

Australian

Issue: 49 | APRIL 2017

BANANAS

WORLD'S GREATEST

Banana Triumph Page 6



LATEST TR4 R&D Page 14

GEARING UP! Congress 2017 Page 20

YOUNG GUNS! Building an Empire Page 24



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Innovation
Australia**



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CONTINUING TO MEET FUTURE CHALLENGES

Stephen Lowe, ABGC Chair



In my first column as ABGC Chair, I would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of my predecessor, Doug Phillips.

Doug's commitment to the industry during

a challenging five years as Chair, has left things in good stead.

Both Doug and retiring New South Wales (NSW) director and former ABGC treasurer Peter Molenaar, who provided 10 years of service to the board, leave a legacy of strong leadership.

Another former director, Steve Lizzio, who left the board last year, made a significant contribution to our industry and continues to do so, thanks to his passion for promoting bananas any way he can.

Following our November annual general meeting, we also welcomed two new directors, Jade Buchanan from LMB Farms at Innisfail, and Tully grower Leon Collins. Welcome aboard!

After serving as deputy chair of ABGC for 12 months, I hope now to continue the work undertaken before me, and provide solid leadership for our growers.

In saying that, I would also call on growers to remain vigilant in their biosecurity measures.

Panama TR4 is a constant threat. It is imperative

that individual growers do what we can to protect our own farms. The only way to keep TR4 contained is by continuing on-farm biosecurity efforts.

Other countries that have been unable to stop the spread of TR4 now know the greatest enemy in an exotic disease outbreak like Panama is complacency and denial. In these countries, this has led to an inability to quickly change farming practices and is why the disease has spread through those countries and across other countries.

We have been universally praised for our response to Panama to date, and I hope all growers can continue these practices well into the future.

The three main actions that growers need to continue are:

- Carry out the highest level of farm biosecurity that you can
- Inspect your farm regularly for early detection and report any suspect plants
- Always source clean planting material, preferably from an approved tissue culture nursery

ABGC and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries have information and resources available that can help if growers are stuck; things like checklists, product recommendations, guides and signage.

SUPPORT THE WORK OF ABGC BY BECOMING A MEMBER

I am often asked, why become a member of ABGC?

The ABGC exclusively represents the interests of all Australian banana growers and our work is funded by voluntary membership fees.

We are here to ensure a profitable and resilient industry future and enable growers to maximise innovation and opportunity. We are your voice on all industry issues and it is important that growers support the council and its ongoing work by ensuring you are a member of ABGC.

JOIN US AT CONGRESS

Congress is fast approaching and I would encourage all growers who are able to attend this significant event to do so by registering soon.

The biennial event will be held in Sydney in June and is shaping up to be the best yet, with an impressive line-up of inspirational and innovative guest speakers and celebrity performers.

This event is a fantastic opportunity for growers and industry supporters to get together and learn the latest developments in scientific research, marketing, retail trends and so much more.

It's also a good chance to catch up with fellow growers and enjoy some well-earned time out.

Hope to see you there!



ABGC Chair Stephen Lowe with Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce during a recent visit to North Queensland by the Deputy PM.

BANANA EXPORT STRATEGY UNDERWAY

Jim Pekin, Chief Executive Officer



On 9 February, the ABGC held an Export Forum to provide information to interested growers on the challenges and opportunities of exporting bananas

from Australia. A range of growers and agents participated in discussions, following an impressive list of speakers—including a global banana marketer and a representative from the company responsible for mango export development. The result was enthusiasm for a raft of work to progress exports.

The initial priority was for Hort Innovation to tender out the development of a Banana Export Strategy to ensure a long-term strategic approach to export market development. That strategy would include engagement with banana growers and other stakeholders, and a data-based report that reflects industry's intentions to export to already open markets in the short- to medium-term, and to currently closed markets in the long-term.

While there are opportunities, participants fully understood that there are plenty of challenges to overcome to achieve sustainable and profitable exports.

INDUSTRY STRATEGIC PLAN

At the time of writing, a draft Banana Strategic Investment Plan was in the final stages of

consideration by industry and Hort Innovation, for the use of R&D and marketing levies from 2017–21.

This follows a successful industry consultation workshop on the plan, held at South Johnstone on 9 March. Growers who attended are applauded for taking the time to contribute their views on how to receive the best bang for their levy bucks. Growers' contributions for the next five years will be approximately \$33 million, and this does not count matching funds from the Commonwealth Government for R&D levy contributions.

The industry investment priorities are likely to focus on:

- Development of new varieties, combined with improved pest and disease management to improve industry biosecurity
- Increased adoption of the industry's Best Management Practice to improve industry biosecurity, industry sustainability and environmental stewardship
- Increased adoption of technology to improve industry productivity and profitability
- Increased domestic demand and product diversification, and commence export market development to increase grower profitability

PLANT PROTECTION PROGRAM

Over the last six years, there was one large and complex Banana Plant Protection Program that is now finalised. It has been refreshed and replaced

by two new projects: one run by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF) and the other by the University of Queensland (UQ).

The QDAF project on improving plant protection, has four parts:

- Identification of varieties with improved pest, disease, agronomic and consumer preference traits
- Safely importing new banana cultivars and then moving them into a high plant health banana tissue culture collection for movement across Australia
- Development of integrated pest and disease management strategies for tropical and subtropical banana growing regions
- Facilitating a cohesive and inclusive plant protection research, development and export program

The UQ project is designed to strengthen diagnostic capacity for accurate detection and identification of emerging endemic and exotic plant pathogens.

MANAGEMENT OF 1IP

ABGC is continuing to upgrade the fences on the first infected farm (1IP) and the related block (2SP), which industry purchased with the assistance of the Australian Government. The farm manager we appointed, Phil Neibling continues to do an extraordinary job on that farm.



INNISFAIL TAKES WORLD RECORD BANANA SPLIT CROWN!

Innisfail is still celebrating after cementing itself into the history books, by breaking the Guinness World Record for the Longest Banana Split.

Thousands turned out to Callendar Park to attempt the huge feat, which required 40,000 bananas, 2500 litres of ice cream and another 2000 litres of toppings and cream.

The town smashed the previous world record of 7.67km, held by

Selinsgrove in Pennsylvania, USA, since 1998. Innisfail recorded a new world record of 8.04km.

Bananas were beamed across the globe with more than 40,000 people across the world tuning in to view the Longest Banana Split attempt, through Guinness World Records' social media streams.

The event was held during Innisfail's annual Feast of the Senses festival.



The Australian Bananas stall at Innisfail's Feast of the Senses was a huge hit thanks to a great team of volunteers.



Our fabulous banana smoothie makers—from left—Tegan Kukulies, Elisa King and Naomi King.

FEAST OF SENSES

Photos by Romy Bullerahn.



Tahnee Alexander, Taryn Carne and Kristen Cox.



Noala and Graham Dunstan from Perth.



Sandra Devaney - Bartle Frere banana grower with Kumok Zammit.



Miki Buchanan & Bonita de Brincat.



Quinn & Brady Devaney.



Sharon Peterson & Paige Brown.



Ryan, Shaun, Carlie and Daniel Stewart.

QBAN UPDATE

In 2017, the Quality Banana Approved Nursery (QBAN) Scheme will be updated and transferred from a state government regulated scheme to a scheme run by a partnership between the Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) and the Nursery & Garden Industry Australia (NGIA).

After the new Biosecurity Act commenced in July 2016, the regulator, Biosecurity Queensland (BQ), indicated that they would no longer provide the QBAN service and that industry should take over responsibility for the scheme. Under the new Biosecurity Act, how will banana growers meet their general biosecurity obligation (GBO) if they do not have access to clean planting material? Clean planting material is critical for reducing the spread of both exotic and endemic diseases, particularly TR4 and Banana Bunchy Top virus (BBTV).

The new industry-run QBAN scheme will be developed by ABGC and NGIA in consultation with current QBAN businesses, relevant technical experts, governments and banana growers, and will involve accreditation under the Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme Australia (NIASA) and BioSecure HACCP Certification. BQ however, will support the QBAN scheme during the transition period over the next year or so.

NIASA Accreditation/BioSecure HACCP Certification offer the banana industry the experience and platform to

develop and deliver a banana-specific clean planting material scheme, while the banana industry retains influence and oversight of such a scheme. Additionally, the NIASA/BioSecure HACCP system is independently audited and already has national approval from all state and federal jurisdictions, which is important for the movement of planting material.

The new QBAN scheme is aimed at being a more practical and workable system while ensuring the best possible biosecurity for industry and meeting legislative requirements in each state. The scheme will target priority diseases, for example, Panama TR4 and BBTV, and provide a superior disease-tested, cost-effective product that growers prefer to buy to enhance their on-farm biosecurity and meet their GBO.

The scheme will initially cover tissue culture laboratories and grow-out nurseries. Additional modules for clean mother blocks and in-ground nurseries for the supply of clean bits and suckers will be investigated for their feasibility and development.

The update and transition of QBAN will take approximately 12 months with implementation beginning in 2018. For further information, please contact Dr Rosie Godwin rosie@abgc.org.au

***Funding for the transition and establishment of the new QBAN scheme is provided by Horticulture Innovation Australia's BA14014 Fusarium wilt Tropical Race 4 Research Program, which is led by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. The project will be subcontracted to NGIA and is expected to begin soon.*

Quality Banana Approved Nursery (QBAN) scheme facilities. March 2017			
<i>Note: Laboratory is where plants are produced using tissue culture. Nursery is where the tissue culture plantlets are grown in pots for the grower.</i>			
Kool Bananas Tissue Culture Laboratory—Phil Berry-Porter (Contact) LABORATORY			
0407 126 113	shazza141@bigpond.com	Mission Beach, QLD	Tissue culture plants only
Blue Sky Tissue Culture—Craig & Sue Althaus (Contact) NURSERY			
07 4068 2208	admin@blueskytc.com.au	Tully, QLD	Potted plants for commercial sales
Lemara Tissue culture—Peter Bakker (Contact) LABORATORY & NURSERY			
07 4778 4441	lemara@bigpond.com	Townsville, Wulguru, QLD	Tissue culture plants, potted plants or both
Lowes Tc Pty Ltd—Natasha Marocik (Contact) LABORATORY & NURSERY (NSW)			
02 4389 8750	Natasha@lowestc.com.au	Tumbi Umbi, NSW	Tissue cultured plants and plugs (where authorised)
Ramm Botanicals—Jason Dexter or Ryan Weber, Owner (Contact) LABORATORY & NURSERY (NSW)			
02 4351 2099	jason.dexter@ramm.com.au or ramm@ramm.com.au (general inquiries)	Kangy Angy, NSW central coast	Tissue culture plants and 25mm-diameter ellegaard plugs (where authorised)
Arakai Pty Ltd—James Howe (Contact) LABORATORY & NURSERY			
0407 933 791 or 07 4093 3826	jhowe@howefarms.com	Walkamin, Atherton Tablelands, QLD	Tissue culture plants, potted plants or both
Mission Beach Tissue Culture—Stephen Lavis (Contact) LABORATORY & NURSERY			
0418 299 900	slavis4@bigpond.com	Mission Beach and Walkamin, QLD	Tissue culture plants, potted plants or both
Wide Bay Seedlings—Adrian Ross (Contact) NURSERY			
07 4129 6684	office@wbseedlings.com.au	Pioneers Rest, Qld	Potted plants
Ausplant Nursery—Brady Cumming (Contact) NURSERY			
07 4662 4934	brady@ausplantnursery.com.au	Dalby, Qld	Potted plants
El Arish tropical Exotics: contact Scott & Ann Cains NURSERY			
07 4068 5058	scott@elarishtropicalexotics.com	El Arish, Qld	Potted plants

- NIASA (Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme Australia) — is a national scheme for production nurseries which operate in accordance with a set of national 'best management practice' guidelines.
- BioSecure HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) — is the industry-specific on-farm biosecurity program (a set of protocols) designed to assist production nurseries to assess their endemic and exotic pest and disease risks, and implement management strategies at critical control points. Businesses manage biosecurity risks by establishing an effective quarantine process for both imported and exported plant material.

NEW WH&S LAWS

Banana growers have been urged to update themselves on the most recent workplace health and safety practices.

With growing pressure on the farming industry to cut down on workplace injuries, Safe Work Australia has released a guide on managing the risk of machinery and vehicles.

It includes information on using plant and machinery in rural workplaces, selecting the most

suitable vehicle for your needs (for example, tractors, quad bikes and other farm vehicles) and how to manage the risks.

The use of quad bikes gets particular attention, following a recent rise in rider fatalities.

Growers are reminded that when it comes to quad bikes:

- wear a helmet

- no children (under 16) on full-size bikes
- do not overload the bike
- make sure the rider has had appropriate education/training in handling the bike.

For more information:

www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/swa/about/publications/pages/guide-for-managing-the-risks-of-machinery-in-rural-workplaces

STILL TOTALLY BANANAS!

Latest Nielsen research shows our favourite fruit is holding its ground as a market leader, with Australian households continuing to buy more bananas than any other fruit.

Aussie consumers are still bananas for bananas. It remains, by far, the nation's most popular fruit. Nine-in-10 Australian households purchased bananas in the year ending 25 February 2017, and total volume sales grew by 7.5% during this period.

The rise in volume and the small growth in the number of households that purchased bananas (+0.2%) helped negate the effect of falling prices and soften the -7.7% decline in total dollar sales. However, this price decline would have still been felt at the farm gate.

Research from Nielsen's Homescan Consumer Panel reveals that the

growth in bananas bucked the trend experienced by total fruit, where value grew at 3.6%, ahead of volume at 0.7%. For bananas, volume outpacing value sales in this environment has cemented its position as the number one fruit. It sells more volume than any other fruit and also has the largest number of households purchasing (94%); ahead of apples (89%), citrus fruit (89%), berries (87%) and stone fruit (79%).

The value and price dynamics, however, have hindered bananas' goal to also keep its lead in value sales. Bananas dropped to second in value rankings as a result of commoditisation behind berries.

On average, Australian households bought 19.1kg of bananas in the past 12 months. Lower prices encouraged consumers to buy bananas more frequently, at a rate of 24 times/year, in the last 12 months, up 1.4

occasions compared to the previous year.

Young families (families with children under 11—a key target demographic) increased their average volume by 1.2 kilograms and are making one extra trip a year, which means we have met our KPI target for 2018 already.

