



## East Gippsland vegetable industry unites for inaugural grower meeting

**July 7 was a landmark event for East Gippsland's vegetable sector when more than 120 growers and industry figures flocked to Lindenow, a small town near Bairnsdale in south east Victoria, to mark the inaugural Vegetable growers meeting.**

Helping celebrate the event were key industry personal from AUSVEG, Vegetable Growers' Association of Victoria (VGA), the Department of Primary Industries, local suppliers and shires.

The evening aimed to bring growers and industry together in an informal atmosphere to discuss key issues affecting the industry. Overall, it was acknowledged by most growers in the room that there was a need to have a strong, local grower group.

Growers were also updated on some of the industry's challenges such as:

- The lack of water security.
- The high cost of production.
- The relatively low industry profile of the vegetable industry.

Held at the Lindenow football club, the evening was opened by local, young vegetable grower Andrew Bulmer who has worked tirelessly to gain grower support to help establish the group.

***"...said it was not often you had so many influential industry people in the one room, and having the event tonight spoke volumes for how the industry viewed the region's growers."***

*Tony Imeson, VGA.*

Mr Bulmer acknowledged the support of VGA Industry Development Officer (IDO), Slobodan Vujovic and Executive Officer, Tony Imeson.

Mr Imeson said it was not often you had so many influential industry people in the one room, and having the event tonight

spoke volumes for how the industry viewed the region's growers.

Other key note speakers included VGA President, Luis Gazzola who stressed the importance of having a united industry that spoke with one voice in order for growers to be heard and taken seriously by government and supermarkets.

AUSVEG Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Richard Mulcahy also acknowledged the importance of having a strong grower network. He took time to explain the role the national peak body plays in representing the interests of Australian vegetable and potato growers.

Since Mr Mulcahy became CEO, last year, he has secured more than 20 Strategic Partnership Agreements with leading Australian agribusiness organisations.

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*Key speakers; Oscar Villalta - DPI, Darcy Boyd - EnviroVeg, Luis Gazzola - VGA, Slobodan Vujovic - IDO VGA, Ian James - AUSVEG Economist, Andrew Bulmer - Lindenow grower and AUSVEG CEO - Richard Mulcahy.*

## president's report

Well, well, what a shock to the system. Looks like our normal winters are back; cold, wet and miserable. Even our vegetables have gone into shock and stopped growing.

Most veggies are in short supply but the markets are very quiet. The consumers must be living on love and fast food.

### AUSVEG Convention

The recent AUSVEG Convention was a tremendous success, perhaps the best ever. A wide range of sponsors and informative speakers also added to the quality of the event, not to mention an engaging MC and the guest appearance of former Australian cricketer, Glen McGrath and the South Australian Independent Senator, Nick Xenophon.

Each year, nominations are open to a range of Industry Award categories which are then presented at the Convention's Gala Dinner. I would like to congratulate the nominees and winners and believe they were all worthy of an award.

My biggest surprise and shock was the announcement that I had received a Lifetime Achievement Award. It was a great honour and brought tears to my eyes. I would like to thank the AUSVEG Board for honouring me with this Industry Award as I am sure there are many others that are likely candidates.

### The Good Food and Wine Show

The Melbourne Market Authority (MMA) once again organised an educational and colourful trade stand which was manned by me and two retailers, Chris Scicluna and Paul Ahern on the Friday and Saturday and VGA Executive Committee Members, David Wallace and Vince Doria on the Sunday. Consumers were interested in learning how vegetables are grown while I emphasised the importance of eating fresh fruit and vegetables every day.

The promotional team, Tiesha Dower and Carolyn Creed, who visit schools educating students on the health benefits of fruit and vegetables, demonstrated how easy it is to prepare and eat healthy food. I believe their role should be extended into working with younger children who are at an impressionable age and are already our consumers. Thanks to the MMA for allowing the VGA to be involved.

### Property Identity Meetings

Property Identity Meetings are now being held and a number of organisations have already submitted proposals. A Property Identity, or Grower ID as we would like to see it, is probably one of the most important things to happen in our industry. The challenge is to convince the State Government that in order for it to succeed it should be recognised nationally. I am your representative and need your support, so please contact me so that we can push this idea forward.



Luis Gazzola was the very proud recipient of an Industry Lifetime Achievement Award presented at the AUSVEG Convention.

