

Australian

Issue: 57 | DECEMBER 2019

BANANAS

STARTING OVER

HISTORIC FIRES HIT GROWERS



EXPORT INSIGHTS PAGE 16

TRESPASS TOP OF MIND PAGES 18-19

THE TR4 FRONTLINE PAGE 26



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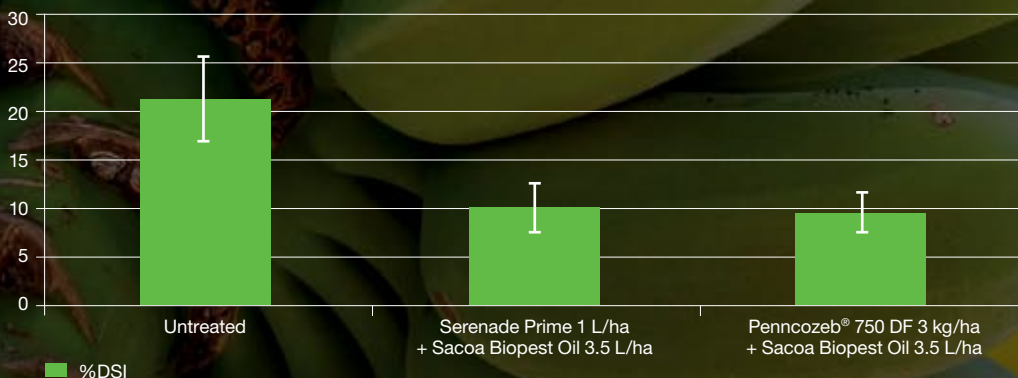


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CONTENTS

Issue: 57 | DECEMBER 2019

REGULARS

CEO's Report 4
Chair's Report 5
QBAN list 8
Under the Microscope 31
Marketing update 34
Banana levy rate 36

Crunch time for leaf spot 23
Frontline attack against Panama TR4 26
Annual banana volumes 36
BCU starts new chapter 36
Your levies in action 36

INDUSTRY NEWS

A very banana Christmas dessert 4
Bananas fuel tennis competitors 6
Private Facebook group for banana growers 6
Report pests and diseases 6
Feral pig fight continues 6
Hort Innovation board members 6
Colombian visitors take in TR4 response 7
Darveniza a Reef Champion 8
Banana expertise on show 8
Growers recognised 9
Meet the next Mort Johnston scholar 9
NSW BGA leadership teams 9
NextGen Top End tour 17
Bunchy Top's next chapter well under way 22
35 years fighting Bunchy Top 23

BANANA FEATURE

NSW and QLD growers hard hit by historic blaze 10-13
Export insights from Asia Fruit Logistica 16
All in to tackle trespass 18-19
A moment for McCuddens 20
Matt's moving on 21
A sweet value add 30
Soil ecology expert marks quarter-century with DAF 32
The secret's in the slope 33

RESEARCH

Banana R&D speed dating night a hit 7
Innovation trial update 27

WATER QUALITY

Reef protection regulations 14
Banana nutrient trial reaches milestone 15
Reef project helps growers reduce run-off 24
MIP inter-row erosion trial 25

BANANA EVENTS

Tully Sustainable Farming Day 38
Fundraising feast 38
Murwillumbah Show 2019 39

Pictured front page: David Cotton on his Yarranbella property with fellow grower and ABGC Director Stephen Spear, where he suffered between \$250,000 and \$300,000 in damage, including the loss of all banana farming infrastructure, equipment and machinery.



CEO COLUMN

Jim Pekin, CEO



Since the 1990s, the banana industry has significantly improved practices and reduced the amount of nutrients leaving farms.

The industry is rightly proud of this, with 92% of land under production now benchmarked against the BMP Guidelines. This has been achieved voluntarily and without regulation. Growers know better than anyone that environmental best practice makes sense for their business, community and preserves the region they love for future generations.

In recent years, the banana industry has been the recipient of grants funded by the Australian and Queensland Governments to help implement that best practice on farm, as well as receiving additional State Government funding for BMP projects and research trials. Ideally, any future improvements would be achieved by working with growers to educate them about best practice and assist them to voluntarily implement this - rather than enforcing regulated minimum standards.

Farmers generally don't like being told what to do on their farms, especially by Government. This is understandable, as their focus is on their business,

family and the local community. Policy people in Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra have other priorities.

However, the Queensland Government has decided to regulate banana growers' fertilizer use and other farming practices. Indeed, the new sediment and nutrient prescribed minimum standards will apply in the main production area (excluding Cape York) from 1 December 2020.

No banana grower wants more regulation. They already spend many hours ensuring that their farming and business practices comply with a raft of different pieces of legislation. However, ABGC took the view that we would work with the Government, which has an election commitment on Reef regulations, to get the most appropriate outcomes for banana growers. If there must be regulation, then it should be practical and proven.

After consulting with members, the ABGC achieved alignment of the nutrient and sediment control provisions with the industry's Best Management Practice Environmental Guidelines. This meant the regulated minimum standards have the greatest chance of being incorporated into existing production systems. The provisions are flexible enough to allow growers to farm as they need to – with evidence required for nutrient rates that are above the prescribed rates.

Just as the Queensland Government is requiring growers to keep evidence of their farming practices,

it is reasonable to expect governments and policy makers to also make decisions based on evidence. The ABGC recently provided a submission to the Federal Senate Committee's Inquiry into evidence-based regulation of farm practices on water quality on the reef. In the submission, the ABGC stated that banana growers must have better access to, understanding of, and confidence in the water quality data that is used in the models that describe the health of the reef. This does not currently exist, yet it should be an essential foundation for all policy and especially regulation. Ideally growers will be part of future effort to improve science-based decision making. Collaboration, problem sharing and respect will be key ingredients for a future where the environment and industry can productively co-exist.

In regard to evidence, ABGC successfully requested that Department of Environment and Science fund a research project that considers the optimum level of nutrients to apply to banana plants. It will also examine the impact of nutrients leaving the farm by leaching.

The ABGC continues to strongly oppose any additional regulation that will impact on a grower's ability to be profitable through banana production on new or expanded commercial cropping. The Queensland Government will commence a new round of consultation on this in the new year and ABGC will continue to represent the interests of the banana industry.



A VERY BANANA CHRISTMAS DESSERT

The Australian Banana Growers' Council wishes you and your family a very Merry Christmas. Finish your festive feast this year with a tasty banana treat – sure to delight both the kids and 'big kids' in your life. Recipe thanks to Australian Bananas.

Na-Na Santas Serves: 4 Prep: 10 mins Cooking time: 0 mins

Ingredients

4 bananas peeled and cut into three
12 strawberries, green part removed
12 marshmallows
24 green chocolate drops
12 red chocolate drops
1 tsp hazelnut spread
12 bamboo skewers

Method

1. Thread the banana, marshmallow and strawberry onto the bamboo skewers.
2. With your skewer in hand, place a little hazelnut spread on to the banana and add chocolate drops for the eyes and nose.

CHAIR COLUMN

Stephen Lowe, ABGC Chair



Bushfire Appeal

The recent destructive East Coast bushfires once again highlighted the pure devastation mother nature can

inflict on farming families

– and communities as a whole – and the sheer resilience often required for affected growers to get back on their feet.

Fires on the Mid North Coast of New South Wales caused hundreds of thousands of dollars damage to crops, infrastructure and machinery belonging to four dedicated banana growers. In Central Queensland, at Cobraball, west of Yeppoon, local grower Richard Benson also lost thousands of banana plants and irrigation equipment, while risking his own life trying to fight the fire.

Far North Queensland growers, like myself, know all too well the heartache of extreme weather events, having experienced a number of destructive tropical cyclones in the past.

Following these events, our growers have always received strong industry support, and I would encourage all growers and the wider community to get behind our bushfire affected southern

counterparts (if you have the means to do so) by supporting a special Go Fund Me campaign established to raise much needed funding for all five growers involved.

While it's a relatively small number of farms affected, the financial impacts to each grower have been enormous. These businesses are also all of a smaller scale, often with just one or a handful of people working on the farm, which means the road to clean-up and recovery is going to be a long one.

You can find out more about the farmers' personal stories and links to the Banana Bushfire Appeal fundraising page on Pages 10-13 of this magazine.

Trespass issues

Trespass onto banana farms in the Tully and Innisfail areas continues to be an issue of major concern.

Despite the fact that entering any private property without consent is illegal, it's of added concern in the Cassowary Coast area because of the presence of Panama tropical race 4 (TR4) in the Tully Valley.

Concerns of increased illegal entry onto banana farms were raised at the Cassowary Coast Banana Growers' Association meeting in October. Complaints of trespass have largely involved local hunters entering properties, as well as tourists.

As a consequence, an urgent meeting was organised by the Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) at South Johnstone and was attended by growers, other industry representatives and local Queensland police.

The meeting was very well attended and was a great chance for the police representatives present to explain the laws surrounding trespass and how growers can take appropriate action against offenders, including prosecution.

It was great to see the industry had the full support of local police in addressing this very significant issue. It was also heartening to have the Cassowary Coast Regional Council, Biosecurity Queensland, Canegrowers and other industry stakeholders on board in this renewed attempt to increase community awareness.

For more information on your rights as a landholder and steps to prosecute people illegally entering your farm, turn to Page 18.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

On a final note, I'd like to take this opportunity – on behalf of ABGC – to wish everyone a happy, healthy Christmas and a safe and prosperous New Year. See you again in 2020.

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BANANAS FUEL TENNIS COMPETITORS

A big thank you to grower Steve Lizzio who generously donated fruit for players at the Cairns Tennis International Pro Tour in September.

The bananas proved to be the perfect nutritious snack for players including Calum Puttergill and Dane Sweeny (pictured), who were vying for points to get into the Australian Open.



PRIVATE FACEBOOK GROUP FOR BANANA GROWERS

There's a new way for banana growers to share ideas, ask advice and catch up – all without leaving the farm.

The Thirsty Banana is a private Facebook group just for growers, designed to function almost as an online pub. In the past you might have stopped by your neighbour's place or popped down to the local to catch up over a beverage. Unfortunately biosecurity and the pressures of modern farming mean this hasn't been as easy – until now.

The group, which can be found on the Australian Banana Growers' Council Facebook page, is the perfect place to celebrate your success, post a cracking photo or find answers to your niggling questions.

SPOTTED ANYTHING UNUSUAL LATELY?

If you see a plant showing unusual symptoms, don't remove it. Here's what to do:

1. Mark the plant
2. Record its location
3. Take a photo
4. Limit access to the area
5. Report it to the Exotic Plant Pest line 1800 084 881

The earlier pests are detected, the better chance there is of stopping the spread. Protect your farm and your industry!

FERAL PIG FIGHT CONTINUES

The fight against feral pigs is far from over in the Tully Valley, despite a targeted program eradicating more than 5000 of the pests.

Feral pigs not only cause considerable environmental damage, but also pose a constant risk of spreading Panama tropical race 4.

As at September 30, 5333 pigs had been culled as part of the TR4 Feral Pig Program. Almost 4600 of these were a direct result of banana industry efforts.

Banana growers and industry have committed

significant funding to this effort, however funding for the future – and a continued focus on the Tully area – remain a concern.

ABGC Deputy Chair Leon Collins said the program had made a real difference at the top of the Valley since it started in July 2017.

"But we can't afford to slack off or the numbers will return," he said.

The ABGC also acknowledges Orora's donation of approximately 100 cardboard bins to the Program, which have been used to ripen bananas used in traps.



NEW AND RETURNING BOARD MEMBERS AT HORT INNOVATION



Paul Harker, Professor Robert Clark AM and Jan Vydra.

Hort Innovation held their Annual General Meeting on November 22, with new and returning board members announced following the event.

Voting members of the company elected one Director to the Board from a pool of five candidates. As a result, Paul Harker was re-appointed as a Director of the company. Following the AGM, the Board met to appoint a further two Directors from the remaining pool of four candidates. Agri-business leader Jan Vydra was appointed as a new Director, while Professor Robert Clark AM was re-appointed to the Board.

Hort Innovation's Selwyn Snell, who was himself

re-appointed as Chair, said the new and returning recruits will be among those positioned at the helm during a never-before-seen period in the RDC's history.

"The 2018/19 financial year has been our biggest year yet," he said. "On top of utilising levy funding, we brokered millions in co-investment dollars from a range of partners and sources. And we secured a significant amount of extra grant funding for investment, through various federal programs."

Dr Mary Corbett retained the Deputy Chair position of Hort Innovation.

BANANA R&D SPEED DATING NIGHT A HIT

A playful title for this R&D event, held in October, gave attendees a good indication of what they could expect when hearing about the latest banana research from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF).

The event, organised by the DAF banana extension team, was attended by more than 40 people and was more about conversation than presentations. With presenters given only 3 minutes to give their pitch, Jeff Daniels (variety evaluation), Stewart Lindsay (variety development), Richard Piper (bunch pest management), David East (yellow sigatoka), Ingrid Jenkins (online resources) and Peter Trevorrow (Erwinia) set the scene, then participated with their colleagues in 10 minute round-the-table discussions with growers and industry stakeholders.

Those that attended also heard first-hand from growers Shannon Paton, Gavin Devaney and Parmjeet Tut, along with ABGC's Research and Development Manager Rosie Godwin, all of whom participated in a recent NextGen trip to the Northern Territory, where they visited variety trials screening for resistance to Panama disease tropical race 4. The growers reinforced that seeing the disease first hand is a reminder of how devastating it is. They also shared some interesting



Growers and researchers participate in round-the-table discussions on a range of R&D topics.

observations from visits to Asian vegetable and mango production systems that were organised as part of the trip.

The Speed Dating night concluded with a grower-to-grower chat about on-farm biosecurity practices followed by light refreshments and further discussion amongst those that attended.

"Hearing how much positive conversation was being had not only between the researchers and the growers, but also between the growers themselves, was so uplifting," Tegan Kukulies, from the DAF banana extension team, said.



Shannon Paton, DAF's Tegan Kukulies, Gavin Devaney and Parmjeet Tut at the event. Shannon, Gavin and Parmjeet shared their experience from the NT.

"The relaxed nature of the event certainly helped stimulate the conversations and I think the growers really got a lot from it."

The extension team thanked all growers who attended and supported the event.



This event was organised and funded as part of the strategic levy investment project National Banana Development and Extension Program BA16007. The project is funded by Hort Innovation using the banana research and development levy, co-investment from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and contributions from the Australian Government. Hort Innovation is the grower-owned, not-for-profit research and development corporation for Australian horticulture.

