian growers up to speed with European and North American growers,” Mr Lomas explained. Developments in robotics and logistics management were explained by Priva’s Oceania manager, Marcus van Heyst. The harvesting robot was of particular interest and this is set to be available in the Australian market place late 2017.



HFF Study Tour to South Korea



The plans for the up and coming HFF study tour to South Korea are now well underway. Michael Tran has been working hard to develop the program and support mechanisms for the study tour to the Horticultural areas of South Korea. With the total estimated cost in the region of \$3,500—3,800 AUD per person, the trip will represent excellent value for money. This price includes the cost of air fares, food, accommodation, transportation, tours and a local guide in Korea. The trip will commence and finish from Melbourne airport.

The proposed itinerary at the moment is:-

Day one - Departure from Melbourne Airport

Day two - Arrive Seoul Airport in the morning, travel to Busan city and visit a farm on the way

Day three - Visit two farms around Busan area—Night time city tour

Day four - Travel to Seoul city, visiting visit one farm and one flower research center in Nonsan city

Day five - Visit two farms in Seoul area

Day six - Visit one farm and city tour include Night tour in Seoul

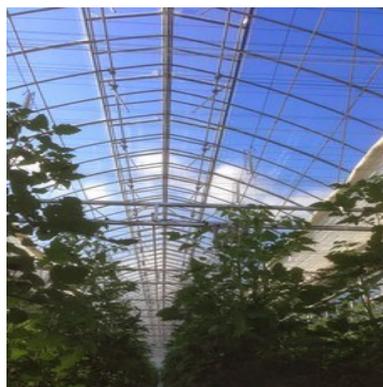
Day seven—Departure from Seoul and return to Melbourne

Currently the tour is being planned for the Korean spring season (April to May 2017).

Following initial interest from grower members, the HFF is now able to announce that this event is open to all grower and trade members and their partners on a first come, first served basis.

The HFF Committee will also be announcing a subsidy program to make the cost even more attractive, and on top of this, a number of trade members have announced that they will be sponsoring events on the trip—we already have two dinners fully sponsored. To secure your place on this trip please call or email Michael Tran. Places are going fast so don't miss out!

Pictures —thanks to Hortidaily



New research facility under construction in New South Wales



Researchers are working to arm Australia's protected cropping growers with the infrastructure to secure the highest possible commercial-yields with minimal energy, labour, nutrients and water outputs. Horticulture Innovation Australia and Western Sydney University recently led an industry tour of the construction of a \$3.5 million Greenhouse Research and Education Training Facility, which comprises eight

plant growth chambers and around 12kms of control cables. Each chamber is individually controlled with adjustable light, humidity, temperature and carbon dioxide settings, giving researchers the opportunity to determine the best possible growth environment for Australia's unique climate conditions. Western Sydney University researcher Prof David Tissue said traditionally, a lot of protected cropping equipment and technology used in Australia has been imported. This greenhouse, which has been developed with the Netherlands-based world-leading agriculture university, Wageningen (WUR), will help determine the optimum requirements for local conditions. "This greenhouse is the first of its kind in Australia, with the nearest known equivalent facility being in the Netherlands," he said. "For the first time, it will allow us to test the interacting and separate factors that affect the growth of various produce types." As part of the research, various crop covering materials will be tested to measure the effects of different light spectrums on plant growth and energy balance. Each growth chamber will also have the capacity to operate under open, semi-closed or closed conditions, which can benefit or decrease productivity, depending on the crop type and other environmental elements. Hort Innovation fund manager Greg Murdoch said the greenhouse research will offer significant benefits to industry. "This state-of-the-art greenhouse facility will help industry maximise its returns through the delivery of new, ground-breaking insights into how to use protected cropping to get the best possible return," he said. The facility will have a strong education and training focus, with Western Sydney University working with WUR and industry to develop career-ready graduates and share learning with industry. "This greenhouse and its associated training programs will provide learning opportunities for horticulture professionals at all stages of their careers. It will also provide significant resources for the next generation of growers, showcasing that horticulture is an innovative and exciting industry to join," Mr Murdoch said. Crops grown will be those typically produced using protected cropping in Australia, such as cucumber, strawberry, capsicum, eggplant, lettuces and other vegetables. In the long term, there are also possibilities for high-value crops such as herbal and medicinal plants that are beneficial to the Australian horticulture industry and growers. Courses associated with the greenhouse are expected to be announced after construction is completed in 2017.