Young Transitionals (under 35s with no children) added an impressive two kilograms of bananas to their volume spend in the past year, and two more trips in the same period. We have also met our 2018 target for Young Transitionals.

The sharp decline (-14.2%) in the annual price per volume means households received much more banana for their buck.

They now spend an average \$54.47, down by \$5.82 in the last year, but they also got an extra kilo in the fruit bowl.

With so many households buying bananas, the opportunities to grow will come from boosting how much is bought and how often. To drive growth further for bananas, a big dollar opportunity exists by focusing marketing efforts to continue to reach and engage young families and Young Transitionals.

By encouraging these households to increase the amount of bananas they buy in a year by 1kg at the current price—be it through buying more bananas per occasion and/or increasing how often they purchase—a \$6.6 million growth prize could be up for grabs.

**Submitted by Hort Innovation Australia using latest data collected by Nielsen's Homescan Consumer Panel, funded by the Banana Industry's R&D Levy. For more information contact Hort Innovation Marketing Manager Elisa King at elisa.king@horticulture.com.au*

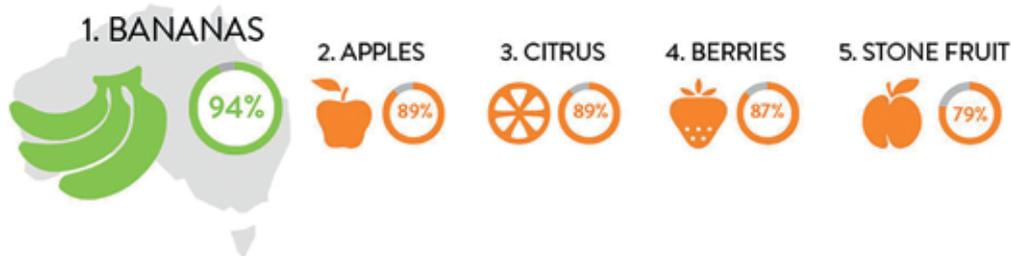
***Note, as the 2018 targets have been met in 2017, new targets will be set in July 2017.*

TOTALLY BANANAS

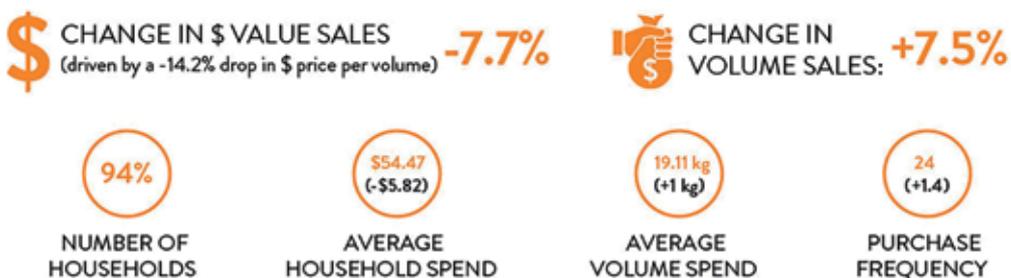
52 weeks ending 25/2/2017

BANANAS STILL #1 MOST POPULAR FRUIT IN AUSTRALIA

Rank by % households purchasing



KEY PERFORMANCE METRICS FOR OUR FAVOURITE FRUIT



INDUSTRY RECOGNITION FOR KEN PEGG

Scientists, researchers and long-time horticulture industry members gathered to celebrate renowned stalwart, Ken Pegg at Brisbane's Ecosciences Precinct during February.

The gathering paid homage to Mr Pegg's 80th birthday and a remarkable 60 years of contribution to plant pathology.

With a career that began in 1956, Mr Pegg is still delivering outcomes for

the Queensland horticulture industry as a plant pathologist specialising in the development of disease management systems that have been recognised both nationally and internationally.

He is also seen as a man who has been an exceptional mentor to countless young scientists and students over the years.

**Note – the ABGC was saddened to hear of the sudden passing of Ken's wife Sue in March.*



Ken Pegg was acknowledged as a vital player in the Australian response to Panama TR4, where he provided high level epidemiological advice to Biosecurity Queensland the banana industry.



ABGC's purpose: *To represent and lead banana growers to ensure a profitable and resilient industry future.*

WHY BE AN ABGC MEMBER?

The ABGC exclusively represents the interests of Australian banana growers. ABGC is **your** voice on all banana industry issues crucial to the sustainability and profitability of growers and the Australian banana industry. By being a member you support ABGCs work, which in turn is integral to every banana grower's business.

Some examples of our work:

ABGC

- Leads the banana industry's responses to critical issues and events. This includes the response to Panama Tropical Race 4 (TR4) and to its management. It also includes the response to Banana Freckle, and other critical issues, such as cyclones
- Influences Government policy decision and create positive outcomes for the banana industry
- Develops and implement strategies and priorities that increase growers' overall profitability, while maintaining the industry's environmental credentials

- Assists Horticulture Innovation Australia (HIA) with its R&D and Marketing strategies and projects
- Works with growers to adopt best practice on-farm biosecurity to protect it from TR4 and other exotic pest and disease incursions
- Communicates banana industry issues to growers and other stakeholders

OUR MEMBERS

ABGC is a voluntary incorporated association with grower and affiliate members.

Grower members pay a membership fee of 3 cents per carton of bananas marketed.

ABGC members receive member-only information and services

As an ABGC member you are given every opportunity to discuss issues of importance.

The ABGC is always keen to welcome new members. Contact the ABGC office or the CEO, Jim Pekin, for a membership application form.

CONTACT US

Chief Executive Officer: Jim Pekin Phone: 07 3278 4786
ABGC, Unit 3, South Gate East Commercial Centre, 250 Sherwood Road, Rocklea Qld 4106

CYCLONE DEBBIE NSW UPDATE



Part of the damaged crop in the Durabah region, which copped a battering by ex-Cyclone Debbie.

At the time of publication, New South Wales growers were still counting the costs of ex-Tropical Cyclone Debbie.

Growers in the Tweed and Brunswick regions faced significant crop losses and infrastructure damage, following the extreme weather in the week following the cyclone. One grower in the Chillingham area, close to the Queensland border, reported over 800mm of rain between 6am and midnight on March 30.

This torrential bucketing came on top of approximately 500mm that fell in the previous two weeks, prior to TC Debbie, and saturated the soil. There was

major damage to roadways and landslips in most northern areas. The storm force winds that followed Debbie caused further damage.

The ABGC was told some growers would take days to get to their plantings due to blocked or flooded roads. Early estimates were that crop losses would reach 30–40% on most farms... with one grower at Cudgen losing over 80% of a new planting.

Growers in the Richmond and Coffs areas were spared the full force of Debbie, with much less damage reported there.

NATURAL EVOLUTION TO GLOBAL RECOGNITION

International recognition has arrived for Rob and Krista Watkins' 'Natural Evolution' label.

The Walkamin couple, who transform green bananas into flour and acclaimed supplements, are finalists in the Food and Beverage category of this year's United States based Edison Awards, which recognise achievement in marketing.

The nomination is just the latest in a string of awards presented over the last few months, including:

- The Innovation in Sustainable Technologies Award

- Banksia Food for Sustainable Thought Award
- The Tropical North Queensland Innovation Awards

These days, the couple are going full steam ahead, with rapidly growing demand from the global market for their pre-biotic range.

One can't help but think a trip to New York in April to find out if they have won an Edison is a worthy reward for a truly innovative approach to the banana business!

**An extended feature on the Watkins was published in the March 2017 edition of Fruit & Vegetable News magazine.*



Rob and Krista Watkins have formed an innovative team and are making a name for themselves in the lucrative nutraceuticals supplements market, using 500 tonnes of bananas each year, in their products.



Leading banana researchers met recently to discuss latest applied research and technology focusing on the short- to long-term management of TR4.

MEETING OF TR4 MINDS

THE LATEST UPDATE ON TR4 RESEARCH.

WHAT'S NEW, IN PROGRESS AND ON THE HORIZON.

Last month marked two years since Panama Tropical Race 4 (TR4) was first detected in Queensland's Far North, on a farm in the Tully Valley. As the anniversary neared, leading banana researchers from across Australia met to discuss the latest applied research and breakthrough technology that continues to focus on the short- to long-term management of the disease. By Tony Pattison and Tegan Kukulies.

Since its initial detection in North Queensland, Panama TR4 has brought many challenges to banana growing, production and the industry at large.

In the two years since detection, banana growers have become much more aware of the disease, and most have implemented effective on-farm biosecurity. Practical banana research is heading toward reducing the impacts of the disease.

There is a long history of research on Panama disease throughout Australia. The use of applied research and cutting-edge technology by banana researchers from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) (agriscience and biosecurity), University of Queensland, James Cook University, Northern Territory Department of Primary Industries and Resources, New South Wales Department of

Primary Industries and the University of New England was discussed at a recent workshop in Brisbane.

The latest research and development aimed to improve growers' confidence in disease containment, reduce disease spread and provide farm management options if the disease became widespread.

One of the first questions North Queensland banana growers asked when TR4 became a reality was, "How do I protect my property?"

Implementing effective on-farm biosecurity is paramount. New management strategies are being developed using revolutionary studies on the genetics of the *Fusarium* fungus, the cause of Panama disease.

Containing the disease on the single, infected property has also been a priority, and improving

our knowledge of containment by establishing the most effective destruction of infected plants continues to be a primary goal.

However, in the event that Panama disease did spread, options for managing the disease and its impacts on the banana industry need to be developed. The creation of banana plants with better resistance is underway, by manipulating the tissue culture process.

When Australia's leading scientists researching aspects of Panama disease met in Brisbane in February, they discussed a range of exciting research; what is new, in progress and on the horizon. Here, we take a snapshot of their innovative work.

WHAT'S NEW?

Extensive research into the use of disinfectants has shown the

quaternary ammonium (QA) group of chemicals to be very effective.

The initial disinfectant testing, which was conducted using Panama disease Race 1, is now being tested using Panama TR4 in the Northern Territory (NT). Testing so far shows that products — for example, products containing 120g/L didecyl dimethyl ammonium chloride, a Quaternary Ammonium (QA), made up at 1% — are also effective on Panama TR4.

Further testing is also showing that detergents (such as Farmcleanse) can actually de-activate disinfectant products, if mixed directly. Therefore, growers should ensure they have thoroughly washed off detergents, before applying disinfectant products.

Dip and compare colour test strips have also shown promise, with testing currently being finalised. Also in this space, there is good news for growers that have a shuttle or spray tank and don't regularly make up QA disinfectant solutions. Using the test strips as indicators, disinfectant solutions (1% QA products), which have been left in a sealed



container exposed to the elements of the weather (full sunlight), have remained at a 1% solution for 12 weeks. Initial testing is also showing that these disinfectants are no more corrosive to a range of metals than water. Together, the use of colour test strips and metal corrosion tests are helping banana growers make sure chemicals are being used effectively.

Current destruction protocols of infected plants involve bagging the plants, gouging growing points and applying high rates of urea to infected plant material, as well as the soil immediately surrounding it. Results from a novel lab bioassay and a field trial in New South Wales (NSW) (using Subtropical Race 4) demonstrated that this was an effective method to quickly kill the *Fusarium* fungus.

Surveys of weed and groundcover species from Panama Race 1 sites in North Queensland and Subtropical Race 4 sites in NSW, identified that some weed species are alternative hosts to Panama disease. A pot trial with 18 common weed and groundcover species revealed that under controlled conditions, *Fusarium* could be recovered from all 18 species. Where and how the *Fusarium* is surviving on the weeds needs to be clarified and how this translates to the field.

WHAT IS IN PROGRESS?

There are some exciting advancements in understanding

the *Fusarium* genetics. Genetics is another language to most of us but, in a nutshell, there are many different *Fusarium* species, each with their own individual 'barcode'. Researchers are analysing the differences in these 'barcodes' to better understand their relationships with each other, and which segments may be responsible for causing Panama disease.

Under strict quarantine conditions scientists have also manipulated the *Fusarium* fungus to 'glow' in order to better understand where and how the fungus moves through banana plants. This research is important to help understand how the fungus moves through the banana plants, to cause disease symptoms which lead to plant death.

The first trial looking at the effect of nutrients on Panama Subtropical Race 4 development has commenced. Using a controlled aeroponic system (soilless), disease development is going to be monitored following different application rates of boron. Other nutrients will be evaluated following learnings from this initial trial. In addition to this, an extensive soil type survey is being conducted on North Queensland banana properties' characterising differences in soil characteristics, and understanding how these differences attribute to suppression of Panama disease.

Scientists are continuing to apply mutagenesis techniques to tissue

culture banana plantlets in an attempt to develop a commercially viable banana cultivar with improved tolerance to Panama TR4. In a multi-pronged approach, firstly mutagenesis has been applied to GCTVC 119 in an attempt to improve tolerance to the disease and also Gold Finger in an attempt to improve agronomic and eating quality. The first plants produced from this approach are expected to be planted in the NT soon.

WHAT IS ON THE HORIZON?

Genome sequencing and soil community profiling are just two of the methods that will be applied to help understand the role soil biology may play in suppressing Panama disease. An array of methods will be used to monitor the soil biology following varying practice changes, such as the use of different cover crops. Different cover crop options are currently being evaluated in a pot trial and this will help determine which species will be used in a cover crop field trial in the NT.

Clean planting material is a key priority for minimising the risk of spreading TR4. Negotiations are nearing completion to develop a Quality Banana Approved Nursery (QBAN) Scheme 'replacement', which is anticipated to be merged under the Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme Australia biosecurity system, which will be ultimately certified by the Australian Banana Grower's

Council. This improved system will give growers renewed assurance that tissue culture producers, that are certified under the new system, continue to supply clean disease-free planting material.

The hard copy of the On-farm Biosecurity BMP, developed as a 'sister' program to the industry's well adopted Banana BMP Environmental Guideline, is nearing completion. The resource aims to set industry guidelines for on-farm biosecurity practices through the use of a self-assessment checklist, similar to that of the BMP Environmental Guidelines.

These projects have been funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia Limited using the research and development banana levy with co-investment from the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and funds from the Australian Government.