COLOMBIAN VISITORS TAKE IN TR4 RESPONSE

A delegation of Colombian government officials and banana industry representatives visited Far North Queensland in September to learn about the region's unprecedented success in containing Panama disease Tropical Race 4.

Colombia is one of the world's biggest banana exporting countries and recently had their first confirmed detection of the devastating disease.

The delegates engaged with industry, met with representatives from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, including Biosecurity Queensland, and visited a TR4 infected farm.

The strict biosecurity protocols in place in Far North Queensland, and the best practice measures that allow a grower to keep trading after detection, provided valuable insight to the visitors.

Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario (ICA) Director of Plant Health, Mr Jorge Hernan Palacino, said for the past few years they had been closely watching how Queensland has managed Panama TR4.

"What we saw today was simple, straight forward solutions to complex problems," Mr Palacino said.

"We have been working with our growers to build up their on-farm biosecurity and will take these Queensland ideas and adapt them to our farms."



All front left: Ms. Marcela Cadavid, Director Cenibanano, Augura, Mr. Antonio Jose Gonzalez, ASBAMA and Mr. Jorge Vargas, Researcher Cenibanano, Augura with the team from DAF at the South Johnstone Centre for Wet Tropics.

DARVENIZA A REEF CHAMPION

An extension officer helping banana growers understand water quality on their farms has won the 2019 Reef Youth Champion Award.

William Darveniza works with banana and cane growers to reduce sediment and nutrient loss as part of the Wet Tropics Major Integrated Project.

From a banana farming family, William was recognised for successfully coupling local knowledge with an ever-increasing understanding of water quality concepts, as well as producing a range of innovative resources.

The Reef Champion Awards, an initiative of the Reef Alliance with support from the Australian and Queensland governments, celebrate

the achievements and efforts of outstanding individuals and organisations who have taken action to improve the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef.

Among other winners announced at a ceremony on November 26 were Lenny Parisi (Prince of Wales Environmental Leadership – Reef Sustainability Award) and Kate and Peter Waddell (Reef Sediment Champion Award). A full list of winners can be found via the Queensland Farmers' Federation website.



Wet Tropics MIP extension officer – and now Reef Champion - Will Darveniza.

BANANA EXPERTISE ON SHOW

Growers and industry representatives have taken the stage in the latter half of 2019 to share banana expertise with a broad audience.

Banana grower Andrew Serra and the ABGC's Strategy Manager Michelle McKinlay spoke at the Queensland Biosecurity Partners forum in September, while former ABGC chair Doug Phillips took the stage a month earlier at the Plant Biosecurity Research Symposium.

In November, Dr Rosie Godwin – the ABGC's R&D Manager – shared her knowledge at TropAg, with a presentation on developing new technologies to secure the banana industry.



Grower Andrew Serra and the ABGC's Michelle McKinlay present at the Queensland Biosecurity Partners forum. Pictures: Sarah Simpson

QUALITY BANANA APPROVED NURSERY (QBAN) SCHEME FACILITIES

QBAN is the Australian Banana Industry's high health, clean planting material scheme.

Note: Laboratory is where plants are produced using tissue culture, Nursery is where the tissue culture plantlets are grown in pots for the grower

Kool Bananas Tissue Culture Laboratory contact Phil Berry-Porter LABORATORY	0407 126 113	shazza141@bigpond.com	Mission Beach, Qld	Tissue culture plants only
Blue Sky Tissue Culture - contact Craig & Sue Althaus NURSERY	07 4068 2208	admin@blueskytc.com.au	Tully, Qld	Potted plants for commercial sales
Lowes Tc Pty Ltd - contact Natasha Marocik LABORATORY & NURSERY (NSW)	02 4389 8750	Natasha@lowestc.com.au	Tumbi Umbi NSW	Tissue cultured plants and plugs (where authorised)
Yuruga Laboratory and Nursery LABORATORY & NURSERY	07 4093 3826	nursery@yuruga.com.au	Walkamin, Atherton Tablelands 4872, Qld	Tissue culture plants, potted plants or both
Mission Beach Tissue Culture - contact Stephen Lavis LABORATORY & NURSERY	0418 299 900	sdlavis4@bigpond.com	Mission Beach and Walkamin, Q	Tissue culture plants, potted plants or both
Wide Bay Seedlings - contact Adrian Ross NURSERY	07 4129 6684	office@wbseedlings.com.au	Pioneers Rest, Qld	Potted plants
Ausplant Nursery - contact Brady Cumming NURSERY	07 4662 4934	brady@ausplantnursery.com.au	Dalby, Qld	Potted plants
Ramm Botanicals Pty Ltd. Laboratory	02 4351 2099	Ramm@ramm.com.au	Kangy Angy NSW 2258	Tissue cultured plants

GROWERS RECOGNISED

Banana growers have again been recognised for their contributions across a range of fields – including, of course, producing a top notch product.

Frank and Dianne Sciacca, of Pacific Coast Eco Bananas, were announced as the 2019 Charlie Nastasi Horticultural Farmer of the Year award winners in late August.

The couple's passion for the environment and unique, trademark certified farming system were among the many reasons they were selected.

Fellow Far North Queensland grower, and ABGC director, Paul Inderbitzin was a finalist for the same award.

Meantime, Walkamin growers Rob and Krista Watkins continue going from strength to strength with Natural Evolution Foods, taking out the emerging exporter category at the Premier of Queensland's Export Awards.



Dianne and Frank Sciacca with the prestigious Charlie Nastasi Horticultural Farmer of the Year Award.

Finally, in the nation's Top End, Rum Jungle Organics were among some outstanding Northern Territory finalists for the 2019 Government Landcare Farming Award.

MEET THE NEXT MORT JOHNSTON SCHOLAR



Hannah MacKay has been named the 2019 Mort Johnston scholar.

Ms MacKay is currently studying a double degree in Agribusiness and Sustainable Agriculture, majoring in Horticulture, at the University of Queensland.

A Tully local and part of the MacKay banana farming family, her interest in the industry began at an early age.

As well as working on the farm during school and university holidays, Ms MacKay said the detection of Panama TR4 on the family's Bolinda property had really opened her eyes.

"Biosecurity is a really interesting process," she said, noting that while they already had some measures in place, the presence of the disease meant a real change in thinking.

"It definitely made me a bit more passionate about the industry and made me realise that we're pretty lucky to be farming bananas. It's such a close knit community. There is so much support – I think it wouldn't be a bad industry to work in!"

Plant health is certainly one area of interest to Ms MacKay, but she's thoroughly enjoying the Agribusiness side of her degree too.

During her time as the Mort Johnston scholar, she'll undertake work experience and is looking forward to seeing how other farming businesses do things.

"In addition to that, just being so far away from home, the scholarship will certainly help me out," she said.

The Mort Johnston Professional Development Scholarship honours the memory of an industry great. It provides financial assistance and work placement to a University of Queensland student seeking professional development in ways that will ultimately benefit the Australian banana industry.

NSW BGA LEADERSHIP TEAMS TAKE ON NEW TERM

The hard-working executive teams of the three New South Wales-based Banana Growers Associations have been re-elected for another term.

In August, the Nambucca BGA re-elected Vicki McCudden as president, Tony Styles as secretary and Joyce Ward as Treasurer.

In October, Colin Singh (president), Ethan McKeever (vice president/events organiser) and Zac McKeever (secretary/treasurer) began their next term at the Tweed and Brunswick BGA.

Finally, in December, Wally Gately was re-elected as president of the Coffs and District BGA, with Jeff Eggins as First Vice President and Treasurer, Phil Bicknell continuing as Secretary and Ron Gray as Second Vice President rounding out the executive team. Michelle Williams will continue in her role as Public Officer.

Congratulations to all those taking on these positions for another term – it is certainly no small feat and is much appreciated by the larger banana community.



Team Nambucca: Tony Styles and Vicki McCudden (not pictured: Joyce Ward).



Leading the Tweed: Zac McKeever, Ethan McKeever and Colin Singh.



The Coffs Harbour executive: Ron Gray, Jeff Eggins, Phil Bicknell and Wally Gately.

NSW AND QLD BANANA GROWERS HARD HIT BY HISTORIC BLAZE

By Sonia Campbell

Four banana growers on the mid-North Coast of NSW and a fifth in central Queensland are continuing to recover after suffering severe losses from catastrophic bushfires, which swept through both states in November.

For some, returning to full production could take up to 18 months, after entire plantations were decimated in the destructive blazes, described in NSW as the worst in living memory.

The road to recovery, both financially and emotionally, will be a long one for those affected, but all are determined to bounce back.

DOWN BUT NOT OUT

Spear brothers determined to return to production.

Stephen and Michael Spear, Taylors Arm, NSW

Michael Spear will never forget the deafening “roar” he heard as fire engulfed his family’s beloved Taylors Arm farm, leaving him just minutes to escape alive.

“Earlier in the afternoon I’d still been packing fruit in the packing shed here, because I could see the fire break behind us was still holding it (the blaze), but later everything just turned feral,” he recounted.

“We heard this roar over the mountain in McHugh’s Creek and watched as the back of the mountain in front of us lit up and it was time to run. It was a very scary situation and we did basically run for our lives at the time.



Small tissue culture plants, planted a week before the fire, managed to survive the intense blaze.

“We only had one or two minutes to gather a couple of the most essential things that matter out of the shed. But you’re so confused and panicky at the time that, you know, I forgot my cane knives, and they’re very hard to come by these days.”

Michael and his brother Stephen have been growing bananas on their family-owned property for almost 40 years. In a matter of minutes, the catastrophic November bushfires destroyed their life’s work. Their entire farming operation – including 20 acres of Cavendish bananas, packing sheds and all other production equipment – were completely ravaged by the intense blaze.

Stephen – a Director of the Australian Banana Growers’ Council, who was away on business when the fire took hold – said the total financial loss the family had suffered in the once-in-a-lifetime blaze was something he “refused” to calculate.

“I’ve refused to even think about that,” he said. “I had a tonne of fertiliser in my shed that just got burnt up. I would probably have had 8000 or 9000

(bunch cover) bags, in both those sheds there and they’ve all disappeared. When you consider they’re \$1 each today ... it’s a fairly big impost to take as well.

“(But) really the biggest loss has been our props. I worked out that I originally bought more than 10,000 props. I know when we first bought those we paid about 80 cents (each) for them. We put wire on the end of them to make them hold the bunch up as well. So ... including labour ... you wouldn’t get those props today for under \$10 (each).”

Michael agreed that the props were a significant loss.

“We can’t really grow bananas without the props and 80 to 90 per cent of those are gone. Every bunch cover we had is gone. There were two quite substantial packing sheds here. We were under insured on the sheds. We might be lucky to get one decent shed back between us.”



Damage from Michael and Stephen Spear’s Taylors Arm farm.

EVERYTHING GONE

Stephen, who also lost 120 avocado trees in the blaze, said the experience had naturally taken an emotional toll.

"I was here two days after the fire. I walked down and you could just look through and see the roofing all on the ground. Mick had already been up to see it and said, "Everything is gone. It's all disappeared."

"You stand in front of the dam and look up at both Mick's and my (plantations) and yeah it's pretty hard to take. I had avocados in the bananas as well and to see them now just breaks your heart a fair bit."

"... it will be 12 months before we start cutting fruit (again)," Stephen Spear.

Both Michael and Stephen said they were determined to return to production, with their banana trees already showing signs of recovery. However, weather would play a crucial role.

"Unfortunately we don't know when we're going to be back (into production), because the bananas can't respond until there's rain," Michael said.

Stephen added, "Two days after the fire, Monday morning, you could see the new shoots coming through on the bananas so I knew the bananas were going to be ok."

"But we've had less than 20 inches of rain so far this year and the long range forecast says we won't get much rain again until February next year, so we're going to have an extremely short growing season. But we sort of estimate it will be 12 months before we start cutting fruit again."

While trying to remain positive, the Spear brothers both have strong reservations about the management of surrounding government-owned land.

"The lightning strike that started the fire in the bush behind us, the fuel levels were so high there, it was bound to happen," Michael said. "The land (where the fire started) is located on the forestry boundary and national parks behind them, and there has been no hazard reduction in 40 years."

"When we were kids the banana growers would light up right along the top (of the ridges) to make it safe in summer, but that sort of thing is just discouraged these days, it's very risk adverse culture. Hazard reduction has gone out of fashion these days and it's got to come back into fashion."

Stephen added: "I agree with Mick. Something has to be done about how we look after our forests and bushland. I'd rather have 10 small fires than this great big one. It will take 50 to 100 years for the bushland to recover fully and that may not be enough."



David Cotton lost every bit of infrastructure, equipment and machinery he used to farm his bananas, including a new tractor inside this burnt out shed.

David Cotton, Yarranbella, NSW

"Most of it I won't be able to replace. Not in my lifetime anyway. It just costs too much money," David Cotton.

David Cotton was travelling to Newcastle when fire tore through his 53 acre Yarranbella farm, on Friday, November 8.

He returned three days later, to discover he'd lost everything.

"It was exactly as I expected," he recounted. "I did have reports while I was in Newcastle of what had happened. I was told that it was a firestorm like you wouldn't believe. I was a bit hopeful about my (new) tractor, but as you've seen, it went."

"(I lost) everything. All the equipment. Everything associated with growing bananas has been burnt."

"The bananas themselves (6 acres) they will come back. It will probably take 12-18 months for

the bananas. But I'm not very hopeful about my avocados and fruit trees that I had, they don't look very good to me at all. I probably will replant and just take it from there."

Mr Cotton has been farming bananas on the property for the past 31 years. In all that time, he's never witnessed such devastation.

"Worst (bushfire) I've ever seen anywhere. On the Thursday afternoon my brother and myself went down along Kosekai Road to have a look at it, and it was going north, away from us on another opposite ridge. Apparently, Friday afternoon a strong wind came up and sent it back this way."

Sifting through rubble that used to be his shed, Mr Cotton estimated his losses at more than \$250,000.



David Cotton surveys the damage on his farm with fellow grower and ABGC Director Stephen Spear.

GROWER STARTING OUT, FACED WITH STARTING OVER

**Clinton Welsh,
Talarm, NSW**

Industry newcomer, Clinton Welsh, planted his first crop of bananas on his Talarm property in the Nambucca Valley in February of this year.

After losing almost everything on the farm in the November bushfires, the young grower was facing the heartbreaking reality of starting over again.

"I've lost the packing shed, I've lost my banana wheel, basically I've lost everything inside this shed to process the banana product - bags, spray tanks, chemicals, fertilisers, lime, you name it," he said.

"I've also lost my trailer, I lost my fire fighter (equipment), I've probably lost 50 per cent of my irrigation, but I've managed to salvage bits (of irrigation) by cutting off the burnt bits and re-joining all the good bits.