### Victorian Farmers' Federation (VFF) Conference

At the VFF Conference last month I again was disappointed with the lack of focus given to vegetables. As vegetable growers, we bust our gut 365 days of the year, seven days a week, rain hail and shine, to produce fresh vegetables to the consumers yet we never get enough recognition at these conferences. Even when the Federal Opposition Minister for Agriculture, John Copp, spoke on the future of exports he did not once reference vegetables. Subsequently, I have arranged an urgent meeting with Mr Copp regarding the issue. Watch this space!

The Free Trade Report was a major issue for our fruit and vegetable growers due to the frozen and fresh imports.

### Future of the VGA Vic Executive.

I would like to thank the Executive for their loyal support and tireless work for our industry. We need new faces around our board table. I will not contest the position of President at the next AGM in October and I ask that someone come forward for the job.

I will help the VGA Vic and the Industry in any way, but I need to step back to allow someone else to take the position in going forward.

Thank you to members for your support and trust and may God bless all of you with health, more rain and a true winter with a promise of a beautiful spring and good market prices.

Luis Gazzola

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Mr Mulcahy said the partnerships contributed to the long term financial stability of the organisation and allowed access to global research and development and other expertise not readily available within the AUSVEG offices.

"I am also particularly proud of an increase in non-levy related revenue that has led to the establishment of a new Public Affairs Program," he said.

"Also as a result of these partnerships, AUSVEG has become more active in agripolitical affairs and engaging decision-makers to ensure a greater appreciation of issues concerning Australian growers."

Mr Mulcahy said one of the battles that AUSVEG is fighting, on behalf of the growers, is appearing before Senate Committees regarding trade and labelling laws.

On hand to update growers on the economic issues affecting the industry was AUSVEG Economist, Ian James. Mr James said his role was to: "Increase growers' understanding of economic, business and market issues occurring beyond the farm gate that affects their operations."

Oscar Villalta, a DPI soil borne disease pathologist concluded the evening and spoke on the latest Integrated Pest Management tools for managing diseases as well as understanding soil health in order to increase farm productivity.



Mr Villalta explained some of the new treatments available to combat sclerotinia, a plant pathogenic fungus. A more detailed workshop for local growers will be held on August 18.

Newly appointed Environmental Coordinator Darcy Boyd from AUSVEG also took the opportunity to promote his services to the growers and explain his role within the industry.

The evening ended on a high when Mr Bulmer brought all the speakers together and mediated an open forum where the audience was invited to ask questions.

The main questions covered were:

- The effects imports of processed and fresh vegetables were having on local producers.
- The lack of a level playing field when Australian exports had a tariff imposed and imports were allowed into Australia under a free trade agreement and no tariff.
- Securing water availability for the future growth of farming in the area and encouraging future generations to continue vegetable production.
- The dominance of supermarkets in the vegetable industry. ▼

## Young leader creates local enthusiasm



VGA Executive Officer, Tony Imeson, Lindenow Grower, Andrew Bulmer and VGA President, Luis Gazzola.

**For East Gippsland vegetable grower, Andrew Bulmer it was attending a Young Leadership Course in 2009 and being introduced to the Industry's key figures that challenged him to become more involved in the vegetable sector.**

"I was introduced to both the AUSVEG and the Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria's (VGA) teams and saw first-hand just how hard they worked for our industry," Andrew said.

Following the Leadership Course, Andrew wanted to further push himself so applied for an Industry Advisory Council (IAC) position and was successfully appointed to the Leadership and People Development Advisory Group.

Andrew is already kept busy as Operations Manager for the family's business Bulmer Farm Fresh Vegetables based at Lindenow which is just outside of Bairnsdale.

He has now met many core figures from the industry and sees benefit in introducing these key players to his region.

"I can see the benefits of the Lindenow vegetable growers understanding in more detail what these core groups do – I know I have learnt so much and found people like Luis Gazzola, president of the VGA, so much help on any issue – and when he doesn't know the answer he finds out," he said.

"And now with the VGA's new Industry Development Officer for the West, Slobodan Vujovic, we have another resource at our fingertips and again our growers needed to know this."

Consequently, an informal grower night was organised in July, solely by Andrew and with the financial support of local industries.

The key speakers included; AUSVEG Chairman, Richard Mulcahy, the VGA team, the new EnviroVeg Coordinator, Darcy Boyd, Oscar Villalta, a pathologist from the Department of Primary Industry and Vegetable Economist, Ian James.

"The sole aim of the evening was for the front men of these groups to get up and tell growers about their organisation and why they should be supporting them," Andrew said.

The evening was a real first for the local vegetable industry which officially does not have their own grower group. Andrew does not dismiss the idea, but adds that the first step is to have all the growers understanding the importance of our peak bodies and the benefits of having an industry group.