Planning has commenced for DAF to host a Panama R&D update event for growers at the South Johnstone Research Station in May. The interactive event will bring the industry up to date on the latest Panama research. Watch the e-bulletins for updates on this event.

**See page 41 for social pics from the 'Meetings of TR4 Minds' gathering.*

LATEST TR4 VARIETAL SCREENING IN THE NT



Overseas visitors in the NT variety trial alongside TR4 affected 'Williams' Cavendish (L-R: Yuval Levy, Navot Galpaz and Stanley Freeman from Israel, and Altus Viljoen from South Africa). The Israeli researchers were on a TR4 fact-finding mission to Australia now that the disease is on their doorstep in the Middle East. Altus, a world authority on Panama disease, is conducting an epidemiological review of Biosecurity Queensland's management of the north Queensland TR4 incursion. Note the dedicated gumboots being worn, which do not leave the trial site.

After a delayed start due to an outbreak of Freckle Disease, a disease screening trial of Fusarium wilt Tropical Race 4 (TR4) in the Northern Territory (NT) is gaining ground, in the ongoing search to find varieties resistant to Panama TR4.

A varietal screening trial was planted at Coastal Plains Research Station in early June 2016 to assess resistance to Fusarium wilt TR4 (Panama disease). This was part of the Hort Innovation (HIA) and Australian banana industry funded Banana Plant Protection Program project—BA10020.

Replicated plots of 27 varieties (see table on [page 15](#)) were established from tissue culture plantlets in a plot known to be infested with TR4, and were assessed over a plant and ratoon crop. Bunch harvest of early maturing varieties commenced at the beginning of March this year—a mere nine months after planting.

Emphasis in this trial has been on determining the reaction of several Cavendish selections, as well as many hybrids from the Honduran breeding program to TR4.

SCREENING PROTOCOL

The trial site was artificially inoculated with TR4 because an earlier sentinel planting of Williams in the previously inoculated site produced disease in just one or two plants, indicating the pathogen was

only present at extremely low levels.

To artificially inoculate, 200 ml of millet grain pre-colonised by the TR4 pathogen was added to the planting hole in the field. Once external disease symptoms were evident, ratings of severity were taken on a monthly basis.

The date of first disease symptoms, type of symptom and date of death were recorded. Upon death of the plant, the pseudostem was examined for the presence of internal symptoms and infected vascular tissue of each variety was collected for laboratory confirmation of TR4.

All remaining plants which reached bunch harvest stage, with or without any external symptoms, were then examined internally and any infected vascular tissue collected as required.

There are four control (check/reference) varieties in the trial:

- The industry standard and very susceptible Williams.
- GCTCV 218 (Formosana), previously shown to be less susceptible than Williams, and probably represents the minimum level of genetic resistance which would be necessary to build an integrated crop management system around to continue production in the presence of TR4.

- FHIA-01 (Goldfinger) resistant.
- FHIA-25 highly resistant.

These controls are essential to help put the disease reaction of new varieties into context.

Despite the relaxation of TR4 quarantine restrictions by the NT government in the NT in 2012, safeguards are firmly in place to ensure that TR4 trial sites, including this one, do not present a risk to the remainder of the industry.



Typical internal symptoms of TR4 in Cavendish.



The extra-dwarf Cavendish selection Dwarf Nathan has so far had no external symptoms of TR4. It may be a good candidate for mutagenesis to improve its agronomic features whilst retaining some TR4 resistance.



Millet grain colonised by the TR4 pathogen, like that shown in the photo, was added at the rate of 200 ml/ planting hole when the tissue cultured plantlets were planted in the field (Photo courtesy Wayne O'Neill, Queensland DAF).

Table - Varieties being screened at Coastal Plains Research Station, NT.

VARIETY	DESCRIPTION
Dwarf Nathan	Cavendish
Dwarf Parfitt Offtype	Cavendish
DPM25	Cavendish
Williams	Cavendish
GCTCV 105	Cavendish
GCTCV 215	Cavendish
GCTCV 217	Cavendish
GCTCV 218 (Formosana)	Cavendish
CJ19	Cavendish
FHIA-01 (Goldfinger)	Lady Finger hybrid
FHIA-02	Dessert type
FHIA-03	Dessert/cooking type
FHIA-18	Lady Finger hybrid
FHIA-25	Cooking type
FHIA-26	Ducasse hybrid
SH-3436	Highgate hybrid
SH-3641	Lady Finger hybrid
SH-3656	Lady Finger hybrid
SH-3748	Cooking type
SH-3362 Auto-tetraploid	Ploidy modified ♂ parent
SH-3142	Elite diploid ♂ parent
SH-3217	Elite diploid ♂ parent
SH-3362	Elite diploid ♂ parent
Senorita	Sucrier/Pisang Mas
Dwarf Ducasse	Dessert/cooking type
Pisang Gajih Merah	Saba cooking type
<i>Musa acuminata ssp. banksii</i>	Australian native

Safeguards include the use of dedicated footwear for the NT locations and decontamination of footwear of NT government staff and their government vehicles.

ON-GOING RESEARCH

The following valuable outcomes are expected from the trial.

- Determine the level of resistance in new Cavendish selections for possible deployment in the NT and in Queensland (should TR4 become widespread).
- Identify additional varieties for the mutagenesis work. Currently Dwarf Nathan is shaping as a likely candidate.
- Provide information on the disease reaction of hybrids and parental lines to the Honduran breeding program to promote the

development of more TR4 resistant varieties for evaluation and potential commercial deployment.

- Determine the disease reaction of niche varieties like Seniorita and others that may be developed alternative markets.

A second trial is scheduled to commence in 2018 as part of the new HIA/Banana industry project 'Improved plant protection for the banana industry'—BA16001, which will include more new Cavendish selections from Taiwan and hybrids from the French research centre CIRAD, Guadeloupe.

**This project has been funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia Limited using the research and development banana levy and funds from the Australian Government. This article was contributed by Jeff Daniels, a Principal Horticulturist with the Qld Dept of Agriculture and Fisheries; and NT Dept of Primary Industry and Resources researchers Dr Lucy Tran-Nguyen (banana team leader); Senior Plant Pathologist Dr Shari Mintoff; Technical Officer Dr Vu Tuan Nguyen and Horticulturist Chris Kelly.*

DURANBAH TRIAL SITE ENTERS NEW CHAPTER



NSW banana Industry Development Officer Matt Weinert with David Peasley at the Duranbah trial site.

The mission to find the most productive banana varieties with good disease resistance has entered a new stage at the Duranbah trial site in Northern New South Wales. Paula Doran reports.

Originally funded by the Banana Plant Protection Program (BPPP), and now by the new improved plant protection for the Australian banana industry, the Duranbah project is trialling semi-commercial plantings of three 'best bet' varieties that have been selected from the original 18 planted.

Led by David Peasley and Industry Development Officer Matt Weinert, the project is now focused on ripening behaviour and post-harvest handling, including temperature and storage requirements of these three varieties.

"Phase one of the project was about screening for disease, phase two was looking at yield/productivity and now phase three is focused on commercial trials so that we can tell growers how these plants grow best," Mr Peasley said.

"What we're looking at now is ripening behaviour for the three varieties, and then the post-harvest handling requirements, especially ripening temperature and storage," Mr Peasley said.

"We're looking at varieties for three different market segments. The first variety is for the fresh fruit market, and may be an option to replace Williams. It has a flavour similar to Cavendish. It is robust, has better leaf disease resistance and may not need

propping (it's got a good structure and doesn't blow over)," he said.

"The second variety is Panama Race 1 resistant, and could be a replacement for Lady Finger. It has a similar taste profile, but is much more productive. It also seems less attractive to birds and bats which feed on the flower nectar and damage the fruit in doing so. That particular variety produces a clean, heavy bunch with good conformation," Mr Peasley said.

The third variety being trialled would service the cooking sector and potentially the fresh market as well.

"The cooking market is neglected in Australia. And there's a particularly strong demand for a dual-purpose variety, suitable for fresh consumption and cooking," Mr Peasley said.

Work on the picturesque Duranbah block has long had the attention of subtropical growers, but more recently, it's come under the appreciative gaze of international industry representatives. Those who have visited are now looking forward to seeing the results, and agree the research will have international implications.



Current trials are now reaching commercial stage, where growers will be fully informed on how to grow the new varieties.

IMPACT OF THE BANANA PLANT PROTECTION PROGRAM

The Banana Plant Protection Program, led by Professor André Drenth—conducted from November 2011 to December 2016—was one of the banana industry’s largest research programs. Here, Prof Drenth takes a look at what was achieved during the course of the program.

The program objectives were to: improve detection, identification, containment or eradication for exotic diseases; import, maintain and store banana varieties in tissue culture; and screen varieties for resistance to Fusarium wilt R1 and TR4 and leaf diseases, in different field trials.

The program also aimed to improve the management of Yellow Sigatoka and weevil borers, and develop and maintain a research capacity to deal with emerging pest and disease issues.

The program developed a forward-looking approach for the screening of germplasm for a range of diseases. Field trials were established in Duranbah to screen for Fusarium wilt R1, leaf diseases and cold tolerance, South Johnstone for Agronomic performance, and the Northern Territory (NT) for screening for Fusarium wilt TR4.

New global links were established with overseas breeding and selection programs and new banana germplasm was obtained. A strategic decision strongly supported by industry was made to prepare the industry for TR4 and currently 28 varieties are screened for resistance to TR4 in the NT as part of the program. In addition, more material is on its way and, through new international collaboration, some material is being screened overseas prior to introduction into Australia.

Due to the closure of the Eagle Farm quarantine station, the program established and managed a new post-entry quarantine laboratory, with more extensive screening for pathogens. This is to ensure that the import of new germplasm does not lead to the introduction of new pathogens. The program also funded the importation of 30 new varieties from a range of different sources, and maintained existing and new germplasm in tissue culture to ensure the industry has access to pathogen-free planting material when required.

The program funded research on Banana Freckle and the development of a diagnostic test which can separate endemic Banana Freckle from the two known exotic species. Information and the tools developed by program scientists were vital in the detection and accurate identification of the Freckle outbreak in 2013 in the NT, and the eradication program that followed.

The diagnostic part of the program, led by Dr Juliane Henderson, was also instrumental in the identification of Fusarium wilt TR4 from Tully in 2015. The program provided further testing and guidance to get the TR4 containment program started. Ongoing support, in the form of diagnostics and advice, has been provided during the ongoing containment activities.

Monitoring Yellow Sigatoka as part of the program revealed resistance to strobilurin fungicides,

which significantly reduced the effectiveness of this group of fungicides in Far North Queensland. Field trials revealed differences in effectiveness between fungicide application programs consisting of fungicides compatible with mineral oil and the use of chlorothalonil. As a result, changes have been made to Yellow Sigatoka spray schedules in the North. New biological-based options for weevil borer control were trialled resulting in the commercial availability of a pheromone lure for weevils in Australia, while new easy-to-use trap designs are still under investigation.

Communication to the industry was done at many different levels, such as regular articles in Australian Bananas Magazine, the organisation of several field days and through presentations at roadshows and the Banana Congress. International exchanges involving bringing experts to Australia, and several workshops, were organised to improve national and international collaboration.

Training of the next generation of banana researchers has taken place through the involvement of 17 students in many aspects of the program. Overall, the program has had a major impact on several aspects of the banana industry and, as a result, most of the activities in this program are continued as two separate projects, one led by the University of Queensland, and the other by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries and the NT Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries.

**This project has been funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia Limited using the research and development banana industry levy and funds from the Australian Government.*

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ISRAELI TOUR TO GAIN INSIGHT INTO TR4



(From left) Col Rostedt, Banana Operations Manager from Costa, explains to Yuval Levi, Navot Galpaz and Stanley Freeman different aspects of on-farm biosecurity during a visit to Costa's Tully operation.

Israel boasts one of the most disease-free, pest-free banana industries in the world. However, with Panama Tropical Race 4 (TR4) at its doorstep, scientists from the Middle Eastern nation visited Australia to share their knowledge and gain first-hand insight into our own world-class biosecurity fight against TR4. By Sonia Campbell.

For the past decade, banana growers in Israel have watched nervously as Panama TR4 has spread to neighbouring countries, wreaking havoc on banana crops and putting their own industry in serious jeopardy.

Israeli researchers, Dr Navot Galpaz and Dr Stanley Freeman, along with banana extension specialist Yuval Levy, recently toured Australia on a fact-finding mission, to learn more about our world-leading biosecurity efforts and cutting-edge applied research into Panama disease.

Speaking during a visit to the South Johnstone Research Station in North Queensland, Dr Galpaz—a banana and mango researcher—said Panama TR4 was one of the biggest threats to Israel's banana trade, which is the highest producing horticultural sector in the country.

"We are highly concerned because our neighbouring countries, Jordan and Lebanon, they have had the disease (Panama TR4) for at least 10 years and it's very close to our plantations," Dr Galpaz said.

"We want to prepare ourselves for the (potential) scenario that we have to deal with (if Israel gets Panama TR4). You know it has spread all over the world. And, you (Australia) are leading the world in biosecurity, so it's the place to know (how to defend against it)," he said.

Dr Galpaz said currently Israel's best defence against Panama TR4 was increasing industry knowledge of the disease and awareness of its symptoms.

"Yuval is a banana extension specialist and his job

is to ensure the farmers know how to recognise the symptoms. We have (also) imported some TR4 resistant lines, to see how they perform in Israel, in case we need it," he said.

During their tour, the industry delegates got a first-hand look into the ground-breaking research and technology being used by Australian scientists at the forefront of our collaborative TR4 research and development approach.

This included visits to the Duranbah Research Station in New South Wales and a tour of banana trials at the Coastal Plain Research Station in the Northern Territory. They also met with staff from the University of Queensland, Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Northern Territory Department of Primary Industries and Resources.

Farm visits in Tully also allowed the group to see some of the strict biosecurity measures that are now in place across the majority of farms in the north, since TR4's first detection in the region in March 2015.

It was not the first trip to Australia for Dr Freeman – a banana and mango researcher with the Israeli Department of Plant Pathology and Weed Research. He had previously toured the country on the invitation of mango growers, keen to garner knowledge of his studies into mango diseases.

However, his latest trip allowed him to not only collaborate with industry experts in similar fields, but to gain some critical insights into Australia's ongoing efforts to contain Panama TR4, which he was quick to praise.