"So all told, I've just basically got to start again."

"I mean I haven't processed it all yet because there's no time, you just have to pick yourself up and get going," Clinton Welsh.

Mr Welsh is a third generation banana grower. The farm where he has Ducasse bananas planted, has been in his family for more than 100 years.

"My grandfather first planted bananas in 1972 and my father took them on until the early 2000s, and I restarted them in February 2019.

"I've always wanted to grow bananas. I've always had a passion for bananas.

"I've always wanted to be part of the farm. But because of financial constraints in the industry - it can't support families any more - you've got to go off farm. So, I was essentially guided to go away and (encouraged to) get a trade. And, I was probably just a bit too young all those



Clinton Welsh inside his packing shed which was gutted by fire, destroying everything inside including his banana wheel, bags, spray tanks and fertilisers.



"When you take everything into account, loss of income from it (and all damage) I would estimate from \$250,000 to \$300,000.

"Most of it I won't be able to replace, not in my lifetime anyway, it just costs too much money.

"I'll have to have some sort of a shed, but it won't be anything like the one I had, that's for sure."

Despite the circumstances, Mr Cotton remained positive about the future; however he said he was not expecting to receive any recovery support from government.

"I don't expect too much from anyone. The government's giving out grants, but the process is so complicated I don't expect to get anything out of that. I'd be very surprised if we do."



Stephen (left) and Michael Spear at their Taylors Arm farm.



Clinton Welsh with the trailer and shed he lost during the recent bushfires.

years ago to deal with bananas, when dad got out of them.”

Mr Welsh said his introduction to bananas had been a “pretty tough start”, involving a lot of hard work, many trials and tribulations, and was all done out of his own “back pocket”.

“And now, to have this happen, it puts you back to square one I suppose. The whole exercise has been absolutely mentally draining, because there has always been set backs.”

“It puts you back to square one I suppose. The whole exercise has been absolutely mentally draining,”
Clinton Welsh.

He wasn't at the farm when the fire storm ripped through, but was counting the costs and surveying the damage soon after.

“I saw it (the fire) ignite out the back and I thought ... there's nothing to worry about, because the fire fighters and everyone else had done a good job in containing it.

“And then by 3 o'clock you could just tell something wasn't right. The weather wasn't right. It was windy high in the trees, but it was dead still on the ground.



The exterior of Clinton Welsh's packing shed, destroyed by fire.

“I had to pick my daughter up. So I felt it best to first go over to the home farm and get dad, but he was in the paddock so I thought, well everything has to be alright, if he's out in the paddock. He's not worried about it.

“I rang dad at 6 o'clock and said “How's things going?” and he said, “It's no good, you'd better get up here.” When I got up here, the fire front had gone through and we were just putting out spot fires”.

Mr Welsh said he was still dealing with the emotional side of losing everything he needed to continue farming, with none of his infrastructure, trailer or equipment insured.

“It's fairly hard. I mean I haven't processed it all yet because there's no time, you just have to pick yourself up and get going.

“You know, you can't prepare yourself for these sorts of events. You see it on TV over the years, people go through fire storms and you think ‘You poor buggers. You know, how can you pick yourself back up again?’ But I think it's just in our DNA and we just do it.”

“Thankfully, I had the irrigation going on the bananas (when the fire went through) so that sort of gave me a bit of hope that things were going to be ok.

“I'm not sure about the bananas yet. I think the parent plant will be ok. I am worried about what sort of bunch that they'll form, because of the stress. But, I believe that they're young enough to grow out of that. It's the followers with the parent plant that I'm a bit worried about. I think I may have lost 50 per cent of them.

“I was looking at my first block bunching at about Easter next year, but we're now probably looking at winter. And, as far as a second following goes, I'm not really sure.”

APPEAL TO SUPPORT BANANA GROWERS AFFECTED BY BUSHFIRES

If you'd like to help out the growers affected by the East Coast bushfires, a special Go Fund Me campaign has been established to raise much needed financial assistance.

Growers are unable to insure crops and most of those affected have little to no insurance cover on farming infrastructure, machinery and other farming equipment.

Industry representatives are working with growers to access any government assistance available,

however differing personal circumstances means this might not always be an option.

The 'Banana Growers' Bushfire Appeal' Go Fund Me campaign is being run by Vicki McCudden, Chair of the Nambucca Banana Growers' Association. It has the support of the Nambucca

and Cassowary Coast BGAs, as well as the Australian Banana Growers' Council.

All money raised will go directly to bushfire affected banana growers.

To donate, go to <https://www.gofundme.com/f/banana-growers039-bushfire-appeal>

REEF PROTECTION REGULATIONS IN THE GREAT BARRIER REEF REGIONS

The Reef protection regulations started on 1 December 2019 and will be rolled out across Reef catchments over the next three years. The table below describes the timing of commencement for each region.

When will the Reef protection regulations apply for banana growers?

Region	Record Keeping	Minimum practice agricultural standards	New or expanded cropping activities
Wet Tropics	1 December 2019	1 December 2020	1 June 2020
Burdekin, Mackay Whitsunday Fitzroy and Burnett Mary	1 December 2019	1 December 2022	1 June 2020
Cape York	N/A	N/A	1 June 2020

Why are regulations required for banana production?

The minimum practice agricultural standards for banana production focus on retaining nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment on-farm to minimise runoff and improve water quality. Most of the new requirements do not apply to existing growers in the Cape York region as the region has met its water quality targets. The Queensland Government has made a commitment that the minimum practice agricultural standards will remain substantially unchanged for the next five years.

What records do I need to keep?

All banana growers are required to keep general records from 1 December 2019 and then minimum standard records as the minimum practice agricultural standards are rolled out across each region. Records can be in any format but must be made within three business days, kept for at least six years and be available when requested by an authorised person such as a compliance officer.

General records

For banana growers, general records must include:

- Name of the banana producer (i.e. the person(s) carrying out the activity)
- Name of person making record
- Company name (if applicable)
- Property address/es
- Postal address
- Farm identification number/s (if applicable)
- A list of the lots included in all the farms within the agricultural enterprise
- Records of agricultural chemicals (any pesticide, herbicide or fungicide applied to land or crops), fertiliser and mill mud/mill ash applied and specifically:
 - location of each application (e.g. farm number with block name or management zone)
 - date of each application
 - agricultural chemical (any pesticide, herbicide or fungicide applied to land or crops) and/or fertiliser product (including mill mud/mill ash) applied to each location with product name, application rate (kg/ha, L/ha or tonnes/ha for mill mud/mill ash) and for fertiliser product percentage of nitrogen and phosphorus.

What minimum practice agricultural standards do I need to comply with?

The minimum practice agricultural standards for banana growers are to:

- Minimise sediment loss to waterways by having appropriate erosion and sediment control measures in places where there is a high risk of soil loss from the farm.
- Ensure fallow blocks have adequate covered ground at appropriate times in the banana crop cycle.
- Ensure inter-rows on plant blocks have at least 60% covered ground before 1 November (wet season) (unless undertaking renovation works).
- Ensure inter-rows on ratoon blocks have at least 60% covered ground (unless undertaking renovation works).

Crop Stage	Nitrogen	Phosphorus
Plant	280 kg/ha/year	60 kg/ha/year
Ratoon	400 kg/ha/year	60 kg/ha/year

If the annual amount of nitrogen and phosphorus applied to the farm remains below the maximum levels stated in the table above, growers do not need to change their current fertiliser rates.

If the annual amount of nitrogen and phosphorus will exceed the levels stated in the table above, growers will need to develop a nutrient management plan with an appropriate person using the prescribed methodology for banana cultivation.

Minimum standard records

For banana producers, minimum standard records must be included for nitrogen and phosphorus application and the amounts of nitrogen and phosphorus (kg/ha) calculated for each block. The method of fertiliser application must also be recorded. Documents such as leaf test reports, fertiliser contractor print-outs and fertiliser invoices can be used as records.

If growers want to apply higher nutrient rates than listed in the above table, they will need to develop a nutrient management plan. Records for these plans are:

- A farm map/s showing block boundaries, block identifiers, block area (ha), and leaf sampling locations.
- The results of leaf testing for nitrogen and phosphorus.
- Annual nitrogen and phosphorus application rates applied (kg/ha/yr).
- Annual yields achieved (for example, the total number of cartons per year per farm).
- Nitrogen and phosphorus recommendations from an appropriate person, including: a. recommended application rates b. appropriate frequency of application.
- Names, date and contact details of the appropriate person/s who have developed and verified the nutrient management plan for the agricultural property.

How will compliance work?

The Queensland Government's compliance program will be prioritising its efforts on the areas that represent the greatest water quality threat to the Reef. If a grower is selected for an audit, compliance officers will meet with the grower to help them understand what is required under the minimum practice agricultural standards.

For more detailed information on the Reef regulations check out the website – www.qld.gov.au/reefregulations or contact the ABGC extension team on 07 4015 2797.

BANANA NUTRIENT TRIAL REACHES MILESTONE

A banana nutrient rate trial comparing current nitrogen fertiliser use in commercial banana production systems with new minimum standard (nitrogen fertiliser) application rates reached a major milestone in November.

The trial - which is assessing how these rates effect production, profitability and the environment – had its first harvest of bananas.

The three-year project is run by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries in partnership with industry. Trial sites have been established at three commercial sites with different soil types in Bartle-Frere, Tully and Innisfail, as well as at the Centre for Wet Tropics Agriculture at South Johnstone.

DAF Development Horticulturist Curtis Lanham said growers were pleased the trial was taking place on commercial properties, as this ensured the everyday realities faced by growers are factored in.

“We are actually accounting for what happens on a regular farm—not just in a highly controlled research environment,” said Mr Lanham.

“Fertilising bananas is quite complex—some of our farmers apply fertiliser as often as once a week.

Whereas other types of broadacre crops may only need one or two fertiliser applications,” he said.

The project team have developed a system called the ‘bolt-on fertigation system’ to deliver controlled amounts of fertiliser within commercial properties in the trial.

“Most of our growers are already using fertigation but developing this new system was a big step forward in running a trial like this and we hope it will benefit the broader horticulture industry who undertake similar trials in the future,” he said.

A key component of the trials investigates the impacts of fertiliser use strategies on reef water quality, which is important for long-term industry sustainability and the health of the Great Barrier Reef.

The Banana Nutrient Rate Trial is funded through the Queensland Government Reef Water Quality Program.



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“Trees look healthier and the bunch quality, size and weight has maintained through the winter period (I would have expected production and quality to drop)! I have also seen a reduction of ‘under peel chill’. I would be happy to recommend Stoller’s Bio-Forge to other Banana growers.”
- Andrew, QLD



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EXPORT INSIGHTS FROM ASIA FRUIT LOGISTICA

Australian Bananas were featured as part of Asia Fruit Logistica this year, with four companies coming on board to help investigate options for exports.

Eco Bananas, Nutrano, Good Life Organics, MacKays Marketing and banana levies invested in this Hong Kong trade show to capture market information, build awareness and develop relationships.

In 2017/18 Australia sold 388,000 tonnes of bananas, but only 0.04% was exported.

Eco Bananas are one of the few Australian banana companies who currently export their produce. As a result of the trade mission, they identified several opportunities to increase their business, with industry representatives from Japan, Malaysia, South Korea and China showing interest in the well-known red wax-tipped fruit.

Good Life Organics reported some an initial interest in Australian organic bananas from Hong Kong, China and India.

Asia Fruit Logistica 2019 confirmed that there are less opportunities for conventional Cavendish bananas when it comes to export, mainly due to the current limited point of difference from existing Cavendish offerings. Other issues were the relatively high cost of Australian conventional bananas and some current trade restrictions.

Broader export insights

It was noted that the 'Clean and Green' pitch for produce was not necessarily unique to Australia. In fact, many countries claimed the same credentials, particularly Costa Rica. The Australian banana delegation formed the opinion that it wasn't enough to distinguish Australia from other exporting nations. However, the level of trust might be greater with Australia than elsewhere.

At both Asia Fruit Logistica and the reverse trade mission (held in Melbourne as part of Hort Connections), retailers and importers were reluctant to talk about ripening and supply chain. This is understandable considering the commercial sensitivity of the information.

Hong Kong happenings

While in Hong Kong, the ABGC's representative on the trade mission, CEO Jim Pekin, presented to Austrade officials in each of the Asian countries and received market insights from those involved.

The banana delegation – through their agents – also investigated bananas at different types of produce stores. This included the traditional Hong Kong wet market, value stores, mainstream stores, convenience stores and several premium/lifestyle stores. They also visited a multi-floor ripening room, where the Australian bananas were ripened for the Asia Fruit Logistica.

The banana delegation met with experienced Australian exporters in table grapes, citrus, mangoes, apples, avocados and vegetables in Hong Kong. Many of these were in Hong Kong mostly (or in some cases, solely) to meet with and build on relationships with their customers. The table grapes and citrus growers, in particular, were enthusiastic about the opportunity for Australian banana exports, due to their industries' export success. Table grapes and citrus now export 60% and 35% of their production.

Findings for Australian bananas

The current opportunities for Australian bananas in Asian markets appear to be limited to high value, low volume products, such as Eco Bananas and organic bananas. The key recommendations were that moves to export conventional bananas should be considered a long-term activity and that export steps forward should be made. It was also recommended that a much better understanding of a range of markets, their supply chains and retailers is needed. If Australian banana companies are interested in export, they need to begin spending time travelling to these markets and forming relationships with other businesses and potential



Brendan Poppi, a grower of Eco Bananas, and Nutrano's Chaise Pensini at the Australian Bananas stand.



Matt Abbott, Good Life Organics and Brad Harvey, MacKays Marketing informing trade show attendees.

customers. The role of government officials in developing these relationships was noted.

In Australia, business to business commercial trade makes sense. However, in many Asian countries, the inclusion of government officials is the starting point for business.

The banana delegation also recommended that the industry seek to take the steps necessary with Hort Innovation and the Australian Government to eventually obtain market access for bananas to China. This firstly requires an industry-agreed Banana Export Development Plan, some industry participants being export capable for that market and then gaining a spot on the Department of Agriculture's list of priority markets/industries to be negotiated. This last step could take ten years.

It is hard to say what changes may occur within international banana markets in the future and what opportunities there might be for the Australian banana industry, but regardless it's clear that more needs to be understood about these overseas markets for the Australian industry to better position itself.

Asia Fruit Logistica was held from September 3-6 2019.

This is article is a summary of a report compiled by the ABGC's CEO – and representative on the trade missions – Jim Pekin. The full report will soon be posted online at Hort Innovation's Banana Fund page.