"With the help of the IDO, I would like to promote key grower programs such as EnviroVeg through organising workshops at a time that suits growers and with topics that are relevant to our region," he said.

"It is no use talking about issues that are relevant for say Werribee when currently our main focus is on soil health, sustainability, the new Horticulture Award and how to lower input costs." ▼

# Winter is the time for **networking!**

## May and June 2010 proved a popular period to hold industry conferences and trade shows.

The AUSVEG conference held on the Queensland Gold Coast at Jupiters Casino in late May provided a great opportunity for the vegetable and potato industry to assemble together over a two-day period.

The well-balanced program provided industry suppliers the opportunity to display their wares at the trade show. Feedback from the trade show exhibitors was extremely positive. A key influence behind the success of the trade show was delegates having to pass through the exhibition display room to enter the main auditorium where they heard the presentations. This created constant activity and opportunity for exhibitors to meet with all delegates.

The event attracted a fair number of growers from all states but has yet to capture the majority and provide an incentive to encourage and motivate more to leave the farm and attend their industry's annual conference.

From a different industry perspective, the PMA Australia / New Zealand Fresh Connect 2010 Conference, held at the newly developed section of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, provided a domestic and global window to marketing and distribution of fresh produce.

Opening the event was Victoria's Agriculture Minister, Joe Helper who also released a new document, Department of Primary Industries (DPI) services to horticulture producers, which aims to outline clearly the nine priority services to be delivered during 2010. Mr Helper was also complimentary about the Horticulture Industry Network (HIN) project which was launched last October, saying that it exemplified the strength of collaboration that existed between the DPI and industry.

The DPI Secretary, Richard Bolt, was on hand to provide a greater depth of information about the DPI services to horticulture producers' nine priorities. Mr Bolt also spoke about the services offered by the Farm Services Victoria (FSV) team that helped the horticulture industry remain competitive.

More than 700 delegates from across all sectors of the fruit, vegetable and floral industries attended and witnessed what is known as the largest produce conference and trade show in the southern hemisphere.

Again, a modest number of vegetable growers were in attendance obviously looking for new marketing techniques and innovations to improve their distribution of vegetables from the farm gate.

The DPI's FSV Horticulture & Forestry team put their best foot forward during the two days. The team launched a range of new products and services which included 20 Farm View Online videos that demonstrate drought mitigation and adaptation responses, as well as the Horticulture Online Resource Library, a search engine delivering easy access to practical tools and resources.

On the local Melbourne scene, the 2010 National Vegetable Industry Leadership Program held its second growing leaders session in Melbourne during June with 13 participants from around Australia. After commencing the program in Brisbane during May, the final session will be held in Canberra in September.

***The AUSVEG Annual Conference has yet to capture the majority of growers and provide them with the incentive to leave their farms and attend their industry annual conference.***

The focus of the program is to develop leadership skills and outcomes for the vegetable industry. This was clearly evident from the participants time in Melbourne.

Bendigo was the venue for the 2010 Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) Annual Meetings which proved an ideal location with more than 700 farmers.

At the VFF Horticultural Group's Annual Meeting, Gaye Tripodi from Swan Hill was elected President for 2010 / 2011 term. Two vacancies still remain on the Horticulture committee and growers are invited to nominate. Special thanks were extended to retiring President Rein Silverstein and Treasurer Caroline Burgi.

A key presentation at the Horticulture Forum, which caused much heated debate, were the implications of free trade agreements for imported horticultural produce. The issue is extremely topical, especially as local produce sales have fallen subject to export tariff costs and the challenges related to free tariff arrangements with importing countries. The provoking presentation was delivered by Michael Mugliston, Special Negotiator, Free Trade Agreement Division for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. ▼

## 2010 National Vegetable Industry Leadership Programme • VIC





## AUSVEG Conference • QLD



## PMA Aus/NZ Fresh Connect 2010 • VIC



## VFF Horticulture Group AGM • VIC



## Widespread career offers wealth of knowledge to new West IDO

Having worked in the horticulture industry for more than 20 years, **Helena Whitman** still finds it an interesting, rewarding and challenging industry. In June, the Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria (VGA) was fortunate enough to appoint her as the new Industry Development Officer for west Victoria. Read on as Ms Whitman tells us her fascinating story of how her life in the industry has led her into nearly every horticulture sector.

During my time in the vegetable industry, I have represented growers on two fronts: politically and through assisting them to implement better practices that ultimately increase on-farm returns.