"I'm also involved in research of mango malformation (disease), which is a serious problem worldwide, and I've been out here twice already on the growers' invitation imparting my knowledge and getting updates from them on how they are trying to deal with the situation on mangoes."

"On the other hand, I'm trying to study what is happening in terms of (Panama) TR4 spread as a plant pathologist, also the diagnostic methods and updated methods that are being applied for detection of the pathogen."

Israel is fortunate to have one of the cleanest banana industries in the world, almost completely void of pests and diseases, thanks to a high standard of best practice and the country's intense sub-tropical climate.

"We have very dry summers and therefore the humidity conditions are also lower than here and anywhere. So I think that the diseases that occur in high humidity aren't really present in Israel, all the bacterial diseases.

"Anthracnose disease, for instance, doesn't exist (in Israel) and it is a problem here, and I think there are many other diseases (elsewhere), but we don't have many insect pests as well that are present here (in Australia)."

While diseases and pests may not be an issue, Israel's extreme climate has created many challenges for banana growers and industry researchers.

Extremely cold winters—including sub-zero temperatures, hail and frost—and severely dry, hot summers with intense radiation levels have seen the industry introduce shade netting and thermal covers over plantations as a means of environmental stress protection. So far the net trials have contributed to a 25% saving in irrigation levels during summer months, when shade housing is used.

RISK ASSESSMENT REVIEW OF BQ FIELD ACTIVITIES

Late last year, Biosecurity Queensland (BQ) commissioned Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) R&D Manager Rosie Godwin to conduct a risk assessment into the potential for contamination and disease spread from Panama TR4 Program field activities. The aim was to ensure that all risks associated with field activities had been properly identified and satisfactorily managed in order to reduce the chance of Panama spread to a very low level. Dr Godwin details the results of her review.

In my role as R&D Manager, the ABGC asked me to 'ground truth' the BQ risk assessment review. Over three days in September, I was able to accompany field staff as they conducted their work and I saw the way these risks were being managed in practice.

I found that BQ's risk assessment and risk management plan had been developed using standard procedures. It also contained detailed information about factors affecting disease incidence, prevalence and development. This information is important since it helps identify potential pathways of infection, the infectivity of different fungal material to cause Panama disease, and the persistence of different fungal parts in soil and the environment.

Potential contaminating structures of the fungal pathogen include hyphae/mycelia, conidia and the long-lasting chlamydospores. These structures can be carried in plant material and plant exudates/sap, which can, in turn, contaminate tools and equipment, people, clothing, boots and soil. Movement of these items can then contaminate other areas and other items.

Risk activities associated with field work that were identified in the assessment included:

- Movement of surveillance personnel onto a property
- Assessing a symptomatic plant for disease
- Movement of sampling personnel between sample sites on a property
- Sample collection, integrity and packaging
- Movement of surveillance personnel off a property
- Storage and maintenance of equipment

During my visit, I observed the surveillance and sampling staff and found them to be well trained, diligent and enthusiastic about their role in the containment of TR4. I found the TR4 program to be well resourced with good vehicles, field equipment, IT, consumables and staff had access to knowledge and reference material.

The use of a well-designed iPad application linked to a comprehensive database was a valuable asset to the program. This system enabled field staff to do their jobs more effectively by knowing what to do and when. This facilitated traceability and accountability, while the risk of human errors in transcribing data or record keeping was also greatly diminished.

BQ had decontamination protocols in place that were best currently known for TR4. It was difficult to think of ways to improve the procedures. At the time of the review, all but two of the 15 field staff were ChemCert trained. Surveillance vehicles were never taken onto farms and all personal and field equipment was carefully washed and decontaminated several times, especially when leaving properties. Procedures were under constant review, which enabled improvements to be made at any time. BQ was also conducting its own research into testing decontamination protocols with the aim of incorporating results as they became available.

At the time of my review, it was evident that BQ had implemented every precaution that could be practically undertaken to reduce the spread of TR4, thereby reducing the risk of spread through surveillance and sampling to a very low level. This should provide confidence to industry that the surveillance and sampling activities conducted by BQ were unlikely to cause the spread of Panama TR4.

"THIS SHOULD PROVIDE CONFIDENCE TO INDUSTRY THAT THE SURVEILLANCE AND SAMPLING ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED BY BQ WERE UNLIKELY TO CAUSE THE SPREAD OF PANAMA TR4."

HELP GUIDE THE FUTURE OF VARIETY DEVELOPMENT

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries Queensland (DAF) will soon launch a new project aimed at protecting the banana industry from pests and diseases, well into the future.

The Improved Plant Protection for the Banana Industry (BA16001) project is funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia (HIA), using the R & D Banana Industry Levy, and funds from the Australian Government, with additional contributions from DAF, the New South Wales Department of Primary Industry and Northern Territory Department of Primary Industries and Resources.

Part of its charter is to maintain the industry variety collection, manage the importation of new varieties from overseas, and negotiate with overseas breeding and evaluation programs, for access to their banana material. Once in Australia, selected varieties are made available to the industry and new varieties

are tested for productivity and pest and disease resistance. Those with best prospects are then made available to the industry for commercialisation.

This program is seeking expressions of interest from members of the banana supply chain with an interest in helping the Australian industry get the best value from their investment in variety importation, development and distribution.

If you want to be a member of this committee please provide a short summary of how you will contribute to this work on behalf of the Australian Banana Industry. Please send it to irene.kernot@daf.qld.gov.au by the 5th of May.

Contact Irene Kernot or Stewart Lindsay stewart.lindsay@daf.qld.gov.au if you have any questions about the role.

BANANA INDUSTRY CONGRESS 2017—

BUILDING UP FOR A GREAT EVENT

By Paula Doran

The Australian Banana Industry Congress is shaping up to be a great excuse to get off-farm and join other banana growers and industry representatives for a well-earned celebration of the achievements of the industry, and a positive reset for the future.

Focussing on the themes of sustainability, resilience and innovation, the hard-working team of volunteers has researched the best speakers to join our program for the biennial big event in bananas.

With Sydney as our host city this year, the venues alone are cause for excitement — the Sheraton on the Park is an opulent host for the majority of the proceedings, and just down the road, the Doltone will offer glamour and style as the destination for our much anticipated ball.

This year the congress coincides with the State of Origin game. As well as many other 'value adds', we'll have plenty of fun in store.

Following is a brief description of our speakers who will bring to you a diverse mix of inspiration and information. Add to that the retail tour and partner program, and you're bound to have an exceptional visit to Sydney this June 22–24.

The complete program of events and other conference information is available online at www.bananacongress.org.au



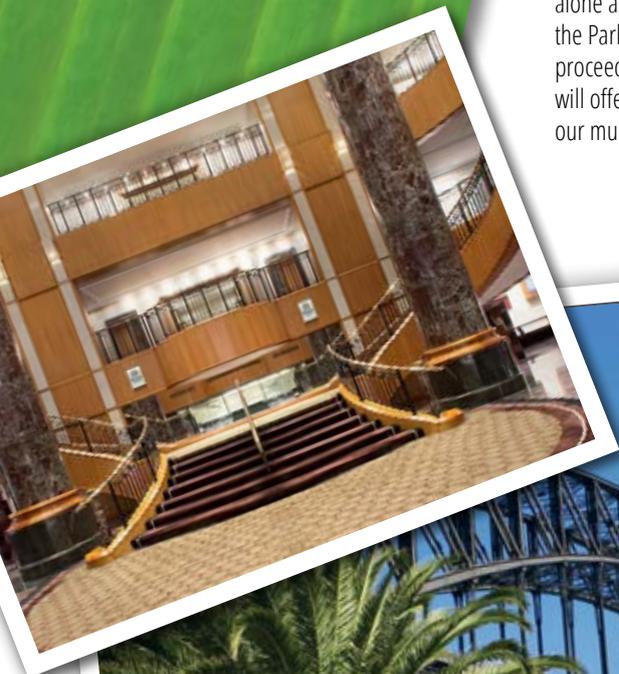
SPECIAL GUEST - COMEDIAN ANH DO

Anh Do joins us this year at the Banana Ball on Friday 23 June.

Born in Vietnam in 1977, Anh Do's family fled the country in 1980, landing in Australia after a harrowing journey. Since then, Anh has made a name for himself in his new country, starting his career at the age of 14 breeding tropical fish, and moving on to comedy and writing later in life.

Perhaps one of the most inspirational comedians and media personalities around, Anh is well known, not only in Australia, but in the United Kingdom and United States as well. He has hosted for some of the top leaders in the world, including Prime Ministers John Howard and Kevin Rudd, as well as some of the most illustrious global companies, including Telstra, McDonald's and Toyota.

More information: www.anhdo.com.au





PETER FITZSIMONS

Focus: Resilience
When: Thursday 22 June

Well-respected newspaper columnist, television presenter, historian and former rugby player, Peter Fitzsimons will be the first keynote speaker at Congress.

His presentation will form a rally cry to the industry through tales of grit and determination, from both his own experience, and those of folklore that fill the pages of his books.

More information: www.peterfitzsimons.com.au



DENNIS HOIBERG

Focus: Innovation/resilience
When: Thursday 22 June

Dennis Hoiberg is an organisational consultant with more than 30 years experience working with individuals, teams and businesses to achieve excellence and high performance.

His main area of consulting expertise is organisational change and effectiveness, bringing with him a practical and pragmatic style — one of his main acknowledged strengths. Dennis' unique insight into human psychology provides clients with a highly effective mechanism to understand, motivate and retain their networks

He has developed programs to accelerate the personal and professional development of individuals, including mentoring and coaching, and has most recently developed a suite of retreats to provide guests with a focused environment for reflection and action.

More: lessonslearntconsulting.com



DR FREDERIK BAKRY

Focus: Disease resistance/science/sustainability
When: Thursday 22 June

Dr Bakry is a world-renowned plant breeder, currently based at French research centre CIRAD. His career has been devoted to banana improvement programs across the world, using cross breeding, and cellular and molecular biotechnologies to incorporate disease resistance in newly selected varieties.



ELISA KING

Focus: Marketing
When: Thursday 22 June

With over 20 years working with Warner Music, Sony Pictures and now Horticulture Innovation Australia, Elisa King's passion has led her to build successful brands and products through marketing, research and understanding the consumer.

Elisa has demonstrated great ability to understand the needs of all stakeholders along the supply chain and develop solutions which see all parties work together to build relationships and maximise benefits in the fruit industry.

As marketing manager for the national banana crop, Elisa will join the congress program to speak on developments and achievements in marketing Australia's energy snack, and what's in place to stay ahead of the game.

More information: australianbananas.com.au



PROFESSOR RANDY PLOETZ

Focus: Resilience/Sustainability/research
When: Thursday 22 June

US based, Professor Ploetz is a world authority on tropical plant diseases, especially those of tropical fruit. He has edited four books and written several hundred book chapters, journal articles and other technical publications.

Professor Ploetz will speak at congress on the latest developments in the management of Panama TR4.



LISA CORK

Focus: Innovation/Sustainability
When: Thursday 22 and Friday 23 June

Part strategist and part trendsetter, Lisa Cork heads up Fresh Produce Marketing, a boutique global marketing agency that helps fresh produce clients create smart strategies and engaging brands that sell produce.

Known for her passion and tireless energy, Lisa cares deeply about her clients and their business goals. Her in-depth understanding of the fresh produce industry and trends impacting the industry enable her to see opportunities others don't see, resulting in innovative strategies and ideas that make a real difference to her clients' bottom line.

"In my business helping growers around the world, I love a good challenge. In Australia, bananas are one of the bestselling fruits. So the challenge is...can banana marketing be bolder or better to drive even more sales?"

Lisa's congress presentations will explore how understanding food and consumer trends can unlock new opportunities for Australian bananas.

More information: www.lisacork.com



ROSE HERCEG

Focus: Innovation
When: Thursday 22 June

Rose Herceg has built a career as one of Australia's most respected social futurists.

Her first business, Pophouse, launched in 1998, became known as Australia's best regarded company for innovation, social trends and business strategy.

As one of the most innovative thinkers in the country (as titled by Business Review Weekly Magazine), Rose will join the congress program to inspire us with her insights into future trends in consumption.



MICHAEL MCQUEEN

Focus: Innovation/Resilience
When: Saturday 24 June

Michael McQueen understands what it takes to thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

Widely recognised for having his finger on the pulse of business and culture, he has helped some of the world's best-known brands navigate change and stay ahead of the curve. As a leading specialist in demographic shifts, change management and future trends, Michael features regularly as a commentator on TV and radio, and has written four bestselling books.

In 2015, Michael was named Australia's Keynote Speaker of the Year and was inducted into the Speakers Hall of Fame.

More information: michaelmcqueen.net



ROB COOK

Focus: Resilience/Innovation/Sustainability
When: Saturday 24 June

There would be few people with more tenacity, courage and resilience than fourth-generation cattleman Rob Cook.

The former champion bull-rider and his wife Sarah, along with their sons Braxton and Lawson, lived and worked on Suplejack Downs Station in the remote Tanami Desert (Northern Territory). Their lives were changed forever when Rob was left a quadriplegic after a horrific helicopter crash whilst mustering cattle.

Not one to live life lying down, Rob has embarked on some amazing journeys, such as receiving a prestigious Nuffield scholarship and becoming the first man to cross the treacherous Tanami desert in his wheelchair.

Rob believes disability need never hold you back. Through the use of technology and innovation, the couple own and operate their own cattle breeding and fattening operation, which supplies their own butcher shop in Queensland.

Rob and Sarah's story will be one of the highlights for congress 2017.

More information: robcook.com.au

Video: www.abc.net.au/landline/content/2016/s4532191.htm

DR NANCY SCHELLHORN

Focus: Sustainability
When: Saturday 24 June

Dr Schellhorn is a principal research scientist at CSIRO, specialising in landscape scale pest management.

She believes increasing food productivity, while reducing our impact on the natural resource base, is one of the biggest challenges of our time. Dr Schellhorn has made several important contributions to this area through the collaborative development of the concept Pest Suppressive Landscapes, which provides a way of measuring, designing and managing agricultural landscape mosaics for productivity and biodiversity.

She will be sharing her insights, specific to the banana industry, as part of congress and will no doubt add a great point of interest for growers and whole-of-industry delegates.