NEXTGEN TOP END TOUR

Sixteen people involved in the banana industry - including ten banana growers - made time in their busy schedules to participate in a two-day NextGen tour to the Northern Territory.

The trip, held in early September, was organised by Tegan Kukulies as part of the National Banana Development and Extension Project. It featured visits to inspect the banana variety evaluation and development (mutagenesis) for Panama disease tropical race 4 (TR4) resistance trials at Coastal Plains Research Farm, as well as visits to Asian vegetable and okra growers, and a large high-tech mango packing shed.

"Those that participated really enjoyed the whole trip," Tegan said. "For those who had not seen Panama disease TR4 in the flesh before it was a confronting experience and for those that had previously visited, it was a reminder of how devastating the disease can be."

The main focus of the trip was to spend time looking at the progress of the variety evaluation and mutagenesis trials.

"Growers were impressed that there were a few varieties that were holding up to the disease, however they also noted that these varieties were either not Cavendish types or not as productive as Williams (cycle time, stature, bunch characteristics, etc)," Tegan said.

Growers also saw the progress on some of the Cavendish varieties that have undergone mutagenesis, particularly the CJ19 plants which were bunching at the time of our visit. The growers were impressed with the size and characteristics of some of the bunches. This feedback on particular plants within the trial block was noted and will be considered when deciding which plants should be investigated further.

The trip to Coastal Plains Research Farm (run by the NT Department of Primary Industries and Resources) was again a reminder that, although the research is progressing, there is currently no 'silver bullet' solution to Panama disease TR4. Keeping banana farms free from the disease with effective on-farm biosecurity systems is the best option.



The Next Gen tour group taking in the trials under way at Coastal Plains Research Farm in the Northern Territory.

As part of the tour, the Northern Territory Farmers' Association helped to organise some 'non-banana' visits to Asian vegetable growers and a large high-tech mango packing-shed.

"As we've found on previous tours, the growers were intrigued by some of the similar challenges faced by other horticultural industries such as labour efficiencies and succession in farming businesses," Tegan noted.

Some of the growers that attended the tour shared their experiences, learnings and some laughs from

the trip at the Banana R&D speed-dating event, which was held at Innisfail in early October.

"Seeing first hand again the devastation that TR4 brings, and the massive priority that good on-farm biosecurity needs to have in your daily business activities."

– A grower on the main benefit of the Next Gen trip

"The overall trip was great. It allowed me to see firsthand the variety development work that is happening, as well as gain a better understanding of where we are at in terms of R&D."

– Grower reflection

Just ask any grower who attended - biosecurity was a top priority during the trip! 32 pairs of shoes, 16 hats and 16 outfits were all left in the NT and copious amounts of disinfectant applied to footwear, phones and glasses on multiple occasions.

ALL IN TO TACKLE TRESPASS

By Sonia Campbell

A renewed campaign to address growing concerns over the number of people illegally entering banana farms along the Cassowary Coast, has resulted in at least one charge of trespass being laid.

At the time of going to print, a 23-year-old South Johnstone man was due to appear in the Innisfail Magistrates Court on November 25. He was facing one charge of trespass, following a complaint from the Cassowary Coast Regional Council regarding a person allegedly unlawfully entering council land for the purpose of hunting, at East Innisfail on October 20.

The charge followed the launch of a united campaign involving the Australian Banana Growers' Council, Tully and Innisfail banana growers, Queensland Police, Biosecurity Queensland, Cassowary Coast Regional Council, Canegrowers and the Department of Defence.

The multiple agencies banded together following concerns raised by growers over the increased risk of spreading Panama tropical race 4, from a reported significant rise in trespass onto banana farms in the Innisfail and Tully areas. Most instances

of trespass involved pig hunters and tourists; as well as other unrelated acts of crime involving theft and wilful damage.

The concerns were initially raised publicly at the Cassowary Coast Banana Growers' Association meeting on October 10.

In response, the Australian Banana Growers' Council organised an urgent meeting with local Queensland Police representatives on October 18 to explain to growers their legal rights, and how to best prosecute anyone illegally entering their farms.

The meeting – lead by ABGC deputy chair Leon Collins and held at South Johnstone – was attended by almost 30 growers, other landholders, Biosecurity Queensland and other associated industry representatives.

The five Queensland Police representatives included two officers from the Mareeba stock squad and

officers from Tully, South Johnstone and Silkwood. They addressed the meeting and answered a variety of questions from growers.

Mr Collins said officers urged growers to report all incidents of trespass to police, so they can investigate and have the best chance of prosecuting offenders. This information will also allow police to establish whether there are any patterns in illegal activity.

"The police did a fantastic job explaining what constitutes 'trespass' and how growers can effectively start pursuing prosecutions of these offenders," Mr Collins said.

"The growers that were present at the meeting said it was very informative and they were very grateful to know that they have the full support of police to start tackling this important issue.



In light of trespass concerns, members of the Cassowary Coast Panama Tropical Race 4 (TR4) Feral Pig Eradication Program issued a joint media statement to further educate the general public about the risk of spreading TR4 by entering farms without permission. Pictured (L-R) Cassowary Coast Regional Council Mayor John Kremastos, Australian Banana Growers Council Deputy Chair Leon Collins, Brenton Haigh from Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Biosecurity Queensland's Panama TR4 Program Leader Rhiannon Evans, Tully Canegrowers Deputy Chair Bryce Macdonald, Officer in Charge of Tully police station Sgt Rod Stanley, BQ Panama TR4 Program Principal Engagement officer Sarah Flenley and Cassowary Coast Council Feral Pig Program Co-ordinator Max Grimbacher.

Key messages:

- To enter private land (including private roads and easements) a person must have permission from the owner. If they don't, it's trespass and they can be prosecuted.
- Having 'No Trespassing' or 'Private Property' signs helps police prosecute.
- A landholder has the right to ask a person for their name and address if they are found trespassing on their land.
- Any person using gazetted 'stock routes' must have a permit.

Key actions for growers:

- Report ALL incidents/evidence of trespass to police. Big and small (e.g. a photo of a cut fence or a vehicle registration number). Police need to build a picture of what is happening and all pieces of evidence add up. If it is not reported, they can't investigate and potentially prosecute.
- All incidents of illegal trespass should be reported directly to your local police station, not Police Link.
- Signage – If your land is fenced, you don't generally need 'No Trespassing' or 'Private Property' signage, as a fence indicates a boundary, and crossing that boundary constitutes trespass. However, where there is no fence, 'No Trespassing' or 'Private Property' signage should be erected. This is to negate any excuse for someone entering your property without permission. Essentially, the offender cannot use the excuse, 'I didn't know this was private land'.
- Set up trail cameras where you can.



Growers gathered at South Johnstone on October 18 to hear from Queensland Police about their legal rights to help prosecute people illegally entering their banana farms.



United front – Addressing a meeting of banana growers at South Johnstone on October 18 were (from L-R) Officer in Charge of South Johnstone police station Snr Constable Adam Wood, Detective Acting Sgt Dale Lumma (Mareeba Stock Squad), ABGC Deputy Chair Leon Collins, Constable Michael Hinchcliffe (Mareeba Stock Squad), Snr Constable Cameron Fell (Silkwood Police station) and Officer in Charge of Tully police station Sgt Rod Stanley.

“As an industry, we are all aware that we have gone to great lengths to fend off TR4. There is no other country in the world that has had similar success in containing this disease.

“However, just one person, dog or vehicle, entering a banana farm illegally, without adhering to strict biosecurity protocols, puts all of this effort at risk.

“And, if this disease does spread more broadly, it will not only affect farmers’ own livelihoods, but as the main employer and economic driver for the Cassowary Coast, it will also have a huge impact on the local communities that rely so heavily on the industry.”

A joint media event involving all agencies was held on October 28, to help educate the wider community on the importance of not trespassing onto banana properties, emphasising the risk of spreading TR4.

Biosecurity Queensland is also working on an information campaign to better educate tourists about TR4, and the importance of not entering farms without permission.

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Modern airbag fleet specialising in bananas

A MOMENT FOR McCUDDENS

The team at McCuddens Bananas aren't afraid of hard work... or a practical joke.

Long-time locals and surf-loving tourists will tell you that Valla, on the New South Wales mid-north coast, is an idyllic destination. Beautiful beaches, rich agricultural history and that small-town feeling that's getting harder to find.

But if you ask people within the state's banana industry, they'll let you in on another strong selling point: it's home to some of Australia's top ducasse bananas.

By Amy Spear

McCuddens Bananas, with its distinctive hot pink cartons and high-heeled banana branding, is run by Vicki McCudden.

"I started working in bananas many years ago with my first husband, Gary," she said. "Due to the challenge of low prices, I returned to my former career in nursing but packed bananas on my days off."

"It was during this time that we diversified into ducasse bananas. Gary was always interested in different varieties. He did the research and hard work organising the plants – and it was with his vision and foresight that we now have the plantation you see today."

For Vicki, banana growing wasn't always on the cards. But she loves it – a fact that is evident in her produce, her plantation and the team that surrounds her.

"When Gary passed there were three people at the plantation who still needed their jobs. There were established markets that still wanted our fruit and my father-in-law – who was 92-years-old at the time – didn't need the stress of finding someone to take over the lease. It was a no brainer. It was the right thing to do and something I've never regretted."

Ducasse, though much less common than their Cavendish or even Lady Finger counterparts, grow

well in the subtropical climate.

While demand remains consistent – McCuddens recently added Perth to their existing markets of Brisbane and Melbourne - the variety is labour intensive.

Working on the typically steep New South Wales slopes, they can't use mechanised equipment apart from tractors and quad bikes. Bagging, fertilising and desuckering is all done manually.

"They're heavy feeders and big drinkers which has been a challenge during this dry time," Vicki explained. "We are fortunate that we can irrigate at the moment."

Microbats, parrots and other birds also pose a challenge, and the team is vigilant about the prevention of beetle borer – but they do have one big advantage in that they don't suffer from leaf disease.

The hard work is made easier when spread among five team members who don't mind a practical joke and take pride in what they do.

"I'm so blessed and grateful to have the team I work with...they go above and beyond what is expected."

The team strive to stay on top of the plantation, dealing with 'prolific' suckers and maintaining a regular regime of fertilising, irrigating and keeping weeds at bay.

In a sentiment many growers will relate to, Vicki knows it's all worthwhile.

"I love that we can produce something that is healthy, wholesome and makes people happy.

"I love when someone asks what I do for a living, the surprised look on their face and then a conversation about the type of bananas they eat – usually involving a recipe."

As for what's next?

"I've remarried now to a wonderful man who is also part of the team, but we'll reach retirement age in around six years. I have two grandkids and my son – Nicholas – so who knows what the future holds."

For the time being, one thing is certain. McCuddens will keep producing high-quality, tasty ducasse bananas.



The sought after fruit and very distinctive branding of McCuddens Bananas.

MATT'S MOVING ON



Matt Weinert, with Golden Dawn's Paul Gibbins, who he has worked closely with over the past few years, including with packed product and reject analysis.

Over the past five years, Matt Weinert has publicly declared, on numerous occasions, that he is bananas for bananas. He's got the shirts and, perhaps more importantly, the industry backing to prove it.

From working one-on-one with growers to harvesting new varieties, from handing out samples at shows to giving public talks and tours – there's little he hasn't been up for, to support industry.

Now, though, it's time for the next challenge. Matt finished his role as NSW DPI Industry Development Officer on November 29.

Reflecting on the past five years, there are a few things that stand out.

The first is that no two days are the same.

"The role has been so varied," he said.

"You can be solving pest and disease problems one day or talking about plant nutrition – something that I'm really passionate about – the next.

"I also spent 5-6 months working with growers across a range of industries on the recovery effort after ex Tropical Cyclone Debbie. I'm pretty pleased with the outcome we achieved there. We got growers some money from the Government to pay for things like infrastructure and fertilizer to get them back on their feet."

More recently, he had conducted detailed reject and packed product analysis, with the aim of improving the quality of fruit coming out the NSW region.

The second thing that stands out is perhaps the one he'll miss the most – interacting with growers, particularly the next generation.

"Watching some of them grow over the last 4-5 years has been great. I'm really chuffed about what we've achieved with the Tweed BGA, for example. There are young guys there, running the BGA and doing a fantastic job with the local show.

"I've only played a small role in that, but I've supported them where I can and it's been fantastic to see it happen."

It seems the feeling is mutual, with Tweed BGA president Colin Singh noting how much he will be missed.

"He's organised so much for us," Mr Singh said.

Mr Weinert has also watched the young growers around Coffs Harbour "blossom", adopting new practices including grassed inter rows and farming on flatter land.

He acknowledged the fantastic support he'd received from industry, including the Australian Banana Growers' Council board and staff.

ABGC CEO Jim Pekin said Mr Weinert had made a real impact during his five years in the role.

"We've been lucky to have someone so passionate about the industry working on the ground," Mr Pekin said.

"No matter how busy he has been, he's always been happy to pick up the phone, help out a grower or showcase the industry to a broader audience."

While Mr Weinert is disappointed he'll no longer have first access to the high-quality fruit produced on the Durambah trial block, he believes the future is looking good for the NSW industry.

Not only are there new plantings going in, but there's demand for the state's fruit both locally and in capital cities.

He's also proud of the fact that the banana weevil lure is commercially available, predicting pheromones will be a key pest management strategy into the future.

"I know some people had trialed it before I came on board, but we had fantastic support from Bugs for Bugs and we've done some interesting trial work... we just need to fully work out the trapping strategy and hopefully that can continue after I'm gone."

While Matt may be moving into a nuttier role now (he'll be working with macadamias), he knows from past experience that it's not farewell for good.

"I'm still in contact with mango, avocado and citrus growers that I worked with on the Atherton Tablelands prior to my job in bananas. I still get some phone calls from them," he said.

"It might not be day-to-day, but I'll still have an interest and keep across what's happening."



Matt with grower David Tate in the field.

BUNCHY TOP'S NEXT CHAPTER WELL UNDER WAY

By Amy Spear

Bunchy Top inspectors have hit the steep slopes of South East Queensland and Northern New South Wales, with Phase Four of the National Project now in full swing.

The Hort Innovation Banana Fund project, which commenced on July 15 under Manager David Peasley, is focused on protecting commercial plantations, as well as driving increased community and grower involvement in detecting the viral disease.

“Our first priority was to ensure we had access to accurate data, including grower details, plantation numbers, surveillance information and correct infection risk categories,” Mr Peasley explained.

“We’ve been having monthly meetings and field checking with our inspectors to verify and update our records.”