WVVA Christmas Party



The annual WVVA Christmas day was once gain a great success, with many local farmers getting involved on the day. The only guidelines for the event? Bring yourself, and your family, and your signature dish along and have fun! And there were plenty of people who did come along to enjoy a great time together. Even the weather came to the party and a beautiful sunny day ensured that everyone could relax. The kids were also well catered for and a bouncy castle kept the energetic (small and large kids!) well entertained. The fundraising auction that has also become a feature of the day was also a great success, not only we're the farmers getting involved but friends and family were also getting involved in the bidding. The WVVA would like to recognise the kind and generous donations from the various companies that supported the day. And if you went home hungry from this event, well you only had yourself to blame! There was an abundance of food on offer in a range of differing styles. A truly sumptuous feast! And the food availability didn't stop there - to finish off the day there were pre-packaged baskets that was filled with local produce that were handed out to families to take home. But while all of this activity seemed to run smoothly, it does need to be noted that there was a tremendous amount of work put in behind the scenes by Michael Tran in ensuring that the event ran on track. The environment of the event turned out the way the WVVA wanted it to be: seeing farmers relaxing and talking to each other, and seeing the kids enjoying the day also. So if you missed out, then you had better get your brand new 2017 diary out and tentatively cross out the last couple of weekends in November in preparation for the next party!



Pictures anticlockwise - Our very own auctioneer, the bouncy castle (scene of some fun for kids & damage to some over enthusiastic adults!) and some of the lucky auction winners

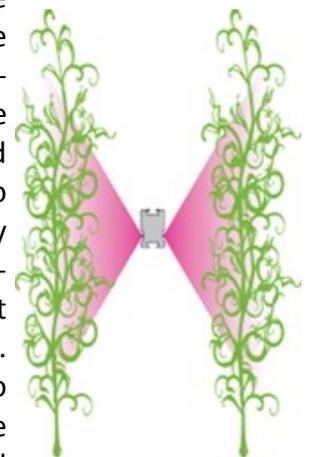


Chisholm Institute of TAFE to host LED Tomato Interlighting Trial



Much of the LED research in commercial horticulture has been developed in the Northern hemisphere, owing to the high density of growers in areas such as the Westland in the Netherlands. Whilst this does provide a sound source of data, the relevance to Australian conditions is questionable. With day lengths of only 6 hours and light levels at least 10% less than Australian winter conditions, the need for lighting in the Northern Hemisphere is obvious. But as many growers have found this year, traditional elevated light levels were not present in the spring period and

this has led to delayed production and growth in many crops. The price cycle in Australia is another factor that is leading growers to consider lighting as a growing tool. In summer there are high volumes of produce and associated low prices. In the winter, prices are higher but production is lower. So can the introduction of lighting help to smooth out this production curve? What is missing for Australian growers is a reference point to see how lights can enhance the performance of crops under Australian conditions. Chisholm Institute of TAFE are working in partnership with Powerplants Australia and Philips to establish a lighting trial to give a direct comparison between a lit winter crop and an unlit crop. Initially the trial will see the installation of a single row of Philips interlights into one side of a compartment at Chisholm's greenhouse site on a Tomato crop. The interlights are designed to give illumination within the crop canopy with the light radiating on a 120 degree angle each side of the fixture. One of the important features of the trial is to have a separate ability to vary irrigation to the plant rows being exposed to the lights. As the plants are growing for longer they will obviously photosynthesise for longer and will ultimately require a higher level of irrigation and nutrients. The trial will also see Chisholm Institute students undertaking the crop registration process to fully evaluate the benefits of the lighting process. This will involve weekly measurements of plant growth and tracking of yield rates. When compared to the non lit crop, a full comparison based on accurate data should eventually be available. Another advantage of having the trial at Chisholm is that the facility is available to accommodate visitors to the trial. Whilst visitors will obviously have to observe Chisholm's hygiene protocols, the ability for growers to witness the ongoing trial first hand will be of great benefit and interest. At this stage the trial should be installed in early January in readiness for planting of the crop in February. "This represents an exciting opportunity for the industry to witness an independent trial of tomorrow's technology" said Powerplants Director Simon Gomme. "The project will allow our students to participate in a some real life and industry relevant research that they would not have normally had the opportunity to be involved in' said Colin Bednarz, Chisholm's greenhouse manager. The HFF will be following the progress of this trial as it progresses and advising members of the outcome.



POWERPLANTS AUSTRALIA



CREATING A CLIMATE FOR GROWTH



PRIVA NUTRIJET



PRIVA NUTRIFIT
FERTILISER DOSING SYSTEM



PRIVA CONNEXT



ADVANCED ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL SYSTEM



PRIVASSIST
CROP AND LABOUR MANAGEMENT

*Powerplants are the exclusive
Australian dealer for Priva.
Call us today to discuss your climate
control needs. Ph: +61 3 87957750*



Control Your Climate Grow Your Profits
www.powerplants.com.au