More information: people.csiro.au/S/N/Nancy-Schellhorn



DR ALLAN DALE

Focus: Sustainability
When: Saturday 24 June

Dr Dale is a Professor of Tropical Regional Development at The Cairns Institute, James Cook University and an Honorary Professorial Research Fellow with Charles Darwin University's Northern Institute.

He will bring his myriad of expertise to the congress to speak about the future management of the Great Barrier Reef, particularly in relation to banana growers.

"While pressures facing the Great Barrier Reef might seem to present an impediment to agricultural industries, the banana industry has shown that securing the industry's environmental and social licence to operate can actually be good for business."





PETER KURUVITA

Focus: Culinary wizard
When: Friday 23 June

Peter Kuruvita joins congress as our 'celebrity chef' this year, and is bound to inspire the culinary genius in all of us!

A chef and restaurateur, author and TV presenter, Peter is well known for his time at Sydney's iconic Flying Fish Restaurant & Bar, which he opened in 2004, and successfully led the kitchen team as Executive Chef for eight years.

In 2008, Peter's love of the Pacific and passion for seafood led to the opening and continued success of Flying Fish at Sheraton Fiji Resort.

These days, Peter calls Noosa home, whilst juggling all the demands of an acclaimed and highly successful international chef.

More: www.peterkuruvita.com

ADDITIONAL ATTRACTIONS:

- Retail tour
- Partners' program
- Banana ball
- State of Origin night



CONGRESS PROGRAM

WEDNESDAY 21 JUNE 2017

15:00 - 18:00	Registration
	Welcome drinks
17:00 - 18:00	Banana Bar, Level 1, Sheraton on the Park
18:00 - Late	Sponsor evening - State of Origin

THURSDAY 22 JUNE 2017

07:30 - 17:30	Registration
09:00 - 10:15	
09:00 - 09:15	Official opening ceremony and presentation ABGC
09:15 - 09:45	True grit - rally cry to the industry focussing on key themes - sustainability, innovation, resilience Peter FitzSimons
09:45 - 10:15	Managing mindset. Honing 'self management' for success Dennis Hoiberg
10:15 - 10:45	Morning tea
10:45 - 12:30	
10:45 - 11:15	Banana Marketing - branding bananas Elisa King
11:15 - 12:00	Consumer trends and the emerging markets that will offer opportunity our industry Lisa Cork
12:00 - 12:30	Futurist Rose Herceg
12:30 - 12:45	Q&A Elisa King, Lisa Cork and Rose Herceg
12:45 - 13:30	Lunch & networking in the exhibition
13:30 - 15:00	
13:30 - 14:00	TR4 disease management - international research Professor Randy Ploetz
14:00 - 15:00	Science Speed Talks
15:00 - 15:45	Afternoon tea and interaction science session (displays/posters etc)
15:45 - 17:30	
15:45 - 16:15	International disease resistance research in banana plant breeding Dr Frédéric Bakry
16:15 - 17:10	Future of bananas in Australia Andre Drenth, Stewart Lindsay
17:10 - 17:30	Future of bananas panel Professor Randy Ploetz, Dr Frédéric Bakry, Andre Drenth, Stewart Lindsay
17:30 - 19:30	Networking reception in exhibition

FRIDAY 23 JUNE 2017

06:00 - 11:00	Excursion - Retail tour
10:00 - 17:00	Registration
11:15 - 13:00	
11:15 - 12:15	Consumer Focus panel Lisa Cork, Warwick Hope, Woolworths and Nielsen
12:15 - 13:00	Cooking demonstration Peter Kuruvita
13:00 - 15:00	Lunch & networking in the exhibition
14:00 - 15:00	High Tea, Sheraton on the Park Optional extra for accompanying persons
19:00 - Late	Banana Industry Ball including Awards of Honour Doltone House, Hyde Park Anh Do - Guest of Honor

SATURDAY 24 JUNE 2017

08:30 - 13:00	Registration
08:30 - 09:30	Recovery breakfast in exhibition
09:30 - 10:30	
09:30 - 10:00	Sustainability/ Environment Professor Allan Dale
10:00 - 10:30	How does the industry stay relevant in the fresh produce fight? Michael McQueen
10:30 - 11:00	Morning tea
11:00 - 12:15	
11:00 - 11:30	How to build sustainable landscapes Nancy Shellhorn
11:30 - 12:00	Resilience Rob Cook
12:00 - 12:15	Congress close and wrap up
12:15 - 13:00	Lunch

DREAMING BIG... BROTHERS IN ARMS BUILDING BANANA EMPIRE



The newest additions to the NSW banana industry, Zack and Ethan McKeever.

In a region that has been hit by its fair share of challenges, Paula Doran meets two inspiring brothers who are determined to break into the New South Wales banana industry and make things work.

Ethan (21) and Zack McKeever (25) are two Murwillumbah locals who have their sights firmly set on building empires from bananas.

The brothers grew up on a poultry farm in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales (NSW). And, while they both work in various jobs in town, they are quickly chipping away at bananas.

“On both sides of our families our grandparents had banana farms,” says Zack. “Unfortunately, though, they sold those farms.”

As with any farming/horticulture sector, it’s a difficult and expensive job to break into from scratch, but one gets a sense these two have got it covered.

With a quiet determination, they have leased two blocks outside Murwillumbah and begun planting from bits and suckers which have been sourced from a Coffs Harbour block. Their crop of choice is Dwarf Lady Fingers and, thanks to a dedicated ‘after-hours’ farm focus, which works around their various day jobs, they now have 85 plants in the ground.

Travel by car to their new block with them and you soon get a sense of the chemistry and camaraderie involved in their shared dream. They both enjoy different aspects of the farm management; they agree, so they work well together. And they take great joy in their budding banana business.

“Ethan’s got banana sap on all his clothes—we need to get him a new banana cap, one for the block, and one for special occasions that doesn’t have sap on it,” Zack laughs.

Behind the banter though, is a pair of young men who are willing to put in the hard yards to get things done.

“We certainly have different long-term ambitions, but we want to start this right and do things well,” says Ethan.

It’s been a game of patience to get from the idea of becoming banana growers, to the first planting. Initially, they began by planting in their backyard at home. Two years ago they attended a field day at the Duranbah trial site into varietal disease resistance, and they got a boost that sent them more firmly towards growth.

“The growers who were there were just so friendly and welcoming,” they agree. “And we got to know David Peasley (researcher) and Matt Weinert (industry development officer—NSW Department of Primary Industries) there too.

“We really wouldn’t have been able to get far without their support,” they say as they stand overlooking their budding banana empire in the cane field country of Murwillumbah.

“David Pike in Coffs Harbour provided us with the suckers for the new planting, free of charge, as long as we went and dug them ourselves. He did need a bit of desuckering done so it helped all of us out. Without Matt putting us onto these suckers, and his help on a huge range of issues, we would not have been able to do banana farming from scratch.”

Long term, the McKeever brothers would like to move into transport and a sustainable ripening business.

To the side of their banana block they’ve built the Taj Mahal of chook pens and have a steady business selling eggs to locals.

“Whatever we do, we will be focussed on good customer service, and looking after people,” says Ethan.

The McKeever’s have Williams Cavendish at one block (estimate 2100) and Dwarf Lady Fingers at another block (estimate 2100) and some of both at home, for approximately 4500 stools in total.

NT FRECKLE UPDATE

Banana Freckle (*Phyllosticta cavendishii*) was detected in the Northern Territory (NT) in 2013, and a response has been underway since then. Banana Freckle affects non-Cavendish and Cavendish banana plants and was found widely across the greater Darwin area. It was also found in five isolated regional locations in NT's Top End. Surveillance of the areas of the NT outside the declared Banana Freckle quarantine zones showed these areas to be free of Banana Freckle. By Rosie Godwin.

The current National Banana Freckle Eradication program (NBFEP) has been in progress since October 2014, and is of major importance to the protection of Australia's \$600 million commercial banana industry and those who rely on it for their livelihood. The eradication program is comprised of four phases:

- Phase 1. Destruction and removal of all bananas within prescribed zones (Oct 14–Apr 15).
- Phase 2. Banana host-free period, for at least six months, including a full wet season (May 15–Apr 16).
- Phase 3. Controlled reintroduction of banana hosts (sentinel plants) and ongoing monitoring over 12 months. Replanting of disease-free tissue culture bananas under permit with targeted surveillance for Banana Freckle (May 16–Apr 17).

- Phase 4. Assessment of proof of freedom (May 17–Apr 18).

All phases involve targeted surveillance inside and outside quarantine zones for Banana Freckle, movement restrictions, compliance, enforcement and tracing.

THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE NATIONAL BANANA FRECKLE ERADICATION PROGRAM (NBFEP) (AT 20 JAN 2017):

Phase 3, the 12-month sentinel planting phase of clean banana material, is currently underway in the NT quarantine zones and is due for completion on 30 April 17. Three-thousand properties in the six quarantine zones have been progressively receiving banana plants from the program out of a pool of over 9000 properties which had banana plants removed in Phase 1 of the program. The sentinels were distributed mostly to private properties, schools, churches, other public places and remote Indigenous communities.

In addition to program-supplied sentinel plants, 242 properties in the NT quarantine zones have purchased banana plants under permit from approved plant nurseries in the Darwin area. As part of the permit conditions for property owners, all banana plants in the quarantine zones are being inspected for Banana Freckle by Program Plant Health Inspectors.

Banana Freckle movement restrictions are still in place. The introduction of banana plant material into quarantine zones and the movement of banana

plant material within or out of quarantine zones is prohibited unless authorised by permit. This includes any proposed movement or cultivation of banana plants by horticulturalists, nurseries or researchers, which cannot be undertaken without permission and a permit. The program is working with growers, nurseries and researchers on a case-by-case basis, in setting permit conditions, monitoring banana plants and ensuring compliance with the permit.

There have been 124 detections of unauthorised banana plants in declared quarantine zones but no detection of the Banana Freckle on any banana plants since November 2015. The NT is free of Banana Freckle. However, surveillance for the disease in quarantine zones will continue until formal area freedom is declared.

Banana growers, householders and banana production nurseries, especially in northern Australia, are reminded to check their banana plants and report any signs of Banana Freckle to the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881. If you live in the NT, you can call the Banana Freckle Hotline on 1800 771 163.

COST SHARING

The NBFEP remains on track to achieve eradication in 2017. Collection of the Emergency Plant Pest Response (EPPR) levy, which is funding the banana industry's contribution to the eradication response, began on the 1 July 2015 and will cease when no longer required. This is estimated to be at the end of 2020.

GROWERS URGED TO START FERAL PIG TRAPPING

Banana growers in northern Queensland are being urged to start a feral pig trapping program to reduce the risk of spread of Panama disease tropical race 4.

Biosecurity Queensland's Acting Panama TR4 Program Leader Rhiannon Evans said there had been reports of increased pig sightings and activity on farms in recent weeks.

"Because Panama disease tropical race 4 is a soil borne fungus, it can be spread by animals when mud sticks to their feet and fur," Ms Evans said.

"Even though the infected property at Tully has been taken out of production, growers shouldn't be complacent about on-farm biosecurity and should manage all disease pathways, including potential spread by feral animals.

"Starting a well-planned trapping program in conjunction with neighbouring farms is an effective way to manage feral pig populations and to reduce the risk of spread of Panama disease tropical race 4," Ms Evans said.

Ms Evans said there had also been reports from growers of feral pig hunters entering farms without permission.

"While we acknowledge that feral pig hunting is a popular recreational activity for many people in the region, hunters trespassing on private land may be putting banana growers at risk."

The Panama TR4 Program, in collaboration with key agencies, has launched a feral pig trapping guide for banana growers on the Cassowary Coast.

"A joint trapping program between neighbours

has been proven to be a much more effective way of managing feral pig numbers than hunting with dogs. There are a number of resources available locally for growers to start trapping pigs on their land."

Cassowary Coast Regional Council has pig traps and hog hoppers for loan and information on how to use them. Hunting with dogs in national parks is not permitted unless it is part of an authorised pest management plan implemented by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS). If your farm is adjacent to a national park, QPWS can assist with traps and expert advice.

The feral pig trapping guide can be downloaded from the website www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au under 'Panama disease' or call 13 25 23.

GROWER ASSISTANCE TO IMPROVE REEF QUALITY



Picture provided by Tourism and Events Queensland.

More growers are about to benefit from Commonwealth funding designed to assist growers to make on-farm practice changes that reduce their environmental footprint on the Great Barrier Reef. Sonia Campbell reports on Reef Trust III and future funding available through this significant project.

The latest round of banana water quality reef grants was awarded by the Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) last month, as part of the Federal Government's Reef Trust III program.

Almost \$130,000 was granted to 10 successful applicants to assist growers in making on-farm nutrient and sediment management practice changes, to deliver improved water quality outcomes to the Great Barrier Reef.

The grants are funded through Reef Trust III and delivered as part of the Reef Alliance project 'Growing a Great Barrier Reef', which is a partnership between agricultural industry, regional National Resource Management (NRM) bodies and facilitated by the Queensland Farmers Federation (QFF), with a common goal of securing the future health of the Great Barrier Reef.

Applications were open from 1 November until 16 December last year, and grants were then scored by a selection panel in late January, with ABGC then advising successful and unsuccessful applicants.

ABGC Reef Team Leader Sarah Simpson said the ABGC was working in partnership with Terrain NRM to administer the grants, utilising Terrain's many years of experience in delivering reef grants in the Wet Tropics region.

"ABGC received a large amount of interest from

banana growers in both the Wet Tropics and Cape York regions, with more applications received than there were funds available," Ms Simpson said.

"In total, out of 19 applications, there were 10 successful banana water quality grant recipients located in both the Wet Tropics and Cape York."

"These successful growers will be implementing improved on-farm nutrient and sediment practice changes in 2017."

ABGC Industry Strategy Manager Michelle McKinlay said the majority of monies would be spent by growers on funding automated fertigation systems, to control and reduce fertilizer applications.

"Automated systems allow growers to put on smaller amounts of nutrients more often, which assists in minimising nutrient run-off and leaching," Ms McKinlay said.

"Another successful applicant will purchase a specialist slasher, while another will buy a spreader, all with the purpose of maintaining grassed inter-rows which help to minimise soil loss from their farms," she said.

To be eligible for grants, growers must have recently completed or revisited their Banana Best Management Practices (BMP).