The latest data for the New South Wales Bunchy Top zone shows that plantation numbers have fallen by 25 per cent in a period of just over three years.

The area under banana production is down by 172 hectares. The team is currently working on obtaining the same information for the target area in South East Queensland.

In the field, inspectors have been working with hot spot plantations and achieving solid results.

In a plantation of particular concern to industry, the numbers of infection have decreased significantly with improved plantation hygiene, a thorough inspection and destruction program, and drier weather conditions.

Mr Peasley also noted the valuable work being done by Associate Professor John Thomas and his researchers looking at latency and aphid transmission.

“Our project team is actively assisting in this essential work. Reducing sites for aphid breeding in hanging dead leaves and excess suckers, as well as aphid suppression spraying, appears to reduce infections,” he said.

The Bunchy Top project team was also represented at the recent Murwillumbah Show. Mr Peasley used cryovaced banana leaves to clearly demonstrate the difference between healthy and infected leaves.

“It’s a great tool to show both growers and the general public some of the key symptoms to keep an eye out for – and how we can use a torch or sunlight to make the process easier,” he said.

A new trainee will be appointed to the Project in early 2020 to ensure the inspection capacity is maintained.



Project Manager David Peasley and inspector Wayne Shoobridge demonstrating how to identify Bunchy Top.

Getting social

Community members and backyard banana lovers now have access to the Bunchy Top team in the palm of their hands.

The Project is using Instagram and Facebook to showcase the symptoms of Bunchy Top and encourage non-commercial growers within the Bunchy Top zone to report their concerns.

Videos and photos are posted regularly, including demonstrating the best way to take a photo of a potentially infected plant so inspectors can diagnose the problem on the spot.

You can check out the channels by searching for ‘Banana Bunchy Top Project’ on either platform.

Bunchy Top Hotline: 1800 068 371

Hort Innovation
Strategic levy investment

BANANA FUND

This project has been funded by Hort Innovation using the banana research and development levy and funds from the Australian Government. For more information on the fund and strategic levy investment visit horticulture.com.au

CRUNCH TIME FOR LEAF SPOT

Growers are reminded that now is the time to get leaf spot under control as the wet season, humidity and hot weather is upon us.

It is much easier to keep inoculum levels low (under the recommended 5%) by making sure your de-leafing is up to date and by following the recommended resistance management strategy for spraying.

High levels of leaf spot infection in your plants will cause problems not just for you, but also your neighbours such as:

- delays in filling bunches
- reduced 'green life' in fruit causing mixed ripening

- increased costs for de-leafing and spraying
- difficulty in detecting exotic leaf diseases if they arrive in your area
- restricted market access.

As the proverb goes, the hardest work of all is to do nothing.

For more information, consult ABGC's Carl Rickson on 0447 551 473, your chemical reseller or agronomist.



Leaf spot symptoms in a plantation where de-leafing has not occurred.

35 YEARS FIGHTING BUNCHY TOP



Retired Bunchy Top inspector Tom Maher.

After more than three decades as a Bunchy Top inspector, much-loved character Tom Maher began his well-deserved retirement earlier this year.

Bunchy Top is a notoriously hard disease to detect, but despite losing one eye some 25 years ago, Mr Maher earned a reputation as a highly-skilled inspector and a valued member of the team.

"It really is difficult to spot in its earliest stage – (but it's) the time when it is so important to find and destroy any aphids before they spread the virus," National Banana Bunchy Top Project Manager David Peasley said.

"I don't know how he did it with only one eye, but he was a fantastic inspector in every way."

Mr Peasley described Mr Maher as a shy, likeable character who liked to stay close to his beloved Mt Chincogan (Chinny), near Mullumbimby.

That was until he saw the Ettamogah Pub on his way to do an inspection on Queensland's Sunshine Coast.

"I remember his face lighting up when he spotted his favourite cartoon in real life. From then on, he didn't mind straying from his 'Chinny'. In fact, he nearly bought out the Pub's gift shop every time we travelled north."

Mr Maher had his own way of getting the job done. He wore shorts and short-sleeved shirts - even in the toughest conditions. A few lantana scratches would never stop him from completing any task he was given.

Mr Peasley said Tom might be shy, but the team would miss his loud voice booming across the plantations.

"Go the West Tigers and all the best in retirement Tom," he added.



REEF PROJECT HELPS GROWERS REDUCE RUN-OFF

Grower Satinderjit Sing Gill works with Soil Conservationist Darryl Evans to design contours on his farm. This work was funded by the Reef Trust III program.

By Amelia Foster, BMP Coordinator

Banana growers are leading the way to reduce sediment and nutrient leaving their farms to help secure the future health of the Great Barrier Reef. With the Reef Trust III Project coming to an end, the last of 50 projects are now being finalised.

The Reef Trust III project ran for three years across the Great Barrier Reef catchments. The project was delivered via the Reef Alliance which brought together 14 industry bodies, regional NRM bodies and the conservation sector with a common goal of assisting to secure the future health of the Great Barrier Reef, as well as supporting an engaged and prosperous community.

The banana industry target was for 43 projects and we well and truly over-delivered! Individual growers were provided 50% funding of up to \$15,000 for projects that allowed them to adopt industry best practice, minimising losses of soil, fertiliser and pesticides from their farms.

Grower Lakhbir Atwal - 'Lucky' - was assisted to upgrade his irrigation to an automated fertigation system which incorporated soil moisture monitoring, and to purchase a slasher to help improve his ground cover. Lucky said that his new side throw slasher would throw grass back onto the banana beds, improving his soil structure and health, and lead to less leaching due to a better nutrient holding capacity. Time will tell if Lucky's aim of increasing the number of worms in his soil will be successful.

The Reef Trust III project allowed for innovative projects that tried new ways of improving water quality. Banana farmer Mark Nucifora identified an issue with ground cover on his farm and chose to trial a solution that involved replacing the tyres on his bagging machine with tracks. Over an extended period of time ABGC Extension Officer, Dale Bennett, and Soil Conservationist, Darryl Evans, monitored the impact of this change against control rows where Mark continued to use a traditional bagging machine.

Matt and Ben Abbott purchased a pivoting-head slasher for use on their farm to reduce the time needed to slash their inter-rows.

Banana growers have embraced the opportunities that the RTIII project has provided and are keen participants in projects that allow them to farm more sustainably. The banana industry leads the way in improved practices, with less nutrients being applied than 20 years ago and significant changes in inter-row management. Growers do not want to waste fertiliser by applying too much just to have it wash off, and they do not want to see the most productive soil leave their farm. They are farming for the long term and for future generations.

Banana growers continue to demonstrate their willingness to improve sustainability on their farms and as one program finishes, another one starts. The ABGC has secured additional funding of \$1M from the Queensland Government, via the Office of the Great Barrier Reef, which will allow banana farmers to access extension support and financial assistance to build or upgrade infrastructure and undertake projects that directly reduce sediment and nutrient run off.

Reef Trust III helped secure:

- 6 GPSes
- 2 slashers
- 10 fertiliser spreaders
- 21 automated fertigation systems
- 11 sediment reducing projects including silt traps and earthworks

MIP INTER-ROW EROSION TRIAL

All growers know that bananas require year-round paddock work, which means there is greater risk of erosion in wet conditions.

As part of a major reef water quality project, Innisfail banana farmer Rob Zahra is demonstrating the effects of reduced traffic in banana inter-rows and the potential benefits to water quality, soil health and rates of soil erosion.

Sandra Henrich, Johnstone Basin Coordinator for the Wet Tropics Major Integrated Project (MIP) says the industry is focused on finding sustainable solutions to stop sediment loss.

“No one wants to be losing top soil from their paddocks. It impacts production, as well as water quality,” she said.

“Whilst it’s accepted knowledge that having ground cover in the inter-row prevents erosion, it can be difficult to maintain in Wet Tropics conditions.”

“Wet conditions, poor light penetration and constant machinery traffic in all weather can affect the quality of groundcover, which has flow on effects for soil loss and therefore the quality of water leaving the farm.”

The project is one of the many water quality projects that are a part of the Wet Tropics MIP.

The demonstration site is located on Mr Zahra’s Bamboo Creek property, at Innisfail. It is comparing

a suite of inter-row management practices that affect ground cover establishment and maintenance.

Rob said he’s looking forward to the demonstration site providing economic data for each scenario, so it can be used as a decision support tool.

“I know sediment loss is an issue on my farm – it’s the reason I got involved. It’s one of those things where you’re always trying to find a good balance between doing the right thing environmentally and making sure it stacks up economically.”

“For instance, bagging machines have an impact on wheel ruts and bog holes so I’m interested to see the comparison between purchasing, operating and maintaining a bagging machine as opposed to the additional labour to bag from a ladder,” Rob said.

The three management systems being compared represent the common methods of farm management used in the industry today. These include heavy weed and inter-row spraying, standard procedure of traffic and banded spraying, and a less intensive approach which restricts vehicles, and takes a targeted approach to weed management.

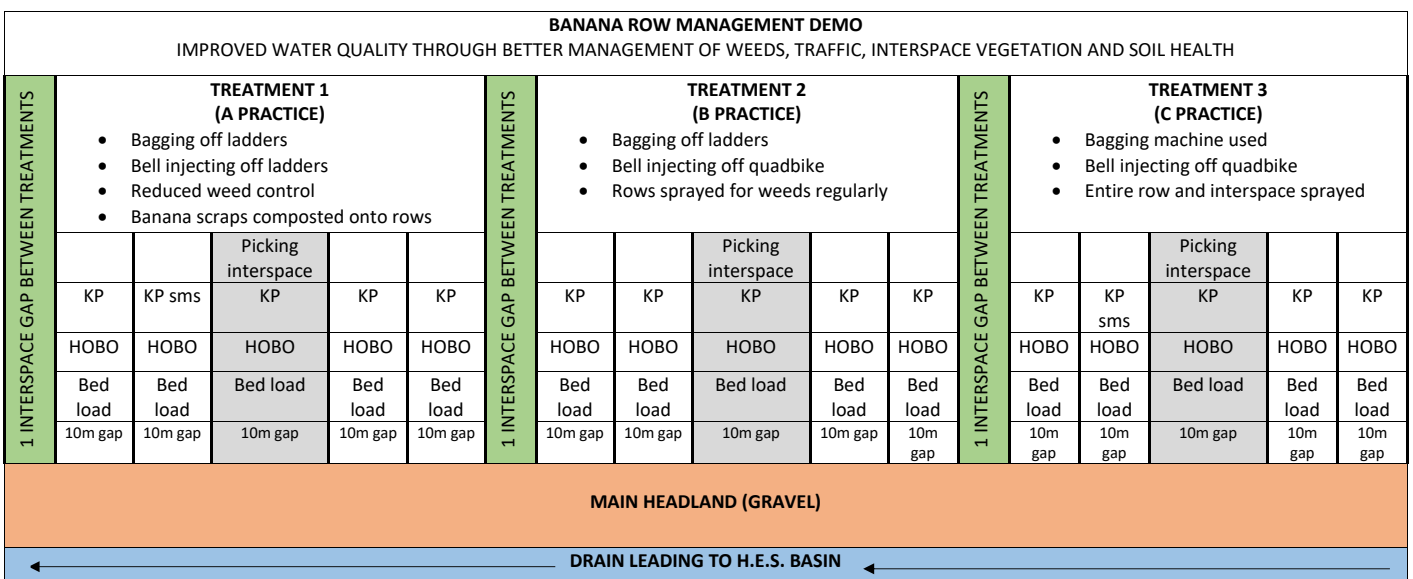
Ground cover, soil health and rates of erosion will be compared from each of the designated rows over this wet season. Results will be provided back to the landholder and wider banana industry in partnership with ABGC extension officers. This information will also be shared with the wider growing community as the principles apply to all horticultural systems.

Through the MIP, Rob has also implemented a High Efficiency Sediment Basin on his farm.

Ms Henrich said that there is no substitute for best management practice, but it is important to acknowledge the constraints of farming systems and landscape conditions.

“Even though best management practices reduce the potential for losses, whole-of-farm approaches are important. Treatment systems can help to stop sediment loss that management practices alone haven’t been able to prevent,” she said.

The Wet Tropics Major Integrated Project is funded by the Queensland Government through the Reef Water Quality Program.



FRONTLINE ATTACK AGAINST PANAMA TR4

By Lea Coghlan and Sarah Flenley, Biosecurity Queensland

Finding Panama disease tropical race 4 (Panama TR4) early and destroying the infected plants means less disease can build up in the soil which is beneficial to an infested farm's viability.

To find the disease:

- growers are encouraged to check their own plants and are legally required to report signs of the disease.
- Biosecurity Queensland runs a surveillance program with trained officers that visit farms to check for signs of the disease.

Growers often ask how Biosecurity Queensland works out which farm gets surveillance and how often. Turn to pages 28-29 to find out more.

In a recent study where banana growers were interviewed about on-farm biosecurity, some growers raised concerns about Biosecurity Queensland's surveillance program. They wanted to know what training our surveillance officers undergo to identify Panama TR4.

How do we train surveillance officers and what do they do?

Our surveillance officers are trained as authorised officers under the Biosecurity Act 2014.

Officers are trained in:

- identifying suspect plants
- collecting plant samples for testing (ensuring that the sample integrity remains intact from the paddock to the laboratory)
- thorough decontamination processes (cleaning, rinsing and disinfecting items that have been taken onto a banana farm)
- correct use and storage of chemicals (chemical certification).

There are generally three surveillance teams operating at any given time. The team comprises a senior field officer and two surveillance officers. One team is dedicated to carrying out surveillance and compliance activities only on infested properties.

The other two teams visit farms across the banana growing regions in Far North Queensland to check plants for symptoms of the disease.

On Farm

When the team arrives, a decontamination station is set up outside the farm. This allows workers to clean boots and equipment in one easily managed area. The team undertake decontamination on entry and exit to a property to ensure there is no chance of disease spread by the surveillance activity. Surveillance officers also wear disposable clothing that is later couriered to a quarantine secure facility.

The senior field officer meets with the grower to gain consent to enter their farm and explain what they will be doing while on the farm. It also gives the grower a chance to ask questions or advise of biosecurity conditions present on the property that need to be observed.

Jared Harman, a senior field officer with the Panama TR4 Program, believes communication with the grower is critical.

"Working with the grower to minimise any disturbance to their daily operations is important," Jared said.

"We take into consideration their operations along with the on-farm biosecurity measures, and give the grower an opportunity to provide feedback on our plan of attack before we start."

Jared and fellow senior field officer Chris Collier lead the surveillance teams who walk every fourth row of a banana farm looking for physical signs of the disease. This can include yellowing of leaves and a skirt of dead leaves around the stem.