My introduction to horticulture was through the South Australian Apple and Pear Growers Association, where I was Assistant to the General Manager, Bruce Lockier. Bruce is the person behind me having a driving passion for the horticulture industry and my introduction to industry politics.

*"...the role isn't political and as IDOs we can't change the world but we do have broad shoulders and can listen."*

My next role took me home to Western Australia (WA) where I worked for many years as the Executive Manager of the WA Fruit Growers Association.

It was during this time that I was introduced to the vegetable industry and eventually worked as the Executive Officer, Horticulture with WA Farmers. The role had me, along with Clive Stevens, attend several meetings of the then fledgling national peak body, AUSVEG as well as many overseas exhibitions and conferences.

Today I run my own business, Hort-Ag Consultancies, which specialises in the delivery of Freshcare training programs to growers. It was through this work and my many contacts in the vegetable industry, that I was encouraged to take up the position of EnviroVeg Manager for AUSVEG.

The position gave me the opportunity to meet with many growers and to nationally promote EnviroVeg, a program that



Helena Whitman soil training with LOTE growers.

has been developed by the Victorian vegetable industry. The role also helped me to obtain funding to produce the *Healthy Soils Ute Guide* that was made freely available to every vegetable grower in Australia. To date, my proudest achievements would have to be the EnviroVeg program and the *Healthy Soils Ute Guide*.

My new challenge as the VGA's IDO West is to, again, make the role one of my proudest achievements. I look forward to meeting with as many growers as possible and providing relative information that may benefit their on-farm management practices. The growing regions that I cover are some of the worst hit by the years of drought with many growers still struggling to survive. Consequently this will add to the challenge of the position, but mark my words I am under no illusion that the task will be easy.

However, the IDO role is only as good as the input from growers – it relies on providing what growers want and unless they make their needs known the information provided will be irrelevant. Growers, however, also need to understand that the role isn't political and as IDOs we can't change the world but we do have broad shoulders and can listen. ▼



## executive officer's corner

### Winter offers off farm "educational" opportunities

During winter, alternative events (off farm) are available that give growers a break. They include industry conferences such as AUSVEG's National Convention or short leadership courses that aim to increase a grower's knowledge in business leadership, market access development or the offer of a potential international scholarship.

Funding provided through the National Vegetable Levy, with matching funds from the Commonwealth Government's contributions assists in covering some of the financial costs involved in these events. Vegetable growers appear to be somewhat reluctant to take advantage of these opportunities for themselves, family or staff. But it is their money at work!

Let's be more pro-active and encourage, especially our younger generation, to take up these opportunities that are available annually to the whole vegetable industry.

Our involvement with the Victorian Department of Primary Industries, Horticulture Industry Network (HIN), through our Industry Development Officers (IDOs), is providing an excellent service to Victoria's vegetable industry. One such

*Let's be more pro-active and encourage, especially our younger generation, to take up these opportunities that are available annually to the whole vegetable industry.*

opportunity was the chance to work, in conjunction with the Victorian Farmers' Federation's (VFF) Horticultural Groups at Lindenow, Cranbourne and Werribee, and to hold various Grower Information Business Sessions. Such sessions have made growers more aware of the key industry issues such as the 2010 Horticultural Awards, Vic Roads' chain of responsibility laws for on and off farm equipment and managing climate change.

East Gippsland growers have also become more involved with the Vegetable Growers Association of Victoria (VGA) due to the enthusiasm and persistence of vegetable grower Andrew Bulmer. Last month, Andrew and the VGAs Eastern IDO held a

growers' night which, again, provided important industry information, the opportunity to network and was well supported by industry suppliers.

The VGAs 2010 Annual General Meeting and Dinner will be held on Friday October 15 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel on Spencer Street in Melbourne commencing at 4pm. It is critical all members realise the importance of attending this meeting as the resolutions will have a direct impact upon the future leadership and operation of your association. After six terms in office, Luis Gazzola will stand down as your President. The position of President is critical to the continued implementation of the VGAs Strategic Plan and the recognition of our association within the vegetable industry.

I would urge all grower members to approach possible nominees now and seek their approval for this important role.

All positions for President, Vice Presidents and Executive Committee will become available and you will all receive notice of meeting and nomination forms in early September.

Please give your consideration to the positions that are available for the coming year and ensure that your association continues to develop and move forward in 2011.



Keep Smiling,  
Tony Imeson

For the latest Victorian vegetable information visit our web site at [www.vegetablesvictoria.com.au](http://www.vegetablesvictoria.com.au) or [www.vgavic.org.au](http://www.vgavic.org.au)

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