The maximum amount that could be applied for

in the latest round was \$15,000, with the growers contributing a minimum of 50% of the total amount of the funded project.

"The grants are significant and, in some cases, can allow growers to carry out improved on-farm practices that they otherwise may not have been able to afford," Ms McKinlay said.

By 30 June 2019, the 'Growing a Great Barrier Reef' project will have invested \$45.6 million to support almost 1200 farmers and graziers to improve their practices across 33 Great Barrier Reef catchments.

The program targets four agriculture areas:

- Horticulture (bananas and other)
- Sugarcane
- Grazing
- Broad acre cropping

There will be an additional round of grants in 2018, which will be open for applications in late 2017.

If you are interested in accessing the grants program or need extension support for on-farm nutrient and sediment practice changes, please contact Sarah Simpson on 0437 241 687 or email sarah@abgc.org.au.

The Reef Trust Phase III: Reef Alliance 'Growing a Great Barrier Reef' project is a partnership between agricultural industry, regional NRM bodies and facilitated by the Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF), with a common goal of securing the future health of the Great Barrier Reef. The Reef Alliance Program is funded by the Australian Government Reef Trust.

BROTHERS USE GRANT TO IMPROVE GROUND COVER



Ben and Matt Abbott will use reef funding to improve ground cover on their Wangan banana farm.

Banana farming brothers Matt and Ben Abbott, of Rabbit Organics, will use funding received in the latest round of Reef Trust grants to trial an under-tree slasher, that has never previously been used in the banana industry.

The slasher is fitted with a pivoting head, which will move in and out from a sensing arm between the banana trees to help maintain full groundcover vegetation over the entire paddock.

“The slasher is out of a vineyard application, they use it to mow in between the grapevines, but we are going to make it work with bananas,” Ben Abbott said.

“We mow the inter-row now, but we want to mow between the trees as well and the slasher will allow us to do both in one pass, to maintain vegetation around the banana trees in addition to the inter-row,” he said.

“We already match nutrient demand to crop use so this is a further measure to improve water quality leaving our farm. Water quality off-farm will be further improved by maintaining vegetation on the row space, in addition to the inter-row.”

Ben said maintaining full groundcover vegetation on their Wangan farm would have multiple benefits.

- Filter out nutrients from surface run-off water, thereby reducing nutrient loss.
- Stabilise soil; the vegetation roots will stop the soil from eroding, thereby reducing sediment loss.
- Halve the passes per inter-row, which will help reduce sediment loss, compaction and therefore reduce the impact on the off-farm environment.

Matt Abbott said assistance available under the Reef Trust program was invaluable to growers who

were constantly searching for ways to improve practices which reduce sediment and nutrient run-off.

Previously, the Abbott’s have used Federal Government reef grant funding to purchase an automated fertigation system, to better control their nutrient application on their other, nearby banana property, at Mena Creek.

“The big thing with the grants is they allow growers to change on-farm practices that improve water quality, where costs are prohibited,” Matt Abbott said.

“Everybody wants to make improvements to their practices, but because of the costs generally associated with it, they may not necessarily do it. So the funding makes it affordable.”



ABGC WELCOMES NEW EXTENSION OFFICER

Dale Bennett’s recent appointment as a Reef Extension Officer with the Australian Banana Growers’ Council (ABGC) was a perfect fit.

Ms Bennett, who is studying a Masters of Science in Natural Resource Management, has a genuine interest in working with growers to help protect the Great Barrier Reef, and saw the Reef Extension Project as a means to “make a difference”.

“It is a fantastic opportunity to work within a sector of the horticultural industry that is innovative and always striving to make improvements to their practices,” Ms Bennett said.

“I am excited to be a part of a project that is aimed at improving water quality on the Great Barrier Reef. So far I have really enjoyed working with growers, and love having a job where I can contribute to a better outcome in some way.”

CHANGING OF THE GUARD



L-R ABGC board members Tom Day, Leon Collins, Ben Franklin, Stephen Lowe, Jade Buchanan and Paul Inderbitzin. (Absent Stephen Spear).

The departure of Doug Phillips as Chair of the Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) in November signalled a significant changing of the guard for the council.

Mr Phillips stood down from the helm during the ABGC's annual general meeting in Tully on 30 November, after five years serving in the role.

As most would be aware, ABGC Deputy Chair Stephen Lowe was elected the new Chair during the

ABGC's quarterly board meeting at Mission Beach the following day.

The Executive Committee was rounded off with North Queensland Director Ben Franklin taking over as Deputy Chair, and New South Wales grower Stephen Spear appointed Treasurer.

Two new faces also joined the ranks. Innisfail banana grower Jade Buchanan from LMB Farms, and Tully grower Leon Collins were both appointed

to the new board during the council's annual general meeting.

They filled the vacancies left by the departure of Mr Phillips and former director Steve Lizzio.

New South Wales director and former ABGC Treasurer Peter Molenaar also retired from the board.

NSW STALWART STEPS DOWN



Peter Molenaar has stepped down from the ABGC, after a significant contribution in which he held the role of treasurer, and participated heavily in the leadership of the biennial banana congress.

Known as one of the quiet achievers on the ABGC-board, outgoing New South Wales (NSW) grower Peter Molenaar, said time spent on the ABGC executive had been satisfying.

The Northern NSW banana grower, with over three decades in the industry, said he enjoyed the 'holistic approach' afforded by participation on the national grower representative body.

"There were obviously challenges, and there will be challenges in the future," he said.

"In my area (sub-tropical region) we need to find new, disease-resistant varieties, for example. Another challenge will be the way in which we keep control of Bunchy Top.

"Marketing our product is always a challenge. We have to keep up with the trends on social media and integrate the benefits of bananas to consumers by bringing it back to good health."

Mr Molenaar said the industry should be proud of its ability to continually face adversity, particularly in regard to the containment of Panama TR4. "We've faced these challenges and come out the other end with positive outcomes."

NEW PASSION FOR RETIRING CHAIR



By Sonia Campbell

When Doug Phillips took on the role of Chair of the Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC), he had no idea the challenges that would lie ahead.

He stepped into the role at a time when growers in Queensland's far north were still getting over the devastation of Cyclone Yasi, and the industry in Western Australia continued to recover from the Carnarvon floods.

And then came the big one—Panama Tropical Race 4 (TR4).

"I could never have predicted the challenges the industry would face," Mr Phillips recounted.

"I thought I was just going to go in there and do my little bit and contribute as I could, and go on my merry way. But even from the start it was pretty intense and it didn't slow down from there," he said.

By and large, Mr Phillips said he enjoyed his time in the role, despite some "very difficult and challenging times".

"Were there challenging times where I thought, 'What the heck am I doing...?' Absolutely. But I

think, eventually, I'll look back on those challenges and probably be proud of what I achieved as well."

During the Panama TR4 outbreak, Mr Phillips was thrown deep in the media spotlight, becoming the overnight 'face' and 'voice' of the banana industry.

This, he said was a particularly difficult time, given the critical decisions and actions that needed to be taken to try and protect and guide Australia's banana industry at large.

"It took its toll. But I do believe we did the right thing. There were many difficult decisions to make and the results weren't easy to achieve," he said.

"I don't think of myself as a natural leader. I don't think I necessarily did too much different to what a lot of other people would do in that situation. I just happened to be the person in that position at the time."

A humble statement, given Mr Phillips' contribution to the banana industry was officially recognised at Queensland's AgFuture Awards in Brisbane last November.

During the presentation, State Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries Bill Byrne described Mr Phillips as having an "extraordinary and profound

impact" on Queensland and the Australian banana industry through "exceptional leadership and vision".

"Most recently, Doug has navigated a path for banana growers and the industry in the turbulent aftermath of the outbreak of Panama TR4 in North Queensland," Mr Byrne said. "Doug's continued leadership has ensured the integrity, sustainability and resilience of the industry."

Since retiring from the ABGC, Mr Phillips has turned his attention back to his farm, where he still grows bananas, but recently planted his first passionfruit plantation to "fill the void" left from departing the board.

He believes the banana industry has a strong future ahead and will continue to be provided with solid leadership from the ABGC.

"I think there is always going to be challenges but the industry will continue to be strong and dominant into the future."

"I certainly have every confidence in Steve Lowe, the current board of directors and the industry at large to continue to ensure a strong future for all Australian banana growers."

PINT-SIZED GM PACKS A PUNCH



Kim Mastin revs up staff to get them energised for their working day.

By Sonia Campbell

When Tablelands banana grower Dennis Howe was looking to employ someone to help manage his family's ever-growing agribusiness, he took a punt on pint-sized accountant Kim Mastin.

She was 27, had little background in agriculture, but had an honesty and directness that Mr Howe admired.

Seven years later, Kim is the Howe Farming Group's trusted general manager (GM) and has helped Mr Howe steer his second-generation farming company from a humble family-based operation into one of the country's largest agricultural producers it is today.

"I guess, if you go back to that period (eight years ago), we didn't really have any structure within the organisation," Mr Howe said.

"We needed to go from family farm to a professional enterprise and Kim has helped us transition into that."

Initially employed by Howe Farming as an accountant, within six months Ms Mastin was promoted to GM.

While always striving towards improved productivity rates, Ms Mastin's main focus was on implementing systematic workplace health and safety procedures, and helping the company adopt a formal organisational structure, appointing managers and supervisors in each company sector.

"I came on board when there were about 200 employees and these guys, at the time, took a gamble to back me," Ms Mastin said.

"There was obvious directions where the company was going and we needed to get things up and running like policies and procedures and certain structures had to be put in place."

Today, Howe Farming—which has been operating for the past 40 years—employs close to 400 staff, making it the largest agribusiness on the Atherton

Tablelands. Bananas account for more than 70% of their production, with avocados, coffee, sugar cane and blueberries making up the remaining crops.

Ms Mastin's approach to her job is not always typical. The mother of three young boys engages her workforce through several unique team building exercises, including yoga stretching techniques and weekly "toolbox talks".

"I try to look outside the square. On a Monday morning we get rewed up and warmed up and ready for the week. We have a toolbox talk every Monday, and that explains what the expectations are for that week and anything that they need to focus on. I think communication's a big thing. So everyone is clear on what the instructions are and what they have to do and I suppose that comes back to productivity as well."

Ms Mastin's mindset works in well with Howe Farming, which has been at the forefront of innovation and diversification in the agricultural industry for the past 20 years.

Last year, the group purchased Yuruga Nursery on the Atherton Tablelands, along with its parent company Clonal Solutions Australia, as the company's focus grows towards increased clonal propagation and research and development of disease-resistant banana varieties.

"We've always used tissue culture for bananas from our very first crop. In fact, in 20 years we've only ever planted one paddock using bits. But we recently acquired Yuruga Nursery and Clonal Solutions, because of the tissue culture lab, just to secure its future."

"A group of us are actively involved in a research program overseas investigating strains with resistance to TR4 (Panama Tropical Race 4).

"Currently, one of the more tolerant (TR4 varieties) has come from a traditional breeding program in Honduras. It's a huge task to breed a new variety, it can't be done in Australia with our labour costs, because it is very labour intensive."

Mr Howe and Ms Mastin said the continued stabilisation of the industry in the wake of the Far Northern Panama TR4 outbreak would continue to be a large focus for growers.

And, you get the feeling this dynamic duo will take it all in their stride. Although daily work-life isn't always smooth sailing for the pair, who admit they don't always see eye-to-eye.

"We have our moments, but I think we compliment each other in many ways," Ms Mastin said.

Mr Howe adding, "She's pig headed. Very pig headed at times. But she's totally trustworthy and she's treated the business like it's her own."

Australian Banana Growers' Council congratulates Dennis Howe for receiving the inaugural 'Farming Legend' award at the ABC Rural and Kondinin Group Australian Farmer of the Year Awards last year.



Tablelands banana grower Dennis Howe with his trusted GM Kim Mastin.



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APP-SOLUTELY A BREEZE

A growing number of Australian banana growers have discovered just how quick and easy record keeping can be thanks to the specially-designed *BetterBunch* app, launched last year.

Developed by the Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) and funded by the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP), the app allows growers to easily store and retrieve on-farm data, while also helping them to reduce their environmental footprint.

The *BetterBunch* app has some handy features, including a budgeting tool where a grower can set a nutrient budget with an alarm that will sound when the grower goes over their allocated budget. The information stored in the app can also assist with Freshcare compliance and other food safety audits.

The app was designed to complement the banana industry's Best Management Practice (BMP) Guidelines. It allows growers to easily record data relating to their BMP, including application and calibration schedules for fertilisers and chemicals, weather conditions, irrigation scheduling and planting records. All, in the palm of their hands.

The new mobile phone technology can be easily downloaded onto smartphones, computers and tablets.

ABGC Extension Officer Robert Mayers, who was instrumental in the development of *BetterBunch* said he was pleased with the number of growers using the new technology since its launch last September.

"Growers covering more than 2700 hectares of banana farming area have learned how to use the *BetterBunch* app," Mr Mayers said. "The response has been great. One grower said, "'I've been wanting something like this for a long time!'"

"We are still tweaking the program, as we see changes that are needed. But the things that we are modifying will make it even easier to use."

Mr Mayers said he'd like to see more growers making use of the app so they could see the benefits of the program and how easy it was to use.

"Some growers may think it is too hard to use, but the idea was to make it simple and easy to use to save the growers time, and we definitely have achieved this."

Michelle McKinlay, Industry Strategy Manager with the Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) said the app had multiple benefits for growers, significantly taking the guess work out of how much fertiliser they applied.

"We are extremely confident that this free app can save growers some money by reducing fertilizer costs and also improve the quality of water leaving their farms," Ms McKinlay said.

"This app can help banana growers reduce their impact on the Great Barrier Reef, by assisting in the management of environmentally-sustainable farming practices."

Growers who would like to use the app must have first completed their BMP. If you don't have mobile service on your farm, you can still use the *BetterBunch* app. You simply record your data in the field and then once you are back in range you sync the phone to your computer.

Mr Mayers is available to assist growers if they need help with their BMP or the *BetterBunch* app. A *BetterBunch* instructional video can be viewed on the ABGC's website—www.abgc.org.au. For further information please contact Mr Mayers via email robert.mayers@abgc.org.au or phone 0447 000 203.