Part of the decontamination process that takes place on entry and exit to a property.

A suspect plant

If a banana plant is suspected of having Panama TR4, the plant is tagged and photographed.

The plant is cut at varying heights. If it shows signs of discolouration in the vascular system, a cross section of the plant is taken, bagged and sent to the laboratory for detailed testing.

As a 12-year veteran of the banana industry, Chris appreciates what the industry means to the region.

"Without bananas, the livelihood of businesses in the area would be at risk," Chris said. "The industry employs a significant number of people in the Cassowary Coast region and it would be rare to find a business that doesn't rely on the industry in some way."

While finding a banana plant suspected of having the disease is bittersweet, it's part of the job.

"The last thing you want to do is tell a grower he has a suspect plant on his farm," Chris said.

"At the same time the first thing you want to do is detect that suspect plant if it exists.

"The earlier the detection is identified the better for the grower and the industry as early detection means early destruction which is less build up of the disease in the soil."

A quality assurance program tracks where officers walked on the farm, and their walking pace. This ensures the agreed government and industry surveillance protocol is followed.

The surveillance team covers around 100 acres on a typical day.

Chris and Jared derive great satisfaction out of helping an industry, which is the backbone of the community in which they've chosen to live and raise families.

"At the end of the day, we are foot soldiers in a bigger war but as local residents we have a huge stake in making sure the industry has longevity in the community."

WHAT IS A GOOD IDEA IF IT REMAINS AN IDEA?

INNOVATION TRIAL UPDATE

By Shanara Veivers, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

The innovation trial planted at the South Johnstone Research Station in November 2017 investigates various 'out of the box' concepts that growers may not be willing to take on due to the financial risk, or have the time and resources to trial on their own farms.

The field trial has a focus on those practices that may increase agronomic performance and/or have environmental benefits.

Within the trial, 90% of plants in the first ratoon crop have been harvested, with very few bunches yet to emerge.

What has been trialled so far?

- Living and non-living ground covers on the

banana bed including black weed matting, chemical soil stabiliser, mint, pinto peanut and conventional bare-earth treatments.

- Early vs late de-suckering - 50% of plants received early de-suckering, which was the removal of the first 'flush' of suckers 3 months after planting, compared to a conventional approach of de-suckering closer to bell emergence.

What are some of the plant crop results?

- Plants that were de-suckered early had shown to produce more leaves, were taller and produced heavier bunches.
- Ground cover affected the cycle time, height and bunch characteristics of the plants. Plants in the black weed matting:

- took longer to reach bell emergence (248 days) compared to pinto peanut (219 days), mint (212 days), soil stabiliser (206 days), with conventional bare-earth being the fastest (194 days).

- had a higher average plant height (258cm) compared to conventional bare (251cm)
- had a higher average number of hands (7 hands) compared to conventional bare (6 hands)

- The chemical soil stabiliser product (10% solution) deteriorated rapidly due to high rainfall, as a result the soil stabiliser plots were replaced with mulching hay.
- Weeds crowded out the 'mint' living ground cover, and more time was required to de-sucker the mint and pinto peanut plots.



Pinto peanut and mulching hay ground cover treatments

NEW INNOVATIONS

Entomopathogenic nematodes (EPNs)

Laboratory experiments are currently underway to see if entomopathogenic nematodes have the potential to control banana weevil borer. Observations so far show that these nematodes are capable of killing adult banana weevil borers. Similar to back butt injection, plants in the field trial have also been treated with the nematodes, however it is still early days. Watch this space as research progresses!

Bell injection

A biological product containing species such as *Beauveria bassiana* and *Metarhizium anisopliae* has been trialled as a potential control for banana scab moth, flower thrips and rust thrips. Unfortunately this biological product did not provide adequate control of banana bunch pests and caused some phytotoxicity to the bunch. The use of EPNs as a potential bell injection treatment to control banana scab moth, flower thrips and rust thrips will soon be conducted.



Bell injection trials



Phytotoxicity caused by biological product



Applying entomopathogenic nematode to harvested pseudostems in the field



Entomopathogenic nematode and banana weevil borer laboratory experiments

Panama disease tropical race 4

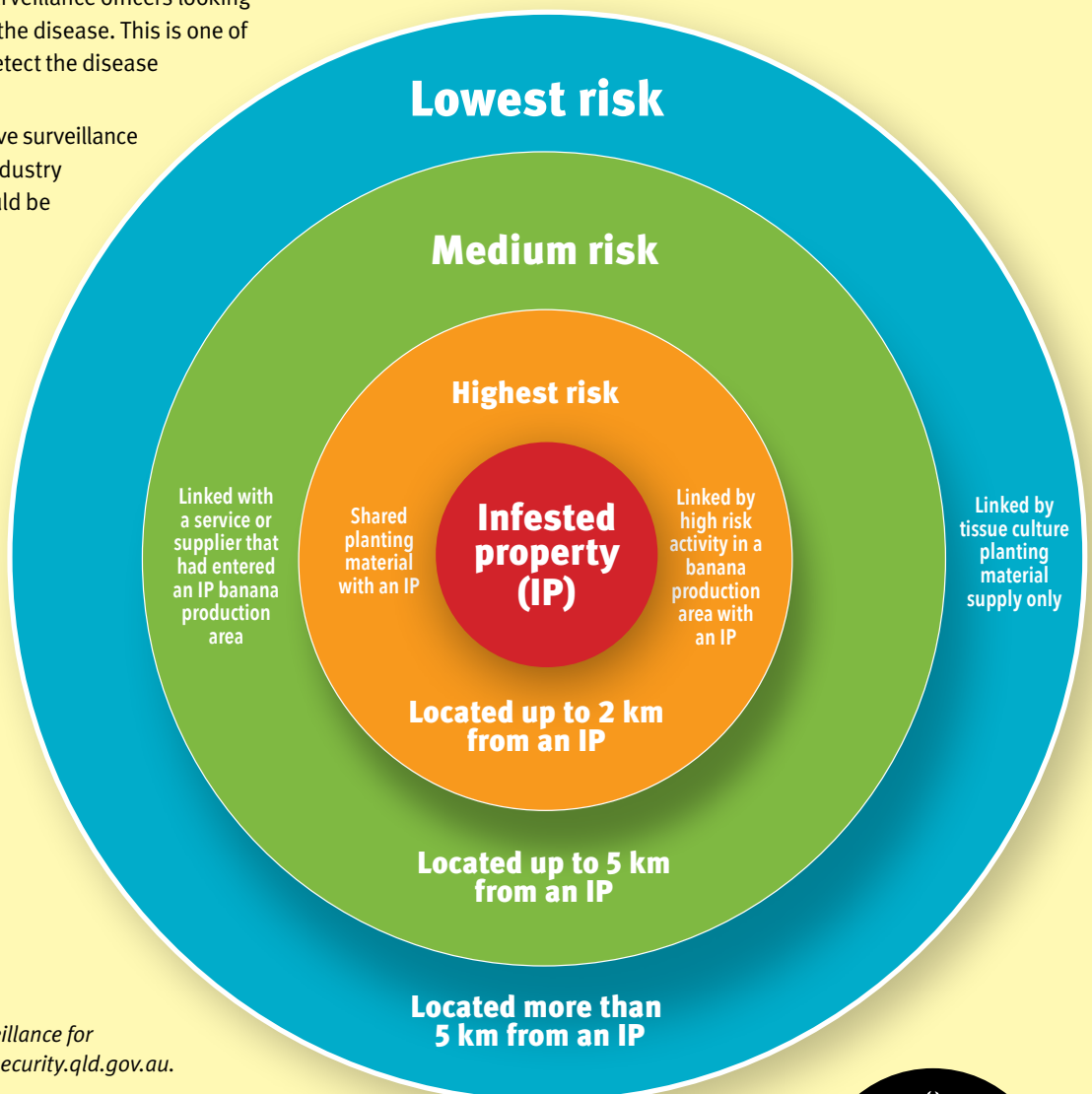
Managing Panama TR4—early detection is critical

Panama TR4 is a serious disease of banana plants that is present in Far North Queensland. The best way to protect farms from Panama TR4 is through preventative biosecurity measures, early detection and rapid destruction of infested plants. Global experience shows without these interventions, the disease can spread rapidly.

How does Biosecurity Queensland ensure early detection?

We have a team of trained surveillance officers looking for plants with symptoms of the disease. This is one of the most effective ways to detect the disease but is one of the more costly.

To run an efficient and effective surveillance program, government and industry agreed that surveillance would be based on a farm's level of exposure to the disease.



To find out more – read 'Surveillance for Panama TR4' factsheet at biosecurity.qld.gov.au.

For more information visit biosecurity.qld.gov.au or call 13 25 23



How can growers and the community ensure early detection?

Early detection means less disease builds up in the soil, which in turn protects farms and the industry. If you suspect signs of the disease, you must report it to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 (it's actually a legal requirement under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*). Once a call is received, biosecurity officers visit the property and may take a sample of the suspect plant/s. The sample is securely sent to a laboratory to be tested for Panama TR4.

For more information read the 'Diagnosing Panama TR4' and 'Check your plants for Panama TR4' at biosecurity.qld.gov.au

WHAT IS PANAMA TR4 ?

Panama disease tropical race 4 (Panama TR4) is a serious disease that affects most banana varieties including Cavendish, Lady Finger and Ducasse. It is a fungal disease that lives in the soil. It is easily spread through infected banana plant material and contaminated soil and water. It cannot be eradicated and can survive in the soil undetected for decades.

SIGNS OF PANAMA TR4 INCLUDE:

- Yellowing of leaves with brown or black edges
- Dying leaves forming a 'skirt' around the stem
- In some circumstances the stem will split at the base of the plant through two to three layers, and later deeper and higher up.

How do I check my banana plants?

Surveillance on your farm can be undertaken informally and formally.

Informal

Surveillance can be integrated into your current farming practices and every day activities. Staff that regularly access paddocks should be trained in disease identification and how to report suspect plants. During the course of their day-to-day duties, they can be on the lookout for symptoms of disease.

Make sure your field staff:

- are trained to identify disease symptoms
- know what to do if they see signs of disease
- know who they report signs of disease to
- are equipped to record the location of the plant and to take photos
- use the *Panama TR4 Disease Identification Guide*.

Biosecurity Queensland offers free Panama TR4 information sessions. Contact us via email on panamatr4@daf.qld.gov.au or phone 4091 8140.



Formal

You may decide to adopt a formal surveillance program for your farm. How often you do this may depend on your proximity and linkages to infested farms, resources and farm size.

Below is a guide based on the current methodology for Biosecurity Queensland's surveillance program:

- Surveillance is undertaken by workers walking along rows of banana plants.
- Workers should look at the plants immediately on either side and wherever possible in the two rows each side of the row being walked.
- A suitable observation pace is slower than walking pace for staff to confidently examine plants for symptoms.
- Alternate rows should be walked for every surveillance round. For example, if row two was walked in the first surveillance round, row three should be walked for the second surveillance round.
- Workers should record the dates and the rows walked as part of your on-farm biosecurity plan.

A SWEET VALUE ADD



Bananas from the Sweeter Banana Co-Operative feature in new West Australian product Gelavo.

By Amy Spear

At this time of year, it's hard to think of a better treat than a tub of cold, creamy gelato.

But if you needed an extra reason to tuck in, the popular dessert is also providing a tasty way to give new life to banana seconds.

Sweeter Banana Co-Operative in Western Australia is currently supplying fruit to two innovative local companies – one an award-winning mainstay in the WA foodie scene and the other delivering new options for ice cream lovers with a nut or dairy allergy.

Gelavo is a creamy avocado-based ice-cream, created by food technologists Anthea Rodoreda and Andrew Tilley – who are passionate both about sustainability and catering for food intolerances.

Sweeter's Business Manager Doriana Mangili reached out to the founders after spotting an article about their work with second-grade avocados.

The Co-Operative initially supplied seconds bananas for a trial, and it proved to be a hit.

Gelavo's Andrew Tilley said the Sweeter team had been patient as they slowly grew their company and always helped source bananas when they were needed.

"Sweeter Bananas are crazy sweet and work well with our base formulation," he said. "They provide a lot of the sweetness that is in our ice cream and lend their own creamy element. They also provide the most amazing buttery mouthfeel when super ripe. It makes for a pretty special experience."

It was the taste that also led Gelatino's Matteo Beccoci to the Sweeter Banana Co-Operative.

"We shop for some of our ingredients for the business – and for home – at the local growers' markets," he said. "We bought their bananas and knew they were a great product, so we started using them at Gelatino."

While consumers have loved the result – the banana gelato was a massive hit at the 2019 Royal Perth Show – the product has also impressed industry veterans.

In 2017 it took out a Gold Award from the Dairy Industry Association of Australia, before securing the Champion title the following year.

Using fresh produce in a product like gelato is not without its challenges, particularly when it comes to timing.

"Once we get the bananas in, we do wait until they are really ripe so all the goodness, sugars and protein come out," Mr Beccoci explained. "We don't use them straight away."

As well as a passion for creating a delicious product, both Gelavo and Gelatino share a vision for creating less food waste.

"It's crucial for us – we hate food waste," Mr Beccoci said. "There's so much fruit that doesn't hit the shelves or even leave the farm because of the criteria that we are used to – if you go to a



Sweeter banana flavoured Gelatino gelato was a huge hit at this year's Royal Perth Show.

supermarket you are drawn to what looks better. That's terrible and it's something that needs to be addressed. In our little world we are doing our part in that."

Mr Tilley noted that using seconds also presented a certain level of risk as market forces and environmental factors can impact prices and change availability.

"This is one of the challenges that we will no doubt have to face in the future, but we hope that by being flexible and clever with our supply, we can ride out any major fluctuations in the market," he said.

For now, Gelavo, Gelatino and Sweeter Banana Co-Operative are excited about what the future holds.

"These two companies really do provide the perfect partnership for what we do here at Sweeter," Ms Mangili said. "There are always opportunities for new products and value adding – and these are great examples."

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE: MOKO DISEASE

A regular feature in Australian Bananas magazine, *Under the Microscope* profiles the industry's emerging and exotic diseases. Sometimes you just need the facts, fast.

What is Moko Disease?

Moko is caused by a bacterium called *Ralstonia solanacearum* which belongs to a group of pathogens that cause bacterial wilts in banana. It is related to banana blood disease. When the disease occurs on cooking bananas of the ABB and BBB type it is called 'Bugtok'.

What are the symptoms?

- Rapid yellowing, wilting and collapse of leaves (Fig 1)
- Wilting of small suckers
- Premature fruit ripening and splitting (Fig 2)
- Premature ripening fingers in an otherwise green bunch (Fig 3)
- Fruit pulp turns yellow to brown grey and results in a firm rot of the fruit pulp (Fig 4 & 5)
- Blackening and shriveling of flower buds
- Vascular tissue of the stalk shows brown discoloration when cut (Fig 6)
- Internal yellow to brown discoloration of the pseudostem (Fig 7)

How does it spread?

The Moko bacterium can be spread in infected plant material, fruit, soil, water, insects and pollinators. The pathogen can survive in the soil for more than a year. Heliconia species are a known host of Moko.

Where in the world is it found?

Moko disease originates from Latin America and is currently also found in the Philippines and in peninsular Malaysia. Australia is free of Moko disease.

What are we doing to protect our industry?

- Strict regulation concerning import of plant material
- Surveillance and validating our diagnostics ensuring that we can detect all the different strains causing Moko
- Increase awareness among industry stakeholders

What can I do to protect my farm?

- Use only disease-free planting material
- Check your farm frequently for new pests and unusual symptoms
- Maintain good biosecurity practices



Figure 1: Rapid yellowing, wilting and collapse of leaves.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.

Photos and text provided by Prof André Drenth and Dr Lilia Carvalhais, University of Queensland as part of project BA16005 Strengthening the banana industry diagnostic capacity. Photo 2 & 3 courtesy of Mauricio Guzmán and Ricardo Villalta, CORBANA, Costa Rica.

SOIL ECOLOGY EXPERT MARKS QUARTER-CENTURY WITH DAF



Well-known soil biology expert, Dr Tony Pattison, was recently honoured for 25 years with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF).

The globally-respected scientist, author and Principal Nematologist took time to reflect on his milestone achievement of service, which he described as both fulfilling and challenging.

By Sonia Campbell

Making a difference to the livelihoods of Australian banana growers, has been the real mainstay for Principal Nematologist, Dr Tony Pattison, who earlier this year celebrated 25 years of service at the DAF South Johnstone Research Facility.

The dedicated researcher is one of the most highly regarded soil ecology experts, both nationally and across the world.

In two and a half decades, he has pioneered a range of innovative technologies that have greatly assisted in the quantification of micro-organisms within soil that interact with horticultural crops.

His research has centred around developing sustainable cropping practices for banana growers that suppress disease – including Panama tropical race 4 – as well as managing plant-parasitic nematodes to reduce the use of chemicals.

A key component of this work in developing productive, disease suppressive banana soils is for growers to maintain the physical, chemical and biological health of soils, by building up biological diversity.

“I think some of the best aspects of being based somewhere like South Johnstone, is that you get constant interaction with banana growers, so you have to keep the research real,” Dr Pattison said.

“You are dealing with people’s livelihoods. So what you’re doing is overcoming real problems that affect the future of the industry and trying to produce better products.”

Dr Pattison’s career in agriculture began in his home town of Armidale, completing an undergraduate degree at the University of New England, which led to an interest in plant science and employment as a research assistant at the University of Sydney IA Watson Wheat Research Institute, in Narrabri, New South Wales.

“During this time plant-parasitic nematodes were becoming an increasing problem for wheat farmers in the region, and nematodes were more interesting than Fusarium (they moved and could be counted).

“While working I completed my M Sci Ag. on *Pratylenchus thornei*, then did a short stint with NSW Ag in cotton diseases, before being lured north in 1994 to work on nematodes in bananas (at South Johnstone).”

An initial 3-year contract turned into 25 years, and he’s still counting - despite having to make some initial major adjustments, both workwise and climatic.

“I had no experience in bananas whatsoever. And, I remember the year that I came up, it was the beginning of January 1994. It was a ‘dry spell’, and then we got Narrabri’s annual rainfall in three days, over the Australia Day long weekend. And, it didn’t stop raining. I asked people, “When is it going to stop raining?” to which one person replied, “I don’t know, I’ve only been here 5 years!”

Bananas being a global commodity, and afflicted by a myriad of pests and diseases, the industry has offered Dr Pattison many opportunities over the

years to travel to tropical countries across the globe, including six-months spent in Costa Rica.

“During this period, I was part of the change away from widespread use of chemicals to control soil borne disease, to more ecological approaches through better soil management. I used nematodes as biological indicators and worked with banana growers to achieve practice change.

“Some of the work that I was doing in Costa Rica in 2007 was investigating soil health and suppression of nematodes. I was working with soil pH and ground covers’ impacts. Having ground covers on the soil surface is now standard practice in Costa Rican bananas.”

The initiative to improve soil health to manage soil borne diseases in bananas allowed Dr Pattison to join and lead projects funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) in countries such as Indonesia, Philippines and Laos. It also allowed him to work with farmers in Costa Rica, Ecuador and Brazil.

“My career has now led full circle back to Fusarium. After having tried to escape from Fusarium when working in wheat, the work with Fusarium now offers new opportunities to work with banana farmers around the world to overcome Panama disease,” he said.

Dr Pattison said he was keen to keep working with the banana industry, which he believes will continue to evolve and see even greater practice change improvements over time.

“I think bananas are always challenging. You think you’ve worked it all out, but they (bananas) don’t follow the rules, it’s like a never ending puzzle. It just offers a lot of challenges to keep coming up with solutions.

“And technologies change so rapidly. Some things I’d loved to have done 10-15 years ago, I can do them now. Sequencing of DNA so you can see the genomes within the soil was unthinkable before. But it is being able to take this new technology and apply it to help growers that gives me the most satisfaction.

“With nematodes, we don’t realise all the advances that we’ve made over time from the work that has been done. It’s only when you go to other countries and see how they produce bananas and you realise how our industry has evolved. And it will keep evolving.”

THE SECRET'S IN THE SLOPE



By Amy Spear

The first thing you notice when arriving at Jason Gentle's banana plantation, near Coffs Harbour in New South Wales, is just how steep the hill is.

The next is how much he loves it.

Banana grower Jason Gentle with Cooper on his property.

Jason is a fourth-generation grower who, with his mum Monica, invested in the Crossmaglen block in mid-2017.

When they started out, there was no sign of the bananas that had grown there in the past – the bush was so overgrown and steep, it was impossible to get machinery into some places, and hand-clearing was the only option.

Now, though, it's a different story. Eight acres of Cavendish and Ducasse line the slopes, with concrete roads allowing for easy access and leading to a brand new packing shed.

"The process has been extremely hard and it hasn't stopped yet," Jason said. "Mum always said if we could last the first three years we could do it." It's now been two and a half.

In addition to starting this plantation from scratch, Jason and Monica work on Monica's block at North Bonville. His father, Mick, and cousin Dom are also growers in the region, meaning he's had plenty of experience to draw on.

"I had no intention to grow bananas at first," he said. But the first day of Year 11 changed his mind. "I went home and told my mum I was working for her – she was over the moon."

It wasn't long before the love of bananas crept in. "It's the satisfaction of putting all that effort into growing something and seeing the end product," he explained.

A large part of the plantation is now onto its second cut, and there's been no trouble accessing markets for the produce.

At this point in time, they supply their fruit to Melbourne and Golden Dawn in Coffs Harbour.

Jason has plans to expand onto the remaining ridges, but is conscious of not getting too big, particularly when his business partner may have her own ideas.

"I don't know what mum's plans are at this stage – she may go part time or retire, and she's a very good worker!

"If you spent a day with us you would think we fight and swear a lot. But we never take it heart.

"It's also good as she does all the paper work," he added with a smile.

Though he's only in his early twenties, he's picked up plenty of 'tricks of the trade' during his time in the industry – the main one is the reason he's passionate about the impressive north-facing hill at the farm.

"In my second year working at the old place, we decided to put in some lady fingers," he said. "Dad had just got himself a northern slope. We planted bananas at the same time of year, but ours were down low and on a southerly slope. It was crazy to see how different the quality of fruit was and the amount of work involved. The output [on the northern slope] was greater and faster. That was the lightbulb moment."

While they may still have six months to go until they pass that magic three year mark, the future certainly looks promising for Monica and Jason.

"We do the majority of work ourselves. That's why we're so tired all the time," Jason laughed. But it's worth it for the quality produce they are consistently producing. And then there's that hill.

"This hill is incredible," he said. "I just love it. And it keeps you fit!"



The slopes are ideal for growing in New South Wales – and provide some pretty spectacular views.

BANANAS MAINTAIN POSITION AS #1 ENERGY SNACK

The latest wave of Consumer Tracking results, an impromptu Triple J banana fest and spots in nine of the ten top mainstream television programmes are among the latest Australian Bananas marketing highlights.

TV

If you were watching The Block, Australia's Got Talent or This Time Next Year, chances are you may have caught the latest Australian Bananas campaign.

A two-network deal utilising Seven and Nine was negotiated for metro areas, while negotiations with all major networks took place in regional markets. The burst launched on August 25 and kicked off with the Ashes Cricket Series.

Overall, Australian Bananas appeared in nine of the top ten mainstream TV programs during the campaign.

Digital Video

The Catch Up television component is now complete, with placements performing well across all major networks including SevenPlus, NineNow and TenPlay. This format saw high completion rates (people watching through to the end of the advertisement), averaging 97 per cent and well above the 70 per cent benchmark. YouTube also continues to perform well, and the latest FlyBuys data research will be released soon.

Radio and Audio Streaming

Podcast activity proved to be very cost efficient and exceeded expected results. Podcast ads were targeted nationally, but more than 80 per cent of users were based in metro areas. Interestingly, while most listened on mobile or tablet devices, 6 per cent listened on smart speakers or home assistants, aligned with the growth of these devices.

Australian Bananas campaigns also ran on the KIIS and Gold radio networks in all five metro markets and Spotify.

Out of Home

August saw a range of outdoor advertising activity commence, including in retail, transit and gym spaces.

Retail panels outside grocery stores served as a final reminder to pick up bananas, while the transit component included some high impact Double Decker buses in Sydney.

The gym campaign included advertisements on screens, as well as digital panels around the facility and bonus print insertions in the Fitness First and Fernwood magazines.

Some elements of the 'Out of Home' campaign are still live, but they are on track to over-deliver the reach and frequency goals.

Social Media

In October, the Australian Bananas Facebook and Instagram pages achieved a total reach of 2 million.



Proactive PR activity: Banana care package to Triple J

Ben and Liam at Triple J were the lucky recipients of an Australian Bananas merchandise package, after discussing their love of banana marketing on air in October.

The activity led to Ben and Liam reading out part of an included letter on their next segment, making multiple banana references and posting images on their social channels (173k following).

Triple J is a national consumer broadcast publication with a reach of 1,073,000.

Identify Research Results August – October 2019

Snack category

Bananas' ranking as the number one energy snack has been nicely building up in the last two years, breaking a new record this wave with a significant jump to 38%.

There has been no significant move in purchase frequency and volume, however 44% claim to be purchasing more bananas than 2 years ago

- motivated by a better awareness of the health benefits or growing families.

Attitudes towards bananas

While consideration of bananas is still dominated by the Cavendish variety, other varieties are slowly starting to trend upwards.

Beyond loving the taste, people spontaneously associate bananas with healthy, convenient and energy.

Consumption behaviour

Shifting consumption behaviour takes time, but encouragingly, we can now clearly see the positive impact of the current campaign - the average number of occasions of banana consumption is growing, led by the target audience.

These results show banana consumption is at its maximum at breakfast, mid morning snack time and lunch time. There is also an upward trend of people eating bananas as a snack, which is a direct effect of the campaign. It will be important to maintain consideration to consume the fruit another way to keep increasing consumption overall.

Advertising effectiveness

The recent media activity proved its effectiveness, with ad recall breaking a new record.

Bananas hold their place at the top of snacking, scoring over the 60% mark despite the growing competition in this category.

Interestingly, compared to two years ago, most 'unhealthier' snacks are significantly less popular.

For more information on Australian Bananas marketing, email tate.connolly@horticulture.com.au

SAVE THE DATE!

The 2nd annual National Banana Day will again be held on May 1, 2020.

Keep an eye out in the next Australian Bananas Magazine for details on how you can become involved in the day of activities, designed to celebrate the growers behind the industry and of course our favourite fruit!

SEASONAL WORKERS

- WHO THEY ARE AND HOW TO FIND THEM

By Peter Angel, State Manager – MADEC, National Harvest Labour Information Service

Without sufficient staff growers cannot get their produce to market.

“It doesn’t matter how efficient an irrigation system is or how effective pest control, if there are not the people on the ground when needed, a farm cannot be profitable” says MADEC’s State Manager Peter Angel.

You don’t have to do it alone

The National Harvest Labour Information Service (NHLIS) is funded by the Commonwealth Government and operated by MADEC Australia to assist growers to find workers, especially for peak periods when extras are needed. The service does not cost anything to use and is very easy to navigate. The Harvest Trail website lists vacancies and the National Call Centre puts callers directly through to growers that have listed their jobs.

Who is available?

There are several groups of people that will respond to a vacancy listing, with working holidaymakers making up a large number. The traditional backpackers from predominantly European countries are keen to do three months’ farm work in regional areas to qualify for a second

year visa to continue their holiday in Australia.

Mr Angel advises that “there is another visa which allows young people from developing countries to come, including those on our international doorstep such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. Recent changes mean they can now work to qualify for a second and third year the same way as traditional backpackers can. And they can now work for the same employer for the whole three years which I think will interest growers.”

The Seasonal Worker Programme that brings in Pacific Island and East Timorese workers is a highly valuable long-term option. These are highly motivated workers that want to save Australian dollars that can change the lives of their families back home. They also work hard because they want to be invited back again the next season. Training any employee takes effort, and the experience these workers gain is retained because they can come back year after year.

“Growers tell me that starting a new season is so much easier when your workforce already knows what to do and is fully productive immediately,” Mr Angel said.

“There is also the new Pacific Labour Scheme which is a variation that allows a worker to stay continuously for up to three years and is more focused on semi-skilled positions.”

And of course the Aussie workforce should always be an employer’s first preference. While seasonal farm work is not popular with Australian workers, some will relish the opportunity for a start that may lead onto more permanent work such as tractor drivers, forklift drivers, machine operators, supervisors and ultimately even farm managers.