Adrian Edgerton was one of the first to trial the *BetterBunch* app before its official industry launch last September and says it is just what the industry had needed.

The Innisfail grower said he was keen to volunteer to test the time-saving device as his family had been searching for a more technically-advanced record-keeping system for some time.

"It is something that my brother and I had been looking for. Something to make it easier to do our data entry for chemicals and everything else," Mr Edgerton said.

The Edgerton family have been using the app for a little over a year and credit it with helping them streamline their daily data entry and recording, saving hours in general record keeping.

"Sometimes you've got a minute on you and you've got your

phone and you can put all your entries in the app there-and-then. It is very handy."

"In the next couple of months we've got to do our Freshcare audit and when that comes around everything is already done. We just have to log on through the computer and press print and it will print out all of our chemical entries for us."

Mr Edgerton encouraged other growers to try the technology and experience the benefits.

"It's definitely easy to use, it's just that some older people may have it in their heads that it's new technology and they can't use it. But I think just about everyone I know has a smartphone and they get on Facebook, so if you can work out Facebook, you can work the app."

"You've just got to give it a go."

"THE RESPONSE HAS BEEN GREAT. ONE GROWER SAID, 'I'VE BEEN WANTING SOMETHING LIKE THIS FOR A LONG TIME.'"

NEW FREQUENCY OF PANAMA TR4 SURVEILLANCE

Now that two years have passed since the initial detection of Panama disease Tropical Race 4 (TR4) in Queensland, and with the only confirmed TR4 infested property now out of operation, Biosecurity Queensland's Panama TR4 Program has reviewed its surveillance program for banana farms in north Queensland.

The frequency of surveillance on commercial banana farms has been reduced, to reflect the reduced risk, that Panama TR4 has spread to other farms in the region.

Property owners, managers and staff should all be on the lookout for symptomatic plants and promptly report them to Biosecurity Queensland (BQ) on 13 25 23. The Panama TR4 Program has a suite of resources for growers to help identify disease symptoms. If you're unsure, give BQ a call and they can offer advice and assistance. Under no circumstances should growers or farm workers

cut a suspect plant. This may spread fungal spores to other areas of the farm, where they can survive in the soil without a host plant for up to 40 years. Mark the plant with flagging tape or spray paint and make a note of its location. BQ's professionally trained surveillance staff and field pathologists will inspect the plant and take a sample if required.

Prompt reporting of plants with symptoms of Panama disease tropical race 4 can extend the viability of your farm. With the recent commencement of the *Biosecurity Act 2014*, all Queenslanders are now required to take an active role in managing biosecurity risks under their control. Banana growers operating in the presence of Panama disease tropical race 4 have a legal obligation to take reasonable and practical steps to minimise biosecurity risks. It is an offence if suspect plants are not reported. For more information about your legal obligations visit www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au and search under 'Panama disease'.

**This article was submitted by the Queensland Government Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.*



Biosecurity Queensland's Panama TR4 Program will now be surveying properties less frequently.

NEW WASH-DOWN DESIGNS

Cleaning, washing and decontaminating vehicles, machinery and equipment is vital to mitigate the spread of Panama disease Tropical Race 4 (TR4). For this purpose, Biosecurity Queensland's Panama TR4 Program have released wash-down bay designs to help banana farmers further protect their properties against this potentially devastating disease.

The wash-down designs were developed by a leading environmental consultancy firm contracted by the Panama TR4 Program. After extensive research and consultation with growers, industry, government and other key stakeholders, the consultants identified two wash-down designs as the most effective for growers to combat Panama TR4. The wash-down facilities cater for two access points on a farm:

1) a manual wash-down facility that requires a three step process of scrubbing to remove all soil and plant material, washing and disinfection for the farming activity zone or 'dirty' exit point where high risk vehicles machinery and equipment exit the farming activity zone

2) a shuttle/automated drive-through disinfection spray system for the separation zone or 'clean' access point for low risk vehicles that access areas such as packing sheds and supply receival areas.

Acting Panama TR4 Program Leader Rhiannon Evans said that although the designs were a guide to best practice and could be easily integrated into current farming practices, every situation was different.

"Growers should take into consideration the requirements for their individual properties and tailor a wash-down facility to suit. In some cases,

a wash-down facility may not be practical and restricting vehicle access or redirecting traffic through a farm zoning system may be a better solution," said Ms Evans.

The designs were developed based on a number of principles that included how easy the wash-down bays were to implement into current farming practices, safety, cost, practicality, flexibility and compliance with both biosecurity standards and environmental legislation.

"Both wash-down designs include options for growers that suit their needs and budget. There are many property owners who have already introduced innovative and effective biosecurity procedures on their farms at a nominal cost.

"Ultimately, it's about growers implementing some level of biosecurity that will protect their property from the disease. Doing something is better than doing nothing at all," Ms Evans added.

A copy of the wash-down designs will be mailed to all growers in the region, or you can download the designs from the Biosecurity Queensland website www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au.

This article was submitted by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.



Wash-down bay designs released by the Panama TR4 Program will help banana growers further protect themselves from Panama disease tropical race 4.

THE IMPACT OF AMAZON'S FORAY INTO FRESH FOODS

Retail analyst, Tristan Kitchener discusses the anticipated entry of Amazon into Australia, what their grocery and fresh foods offering could mean for the supermarket industry, and the question marks for producers.

Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon, says that the reason Amazon is successful is because they've had three big ideas that they've stuck with: 'put the customer first, invent and be patient'. However, if you're a retailer, another of his sayings might make sitting comfortably a thing of the past: 'your margin is our opportunity'.

Amazon is valued at over \$350 billion and is disrupting businesses across a wide range of sectors. Its appetite to improve the customer experience through supply chain integration is unprecedented—as illustrated by their recent US\$1.5 billion airport acquisition and decision to lease 40 planes to guarantee on-time deliveries.

Through their 'Amazon Go' concept store in Seattle, Amazon is looking to revolutionise grocery shopping; consumers just walk in, select the products they want and walk out, with the payment fully automated. This stands Amazon in good stead as it looks to provide a full online grocery offer in a market where its rivals are struggling to differentiate their brands.

The unique challenge for Amazon will be how they will adapt their business model in Australia, considering the high cost of labour and land, large freight distances and being an unknown to consumers in grocery retailing.

WHAT IS AMAZON?

Amazon was founded in 1994 as an online bookstore that diversified into selling electronics, video and music downloads, cloud computing and, in 2018, Jeff Bezos is planning to launch suborbital human flight into space!

The marketplace model allows open-access for all consumers and businesses, with simple sleek websites and superior customer service. Efficiency savings are reinvested into lower prices and a wider range, to provide further value to consumers and increase customer satisfaction. This, in turn, increases Amazon's loyalty and brand strength, and ultimately enables Amazon to 'own the customer' and have pulling-power with suppliers.

Australia is moving to a market that favours the hard discounters, ALDI and Costco. Amazon will provide consumers with hard-discounter prices, high quality private label brands, and ranges that are larger than Coles and Woolworths. And, of course, the convenience of online shopping.

WILL AMAZON FRESH SUCCEED IN AUSTRALIA?

That's the multi-billion-dollar question. Few details are known about the model Amazon might use in Australia to deliver a fresh food offering (Amazon Fresh).

Amazon is largely geared to moving boxes of ambient products, and not fresh foods. Success in fresh foods, and particularly fresh produce, will be dependent upon navigating the changing seasonal growing locations across a large geography, and generating enough sales to provide the necessary economies of scale. Just like the Australian retailers, Amazon will have to domestically source most of their fresh foods due to strict quarantine restrictions.

Amazon could partner with a mature retailer as they have in the United Kingdom. Combining the existing sourcing and buying infrastructure of a major retailer with the online capabilities of Amazon would make an attractive proposition, and provide a swift low-cost entry solution. And for Coles and Woolworths it could be a case of 'keep your friends close but your enemies closer'.

If Amazon go it alone, then the increased competition could benefit suppliers as there will be greater demand for their products, but a partnership with either Coles or Woolworths could mean the opposite, with even greater buying power for the majors.

IS IT JUST A QUESTION OF WHEN?

Amazon's operating model revolves around building scale and loyalty quickly. In Australia, Amazon will go after the low hanging fruit first, and target electronics and general merchandise — watch out JB Hi-Fi and Harvey Norman! Then they will tackle the niches, and their suite of other businesses will follow, with Amazon Fresh most likely being a later arrival.

Nevertheless, the strength of the Amazon brand makes it a disruptive force in any sector and market it enters, and Australia is likely to be no different. It's probably just a question of when.

Am I certain? Certainly not.



Tristan Kitchener.

TODAY'S VIRTUAL TEA LADY - THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

By Paula Doran

If ever there was a story to inspire 'thinking outside the box,' it's a company initiated in the suburbs of Melbourne by the name of The Fruit Box.

What began as a delivery service of fruit to bayside Melbourne homes, with two delivery vans and, at one point, five people filling those orders, has grown exponentially.

The former lawyer at the helm, Martin Halphen, bought the business in 2000 when, ripe for a change of career and a new adventure, the average sale per order was \$30. In those days, he says, it was easy to sell the fruit, but difficult to deliver across geographic challenges and still make a profit.

Ironically, it was just a few years later, after he became a mobile fruiterer, that an opportunity to supply to a large legal firm in Melbourne opened up a door that made The Fruit Box grow.

If you know Melbourne's CBD, you'll be impressed by 101 Collins Street and know it as the home of Freehills law firm. When The Fruit Box was given the opportunity to supply the entire building with fruit, cashing in on the birth of corporate perks and workplace 'wellness', Halphen, in a way returned to his legal roots, and launched his new baby, The Fruit Box, into a whole new chapter.

LEAVING BEHIND THE SUBURBS

"Once we had that first opportunity to fill a workplace inquiry, we then applied the same model we'd had in the suburbs to the corporate need, which was much better for us. We could deliver in a much denser area and were quickly making 20–30 deliveries per hour," Mr Halphen says.

"Employee perks were the flavour of the month, and we definitely rode that wave."

That same sort of 'corporate fruit courier' model was a turning point for Halphen, though he still says there were significant moments of character

building along the way.

"After that first inquiry from one of the top five legal firms in Australia, we upgraded our logic and thought, if there is one organisation who needs us to cater to their whole-of-office needs, there has to be many.

"We also kept moving in that, a key customer asked us to then supply their Sydney office," he says.

"At that point the penny dropped and I could see a real opportunity in providing a national footprint for The Fruit Box."

Between 2005 and 2008 The Fruit Box expanded into the capital cities of Australia, supplying multi-tiered organisations with as few as five employees to large multi-nationals with 500-plus.

"The business growth was unprecedented. Cashflow in those early days was a real problem. As was time," Halphen says.

"In our case, we were paying the fruit markets in 14 days, and then got paid by our clients within 40–45 days. You're extending the credit terms to your customers, so we had fantastic growth but no cashflow.

"You could say I starved for about eight years. There's that exhilaration that you're onto something special, but at the same time you're quite deflated. At the worst of it, I sold my house, which gave me time to keep going and provided a bit of a buffer.

"You keep working, you keep listening to your customers and you keep building. Then, one day, the receipts are higher than the payables and you've turned the corner."

Halphen says initial market clout was also a challenge. "In the beginning we were so small. We couldn't secure strong supply relationships because we had no volume.

"But then as business grows, you start buying pallets of fruit and suddenly the mandarin guy in the Sydney markets that wouldn't sell to you because you were too small is watching you walk past to the



Former lawyer Martin Halphen has grown an extremely successful business delivering quality fresh fruit to corporate towers across Australia by thinking 'outside the box'.

next guy and buy in bulk. I got great pleasure in walking past that man."

THE VIRTUAL TEA LADY

These days, The Fruit Box has expanded its repertoire as corporate courier and is also virtual tea lady.

"We could see that the Global Financial Crisis was coming our way and we needed to be more than a one-trick-pony with fruit," says Halphen.

"What we didn't know when we decided to move into fresh milk supply was that specialised coffee machines/pod machines would become cheaper, and daily coffee intake would rise so quickly."

And despite the humility in that comment, one gets a very real sense of the grit and hard work in which this former lawyer, come corporate fruiterer, has led The Fruit Box growth.

"You need to be prepared to listen to your customer and react in the right way. I have been very, very close to all aspects of the business.

"And what it is, in fact, is a service. We've turned products into services. Orders are broken up by tea room, by office, by site. We give the tea lady service and do all the hard work so

that the milk is in the fridge when it's needed, the fruit (and good quality fruit) is there waiting. We make things easy for corporate businesses to access the flexibility of delivery and convenience."

From those early days racing across the suburbs to deliver \$30 orders, to that of modern day tea lady supplying corporate towers across the country, it will be interesting to watch where The Fruit Box tale of success goes.

- Bananas are the most popular product in The Fruit Box weekly order.
- The company sells 40–50 tonnes of bananas per week.
- The company is focussed on supplying fresh products and expanded into milk supply with the growth in use of coffee machines.
- The move into milk was a buffer to being a 'one trick pony' and helped the company sail through the Global Financial Crisis.
- Since 2001, the company has grown from 1.5 employees to 200+.

BANANA MARKETING



In recent months, Australian Bananas have been everywhere! On our small screens, city streets, shopping centres and even our mobile phones! And, we are about to see even more of them. Hort Innovation Marketing Manager Elisa King outlines some of the future planned marketing.

TELEVISION—JANUARY-JUNE 2017

The next round of Australian Bananas TV advertising will see our 15-second commercial run across a staggered four-week period, during early April and late April/early May.

As per our launch burst, activity will be represented across all major capital cities and key major regional markets (NNSW, SNSW, VIC, QLD and WA).

It is an exciting time for TV as a lot of the first quarter TV shows are coming to an end. Our next burst will tap into the new round of Quarter 2 programming that the networks are releasing, such as House Rules and MasterChef.

The additional allure of slightly altered programming formats is likely to draw audiences in even further, as the networks vie for consumer attention.

As always, our TV investment will feature a proportionate spend in pay-TV environments to ensure we are covering the entire market and delivering our branded commercial to 30% of households, on average, nationally who have Foxtel.

We are only halfway through our full campaign TV schedule and look forward to delivering efficient

frequency and top-of-mind consideration of Australian Bananas in the four weeks of upcoming activity.