Don’t delay, start now

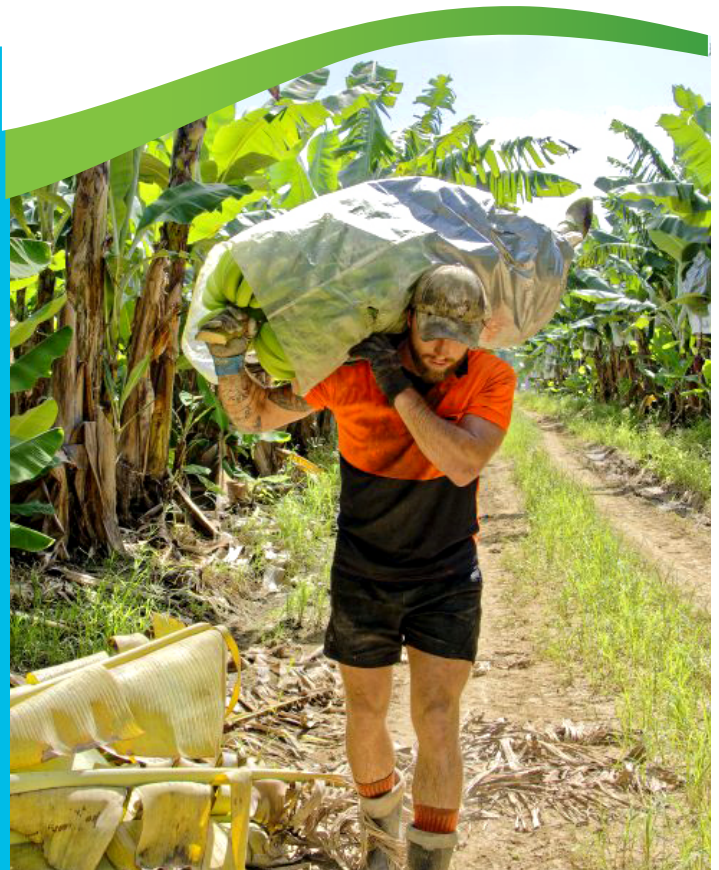
The advice from MADEC is that now is the time to start planning for the essential workforce you need for your busy summer period. Some options can be accessed quickly, but others such as the SWP can take months to arrange. Talk to the staff at the Call Centre for how to list a vacancy, or ask to be put through to one of the very experienced State Managers for more detailed information.

Simply call 1800 062 332 or go to www.harvesttrail.gov.au.



Need a hand finding workers?
We can help.

1800 062 332
www.harvesttrail.gov.au



The National Harvest Labour Information Service connects growers with workers and is provided as a no-cost service through a call centre and website. It is funded through the Australian Government and managed by MADEC, a not-for-profit organisation.

ANNUAL BANANA VOLUMES

The national banana levy collected by the Federal Department of Agriculture is compulsory for commercial banana growers. It is 2.19 cents per kilogram of bananas sold.

The dollars collected show an estimate of production for the previous financial year. Right is a table of the levy-based banana volumes.

For non-industry participants, please note this is an approximation of production, but not all bananas grown are sold, i.e. some don't make the retailer-required specifications.

Also, there is a lag factor, in that levies paid on June sales (at least) are paid in the following financial year.

Exemptions from paying the levy and other details are to be found at agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/levies/rates/bananas

Years ending 30th June (in '000 tonnes):

2013	341
2014	371
2015	371
2016	393
2017	414
2018	388
2019	372

BANANA LEVY RATE

The make-up and purpose of the various components of the Banana Industry Levy are as follows.

Levy Amount Purpose

0.50c /kg	Plant Health Australia (PHA) levy: The Department sends the funds to PHA, for the ongoing containment and management of Panama Tropical Race 4 disease, and to conduct activities that aim to improve biosecurity within the banana industry.
1.69c /kg	Hort Innovation (HIA) levy: The Department sends the funds to HIA for R&D and Marketing: 0.54 c/Kg is for Banana R&D, which is matched dollar for dollar by the Department and 1.15 c/kg for Banana Marketing
Total = 2.19c /kg*	

The total compulsory levy was reduced by 0.75c/kg from 1 July 2019, due to the abolition of the specific Emergency Plant Pest Response levy for bananas, previously established for the Freckle Response. It is now 2.19c/kg (32.85c per 15kg carton).

The Banana PHA levy currently funds the containment of the first TR4 infested farm that the industry purchased and the remaining debt for the industry's share of the cost of the national Banana Freckle eradication program. It also funds the pre-existing commitments – Torres Strait Exotic Fruit Flies Eradication Response, PHA membership/meetings and Government levy collection.

Further information:

Jim Pekin, CEO, ABGC: Email - jim.pekin@abgc.org.au. Phone – 07 3278 4786

BCU STARTS NEW CHAPTER

A new era began for members of the New South Wales- based Bananacoast Credit Union on November 1.

Almost five decades after a formation meeting was held in the Country Women's Association rooms in Macksville, a merger with P&N Bank was approved.

While the name remains, the merger was pitched to members as way to improve size and scale to remain competitive in today's market.

The credit union was first broached as an idea at Taylors Arm's Pub with No Beer. It was created by farmers for farmers, who often leased land and therefore struggled to get loans.

After the formation meeting in September 1970, Bill Ussher was elected the inaugural Chairman, Gordon Hughes as Vice Chairman and Neville Spear as Secretary/Treasurer.

Its first 'office' was a family home in Gray's Crossing (complete with cardboard box under the bed) and repayments were often made by handing over money in the street. Loans could be paid off at 20 cents per case of bananas sold at the markets by the Banana Growers' Federation (BGF). For years, there were no bad debts.

Mr Spear's wife Beatrice, who was also instrumental in running the credit union in the early days, shared some of her recollections before she passed away in 2016.

"Many times, I was given money to either deposit into savings or pay off loan accounts from members in the street. It was a wonderful feeling to be trusted like that," she said.

"When told by an official of the Credit Union League that we could easily have a million dollars in assets before long, I was astounded. But we did pass the million dollars within a few years."

A key goal was to give fellow primary producers a good standard of living, with less time worrying about finances.

"At first, you had to be a member of the BGF to become a shareholder, but that proved too big a job for BGF as too many people were joining just to be able to join the Credit Union," Mrs Spear recalled.

"It was decided to change to 'Bananacoast Community Credit Union Ltd' in 1975. Any person living in the shires of Nambucca or Coffs Harbour could join."

Of course, the credit union continued to grow. In 2012, bcu opened its 23rd branch and membership reached 50,000 in 2015.

The merger with P&N Bank was approved by both bcu and P&N Bank members. Both groups of members returned a favourable vote of 87%, exceeding the required 75%.

YOUR LEVIES IN ACTION

Want to know how your levies were invested in 2018/19? Download a copy of your Hort Innovation Banana Fund Annual report to find out.

Each industry-specific report released in late October includes key investment and project information from the year, and is available to download from www.horticulture.com.au/annual-report-portal.

You can also access a copy of the Hort Innovation 2018/19 Company Annual Report, detailing activities and highlights across the company's entire portfolio of work.

BROTHERS MAKING WAY IN NICHE ORGANIC BANANA MARKET

Across close to 200 acres of farmland in tropical Far North Queensland, a dedicated farming family is establishing a secure future in the industry – one organic banana at a time.

Brothers Ben and Matt are at the helm of the business, but parents Rob and Jenny have close to 30 years experience meeting the expectations of the niche, but in-demand, organic banana market.

Matt said the brothers had grown up with bananas in the family.

“I really enjoy what I do on the farm and that’s probably come from growing up on the farm with Dad and watching what he does,” he said.

Matt and Ben used a Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA) First Start Loan in 2017 to purchase their second farm.

The second property is 25km away from the existing family farm - enough to mitigate biosecurity risks as well as lessen the potential for cyclone damage.

Matt said the decision to access a First Start Loan was about expanding the business but also following a succession plan to allow the brothers to run their own banana operation.



QRIDA's Regional Area Manager for the Far North, Sam Spina, with grower Ben Abbott.

“It should be your first stop to talk to the guys at QRIDA and see if that process is going to work for you,” he said.

“Dealing with QRIDA has been easy. The local representative has been very helpful and professional in our dealings.”

First Start Loans offer finance up to \$2 million to assist in the early years of establishing a primary

production enterprise while Sustainability Loans offer finance up to \$1.3 million to assist in achieving a more productive and sustainable primary production enterprise.

QRIDA's Regional Area Manager for the Far North, Sam Spina, is available to meet with producers in the local area and answer their questions about eligibility or the application process.

To talk to Sam or to find out more, Freecall 1800 623 946 or visit www.qrida.qld.gov.au
 Watch Matt and Ben Abbott's story online at www.qrida.qld.gov.au/news-and-events/client-stories



Advertisement

Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority

+ We can help grow your banana business

Looking to develop and improve your banana growing enterprise by investing in new technology, implementing biosecurity measures or rolling out your development plans to boost productivity?

Our Sustainability Loans can help your banana business grow by providing low interest finance to implement your plans, whether it be to purchase, upgrade or replace packing sheds (including reconfiguring to manage biosecurity protocols), improve or install irrigation systems or establish renewable energy systems for long-term sustainability.

Loans up to \$1.3 million | Low interest rates
 Flexible repayment terms | Interest only options available

To find out more, talk to one of our Regional Area Managers on Freecall 1800 623 946 or visit www.qrida.qld.gov.au

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Authorised by the Queensland Government, Turbot St, Brisbane

TULLY SUSTAINABLE FARMING DAY

Almost 100 people attended the Tully Sustainable Farming Day, held on November 8.

The event, which was an initiative of the extension network including the Australian Banana Growers' Council, featured a range of ways to improve production, profit and sustainability.

Attendees were also given an update on banana nutrient rate trials and grants, and had the option of listening to short talks on topics including Tully farming and pig management strategies.



Mahmud Kare, Senior Research Agronomist from DAF, Curtis Lanham, DAF Development Horticulturist, and Panama TR4 Program engagement officer Rebecca Breden.



The ABGC's Amelia Foster and Robert Mayers.



The ABGC's Deputy Chair Leon Collins spoke about feral pig management.



Former ABGC Yellow Sigatoka Liaison officer Louis Lardi (left) caught up with DAF's Allan Blair.

FUNDRAISING FEAST

The Cassowary Coast Banana Growers' Association has raised thousands of dollars for some very good causes over the past two years through Innisfail's Feast of the Senses.

The BGA has a stand at the popular event where members of the public are invited to guess the weight of a banana bunch, as well as stock up on Australian Bananas merchandise and cool off with a smoothie.

The bright yellow marquee is always a hit, drawing plenty of interest on the day.



Neville Duncan, Innisfail Floatilla Commander, receives the funds raised at the 2018 event on behalf of the Australian Volunteer Coastguard – Innisfail Division. He's pictured with BGA Chair Dean Sinton.



Funds raised from 2019 event were donated to the Queensland Country Women's Association's Public Rural Crisis Fund, received by State President Christine King.

MURWILLUMBAH SHOW 2019

Despite tough growing conditions, the quality of bananas at this year's Murwillumbah Show was 'outstanding' according to judges.

Growers were competing for more than \$8000 in prizes, thanks to the hard work of local BGA executive Colin Singh, Zac McKeever and Ethan McKeever.

"Considering the conditions, it's incredible the high quality that people have been able to bring in. It's much better than what we were expecting," Zac McKeever said.

BGA President Mr Singh agreed, noting they had two new entrants this year: "Hopefully other growers see what's here and the prize money on offer and get involved in future."

The banana exhibit was judged by Greg Bradshaw and David Peasley.

"I haven't seen a better display in terms of number of entries and the quality of fruit," Mr Peasley said.

Mr Bradshaw agreed, noting that an improvement on last year may be due to better practices being employed by local growers.

"I don't think the industry here recognises the potential its got," he said. "I've been saying that for years."

Both judges agreed that this year's champion bunch, from Glen Colefax, was particularly impressive – fresh, with beautiful conformity and colour.

"Biggest is not always best," Mr Peasley added. "That bunch was just class."

WINNERS

- BEST COMMERCIAL BUNCH OF CAVENDISH
 - 1ST Glen Colefax
 - 2ND Colin Singh
 - 3RD Colin Singh
- BEST COMMERCIAL BUNCH OF LADY FINGER
 - 1ST Will Everest
 - 2ND A & S Everest
 - 3RD P & D Molenaar
- HEAVIEST BUNCH OF CAVENDISH
 - 1ST David Walsh - 51kg
 - 2ND Colin Singh - 38kg
 - 3RD Colin Singh - 36.5kg
- HEAVIEST BUNCH OF LADY FINGER
 - 1ST Will Everest - 34kg
 - 2ND Glen Colefax - 32kg
 - 3RD Will Everest - 29.5kg
- BEST HAND CAVENDISH
 - 1ST Colin Singh
 - 2ND Glen Colefax
 - 3RD Colin Singh
- BEST HAND LADY FINGERS
 - 1ST P & D Molenaar
 - 2ND Will Everest
 - 3RD A & S Everest
- CARTON CAVENDISH
 - 1ST Colin Singh
 - 2ND A & S Everest
 - 3RD Colin Singh
- BEST COMMERCIAL CARTON LADY FINGERS
 - 1ST A & S Everest
 - 2ND Colin Singh
 - 3RD Glen Colefax
- CHAMPION BUNCH OF SHOW
 - 1ST Glen Colefax
 - 2ND Will Everest
- CHAMPION HAND OF SHOW
 - 1ST P & D Molenaar
 - 2ND Colin Singh
- CHAMPION CARTON OF SHOW
 - 1ST A & S Everest
 - 2ND Colin Singh
- MOST SUCCESSFUL EXHIBITOR
 - 1ST Colin Singh
- ANY OTHER VARIETY (BUNCH)
 - 1ST Wayne Shoobridge
 - 2ND Colin Singh
 - 3RD Colin Singh



Ethan McKeever and Wayne Shoobridge help to hang the bunches.



Reserve Creek grower Dave Walsh's 51 kg bunch took out the heaviest Cavendish bunch class.



Students Lachie Everest and Koby Spry were on hand to help out on the day.



Will Everest, who won Best Commercial Bunch of Lady Finger and Heaviest Bunch of Lady Finger, with Nathan Watt.



Peter Molenaar and son Dan took out the Champion Hand of Show.



Judges Greg Bradshaw and David Peasley.



Chillingham grower Glen Colefax took out the Best Commercial bunch of Cavendish for the third year running



Colin Singh and Zac McKeever of the Tweed BGA.

Keep banana pests pinned down.

Stop the suckers and borers wherever they're hiding in your banana crop, with the innovative combination of the two active ingredients of Movento® Energy insecticide:

- Controls actively feeding larvae of banana weevil borer.
- Controls early nymph stages of rust thrips (Cavendish variety only).
- When used as directed does not cause mite flare.

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To learn more visit:
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Banana rust thrips
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Banana weevil borer
(*Cosmopolites sordidus*)