OUT OF HOME

Similar to our TV schedule, our out-of-home approach has been in market since 19 February. It has been complementing the Australian Bananas television campaign, with a highly visible presence in high footfall retail and commuter environments.

As has become standard now for our shopping centre investment, 70% of our retail panels (digital posters) appear right in front of supermarkets as a last-touch reminder point before a consumer enters Coles, Woolworth or ALDI, and the remaining 30% appear throughout shopping centres to drive audience incremental reach, frequency and awareness.

Our retail activity will continue until the final week of our television campaign, 13 May. With likely bonus placements to drive even further longevity beyond the campaign period.

Our bus advertising formats will continue running in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth until mid-May.

Advertising on trains will continue until late May,



with our current train wraps in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane reaching the large proportion of people who travel via public transport each week in these metro centres.

Finally, our rail transit component will feature our Australian Bananas creative across rail networks in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane until late May,

UPDATE

covering key routes and delivering huge audiences on station platforms throughout each city.

DIGITAL (DESKTOP AND MOBILE)

Scheduled to run until late May, this campaign will be two-fold.

- Extend the visibility of our TV commercials to our core audience across highly visited online environments to drive high-reaching awareness.
- Deliver our campaign messages through mobile banner advertising in highly engaging, rich media formats. Again, to ensure our brand stands out from the advertising clutter and provides a fun and engaging mobile piece of advertising presented by Australian Bananas.

SYDNEY ROYAL EASTER SHOW

For the first time in four years, the Sydney Royal Easter Show will fall entirely in the school holidays. Bananas will feature through highly visible advertisements in a number of formats for the total duration of the show, including on the big screen, banner boards and plasma screens.

**For a complete timeline of activity & budget for 2016/17 refer to the Monthly Banana Marketing Reports*



NEW BANANA INDUSTRY STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PLAN

A new Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) is currently being developed for the Banana Industry for 2017–2022. The new plan will guide the investment of levies and government funds in research, development (R&D) and marketing for the banana industry over the next five years. The SIP represents the overall interests of the banana industry, allows industry priority areas to be identified and ensures levy investments align with these priorities.

The process in preparing each SIP was managed by Horticulture Innovation Australia in consultation with the Banana Industry Strategic Industry Advisory Panels (SIAP), growers and other industry representatives, including ABGC. An independent consultant was engaged to run the consultation process, to gather the advice from stakeholders

impartially and produce a plan against which the banana industry can be confident of its strategic intent.

The draft SIP was prepared last November after workshops with the SIAPs, grower engagement and desktop research. The outcomes, strategies and deliverables were reviewed with growers and SIAP members in December and context reviewed in January and February. ABGC then facilitated a half day workshop at South Johnstone Research Station in March to review priorities, outcomes, strategies and deliverables identified to date. During the workshop the participants reviewed the four priority areas that were identified through the development of the draft SIP. These include:

1. Improved biosecurity and varietal diversity by developing new varieties in combination with improved pest and disease management.
2. Increased industry sustainability biosecurity and environmental stewardship by greater adoption of the industry's Best Management Practice.
3. Enhanced grower profitability by increasing domestic demand, export market development and product diversification.
4. Better industry productivity and profitability by the adoption of continuous improvement and automation technology.

The SIP is due to be finalized in April.

HELP AT HAND FOR GROWERS DOING IT TOUGH

Growers facing financial hardship are being urged to make the most of free financial counselling on offer, which could provide vital assistance to see them through difficult times.

Rural financial counsellors like Nick Birchley are available to assist growers, through the Queensland Farm Finance Strategy, which is jointly funded by the Queensland Farmers Federation, the Queensland Government and the Australian Bankers Association.

With banana growers experiencing some of the lowest prices on record in the past year, many continue to face crippling debt.

Mr Birchley said while some growers were reluctant to seek financial assistance, often the support he provided was enough to resolve many financial issues and help them survive through future hard times.

“Financial difficulties can arise through circumstances beyond a farmer’s control, such as natural disasters, disease incursions or commodity price collapse,” Mr Birchley said.

“Other difficulties can arise through individual family or business circumstances, such as family illness or relationship breakdowns, or business issues that have gone wrong for whatever reason,” he said.

“Counsellors assist producers through these hardships and, if necessary, can engage the assistance of other professional services.”

One of the key roles a financial counsellor can play is helping a producer devise a business model that speaks a bank’s language.

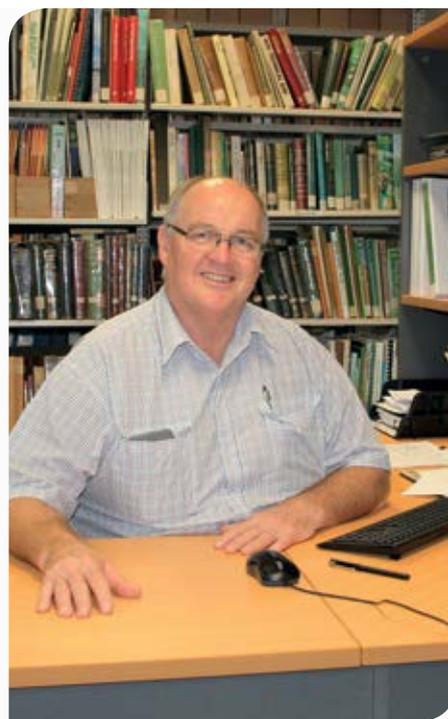
“When you’re in a situation, the bank has a certain perspective and you have a different perspective. What we can do is put together a business plan that will suit the bank, a plan that gives the bank a better picture of your farm.”

“There may be people who have some pretty poor cashflow situations, but the banker doesn’t appreciate that for the last three years they may have had a significant planting, or they’re coming through where they have rejuvenated paddocks or something like that.

“And, we’ve had a lot of experience with the banks, whereby just giving them that perspective has really made them far more comfortable to support you.”

Mr Birchley has more than 12 years experience assisting banana growers and other farming families and points out that all counselling services are highly confidential.

He believes there is likely to be many banana growers that could benefit from his assistance at present, given the industry’s extended period of prices below the cost of production, coupled



with the added expense of having to implement improved biosecurity measures in the wake of Panama TR4.

Mr Birchley is based at South Johnstone and can be contacted on 0448 460 309. For Rural Financial Counselling Services in other regions go to the website at www.rfcsnq.com.au.

BANANA LEVY RATE

In 2016, growers nationally voted on an increase to the banana levy for Panama TR4.

The Australian Government made the resulting levy increase of 0.49 c/kg into a regulation in late February, and it will be in place from 1 April 2017.

The components of the Banana Industry Levy will then be as follows:

The below compulsory levy is provided to the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources

(DAWR), not to the Australian Banana Growers’ Council (ABGC). The department then provides it to Horticulture Innovation, for marketing and R&D, and to PHA for the other two components.

The ABGC Membership Fee is a voluntary contribution, and is currently 3 c/carton.

**Both the most recent levies are temporary: The EPPR levy will finish after the Freckle response costs are repaid. The bulk of the PHA levy is for repaying the Australian Government the refundable grant used to buy the infested farm. That levy (apart from the pre-existing PHA*

membership component) will be reviewed annually and cease when no longer required.

***The current levy total to 31 March 2017 is 2.45c /kg.*

Further information:

DAWR: www.agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/levies/rates/bananas

ABGC: jim.pekin@abgc.org.au

LEVY AMOUNT	PURPOSE
1.69c /kg	R&D and Marketing: 0.54 c/Kg for research and development and 1.15 c/kg for marketing.
0.75c /kg*	Emergency Plant Pest Response (EPPR): For repayment of the industry’s share of the cost of the national Banana Freckle eradication program in the Northern Territory.
0.50c /kg*	Plant Health Australia (PHA) levy: Mostly to repay the industry’s share of the costs of buying the TR4 infested farm in Tully.
Total = 2.94c /kg**	

WORKSHOP BRAINSTORMS WATER QUALITY IDEAS

By Michelle McKinlay

More than 500 reef water quality ideas were gathered at the Wet Tropics Major Integrated Project (WTMIP) innovation workshops, held in Innisfail and Tully on 2 and 3 March.

The Queensland Government is funding the WTMIP, which will be implemented in the Tully and Johnstone catchments, to reduce the level of nutrients and pesticides reaching the Great Barrier Reef.

The project is being coordinated by Terrain NRM and lead by a Project Panel. The panel is chaired by Joe Marano, Chair of Innisfail District Canegrowers. The banana industry is represented on the panel by ABGC Extension Officer Robert Mayers and Industry Strategy Manager Michelle McKinlay.

The WTMIP project will focus on improving water quality from a range of sources including cane and banana farms. Importantly it will look beyond just farm practices and combine water quality solutions across all activities in the catchment areas.

"This is a really big deal for the Wet Tropics," said Ms McKinlay. "There is a share of \$33million available to fund a range of projects to improve water quality entering the Great Barrier Reef."

"And, it is not just focusing on agriculture. Government is recognising that there are many contributors to the Reef's current water quality."

The ideas generated at the recent workshops

came from the local community. Common themes included soil health, new technologies including bioreactors and bioremediation, carbon and reef credit systems, systems repair and wetlands, incentives, extension, data and water monitoring, land use, and governance.

Mr Mayers said the workshops provided a forum for local knowledge and experience to be recognised.

"People who have lived and farmed for generations in this region know the land, the waterways and how they work together. It is vital that local input guides how this project is rolled out," Mr Mayers said.

ABGC Reef Extension Officers Sarah Simpson and Dale Bennett also attended the workshops.

"It was great to see such a wide range of participants across communities, industries and universities," Ms Bennett reflected.

Ms Simpson added; "The workshops had a really positive vibe and everyone was willing to listen and encourage participation. There was lots of optimism and good will in the room."

Ms McKinlay commended Terrain for its work in steering the significant project in a practical and results-driven way.

In the next phase of the project, a diverse range of experts came together over two days to generate an enormous amount of knowledge that will be critical

for the project panel in making design choices.

Over the coming weeks, concepts that show real potential for water quality outcomes and community benefits will be checked for feasibility and cost effectiveness, and further developed. Project implementation will start in July.

"In the early stages of such a massive project there can be a lot of effort, for what looks like a small return," Ms McKinlay said.

"Growers need to be persistent and yet patient. Keep up your best management practices, look for ways to improve your farming and water quality improvements will start to be measured," she said.

There will be two half-day solutions workshops in the Tully and Johnstone catchments on the 27 and 28 April to provide a WTMIP update to partners and the broader community. This is an opportunity for input and refinement of the draft program design and to enable the continued involvement of growers. Follow [@WTMIP](#) on Facebook for locations and times.

The WTMIP is funded by the Queensland Government Office of the Great Barrier Reef. Terrain NRM is coordinating the project on behalf of the Wet Tropics Sugar Industry Partnership, Australian Banana Growers' Council, Local Government, community groups, consultants, investors and researchers.

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SEA OF YELLOW SPREADS THE WORD

The colourful brand of Australian Bananas has popped up everywhere since our last edition.

Bright merchandise, from hats to shirts, made it all the way to Antarctica, thanks to Antarctic tourism expert Professor Thomas Bauer, who wanted to promote our favourite fruit during one of his many expeditions to the icy continent.

Bananas also helped to fuel Australian kayak adventurer and environmentalist Steve Posselt, while he embarked on an epic international journey raising awareness of climate issues.

In his kayak he calls 'Old Yella', he set out in 2015 on a gruelling journey from Canberra to Paris—via sea and land—taking in the Gulf of Mexico, United States of America, United Kingdom and the English Channel.

Our banana industry was also centre stage at the Brisbane International tennis tournament, when 13 Tully students donned their Australian Bananas t-shirts during the Brisbane International Schools Challenge.

Student Cohen Emmi even scored the honour of tossing the coin before the women's semi-final doubles match.

And what great promotion it was when AFL superstar Patrick Dangerfield proved he was a huge fan of bananas, when he donned an Australian Bananas shirt while filming an up-coming episode of IFISHTV off Mission Beach.

The episode featuring Dangerfield in his bright yellow shirt will air nationally next month (May).



Brownlow Medalist Patrick Dangerfield sporting his Australia Bananas shirt while filming an episode of IFISHTV with host Paul Worsteling.



Professor Thomas Bauer in Antarctica.



Australian kayak adventurer and environmentalist Steve Posselt fueled by bananas during an epic international journey raising awareness of climate issues.



Tully students in the Pat Rafter Arena before an exhibition match—from left—Ava Wilkinson, Jackson Martin, Zane Crema, Jack Edwards, Flynn Crema, Logan Deloryn, Sasha Flegler, Chase Flegler, Madeline Deloryn, Xavier Collins, Maddy Fielder, Cohen Emmi, Rudy Thorgood and Wayne Fielder (coach).

ABGC AGM

A small, but enthusiastic group of growers attended the ABGC's Annual General Meeting in Tully, where Doug Phillips stepped down as Chair. Following the meeting, growers and ABGC staff enjoyed a traditional end of year barbecue.



From left, ABGC Reef Extension Officer Dale Bennett, ABGC Director Leon Collins, Cameron Mackay and ABGC Reef Team Leader Sarah Simpson.



From left, Maggie Day, ABGC Field Officer Louis Lardi and ABGC Director Tom Day.



Former ABGC Chair Doug Phillips and sitting ABGC Chair Stephen Lowe.



From left to right, Barry Lowe, Shane Zonta and Racheal Zonta.



ABGC Director Paul Inderbitzin and ABGC Industry Strategy Manager Michelle McKinlay.

MEETING OF TR4 MINDS

Leading banana researchers from across Australia met at the Eco-Science precinct in Brisbane to discuss the latest applied research and cutting-edge technology that continues to focus on Panama Tropical Race 4.



From left, Dr Anna McBeath (DAF), David East (South Johnstone) and Shanara Veivers (DAF South Johnstone).



From left, Tim Smith (DAF), Julie Pattermore (BQ) and NSW industry development officer Matt Weinert.



Paul Dennis, left (UQ microbiology) and Henry Birt (soil microbiology).



From left, Jenny Cobon (DAF), Stephen Spear (ABGC Board member) and Dr Rosie Godwin, ABGC.



Juliane Henderson (UQ) and Tony Pattison (DAF South Johnstone).



AUSTRALIAN BANANA INDUSTRY CONGRESS 2017

SUSTAINABILITY, RESILIENCE, INNOVATION

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