

Australian Bananas



Australian
Banana
Growers

ISSUE 72 | DECEMBER 2024

FAMILY BUSINESS

Generational farm success



Biosecurity Award Winners

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Reasons to rest your soil

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WA, NSW, QLD Banana Roadshows

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6-8 AUGUST 2025

RACV Royal Pines Resort, Gold Coast

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We're excited to welcome Landline legend Pip Courtney on board as our Congress host next year!

With over 30 years of sharing stories of those living off the land, Pip will bring unmatched insight and passion to the stage.

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\$500 registration for ABGC
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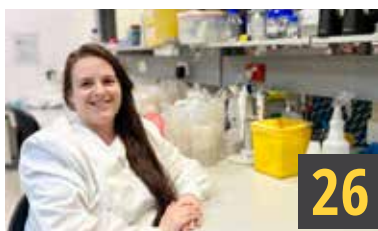
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Front cover: Jorja Buchanan, Tallan Horsford, Miki Buchanan (with Nana, the chief ratter), Cathy Hampson and Jade Buchanan.



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A NOTE FROM THE CEO

Leanne Erakovic

In 2024, I've had the great pleasure of speaking face-to-face with growers from right across Australia's growing regions.

From Carnarvon in Western Australia, to Mareeba, Tully and Innisfail in Far North Queensland, through to those from the Mid North Coast and Northern Rivers of New South Wales. These conversations have reinforced two key things for me.

Firstly, how good are banana growers. The generosity, humour and openness I've experienced never ceases to amaze me. I challenge you to find a more passionate group of people.

And secondly, though we are a hugely diverse industry by any measure, there are some challenges that span variety, farm size, location, age – you name it. Compliance is top of the list for the vast majority. Pest and disease management. Cost of production, workforce and the chance to make a decent price at the farm gate. These are areas where having a united, clear voice through the

Australian Banana Growers' Council can really make a difference.

Survey says it all

These key priority areas, and more, came through loud and clear in the recent ABGC 'Value to You' survey. I want to thank the growers, supply chain businesses, and other industry stakeholders and partners for giving up your limited time to take part. Your feedback is already shaping our focus, communication and engagement to continue improving our service to you and the banana industry. You can read more about the survey results and our latest advocacy from page 12 of this magazine.

Members in the spotlight

What an honour it was to watch Shayne and Blaise Cini accept their well-deserved award for Farm Biosecurity Producer of the Year in Canberra in November (pictured). The Cinis, of Edari Bananas, are passionate about protecting their farm and the industry more broadly, going above and beyond in both implementing and promoting biosecurity

measures. You'll also spot a number of other ABGC members achieving great things throughout this edition – and I'd encourage you to check out our new Affiliate Member feature on page 13 too.

'Tis the season

As we venture into the holiday period, I hope you and your family have a safe and happy festive season. I look forward to working together again in 2025, as we strive for a brighter future for the banana industry.



The ABGC thanks its Affiliate Members for their support of our industry.





CHECKING IN WITH THE CHAIR

Leon Collins

Well, here we are again. The end of another year, and all the highs and lows that banana farming brings.

It was great to hear about some of them from you directly at the Australian Banana Growers' Council Annual General Meeting, held in Tully in November. We had a huge turnout, which was fantastic for the official side of things but even better for dinner and conversation afterwards. Thank you to all those ABGC members who made time to attend. Without your presence at these events, ABGC simply can't exist. I hope you enjoyed the evening as much as I did. I'd also like to congratulate re-elected Queensland director Stephen Lowe, who continues as Deputy Chair of our Board.

Congress 2025 – half price registration for members

For the first time, ABGC is delighted to offer half-price Banana Congress registration to ABGC members. The ABGC Board believes this event is of huge value to our industry, providing the opportunity to get everyone under one roof to hear about latest innovation and tackle some big issues together. Our program committee is striving to keep pricing reasonable for everyone, but if you're not already an ABGC member, you still have time to

join us before August 6-8, 2025 to take advantage of this \$500 registration. Read more about Banana Congress from Page 34.

Looking ahead

The Panama TR4 program continues to move ahead, and I'd encourage you to check out the updates provided from Page 26 of this magazine. There's important information about the return of all-in surveillance from next year and the work that is being done behind the scenes to provide options for those farming with Panama TR4.

I'm also conscious that we are now well into the cyclone season. These events can be devastating and ideally they'd steer well clear.

But it pays to be prepared, and the team has provided some good reminders on page 10.

Deck the shed

I trust that you and yours will have a enjoyable holiday season. I know the work doesn't stop for many of us, but I hope you get a few moments to kick back and take-in the festivities with your loved ones. Cheers to a safe, happy and profitable new year for you all.



The Board and Executive Leadership Team gathered in Mission Beach in November for ABGC's quarterly meeting. Among the topics discussed were Banana Congress 2025, the Panama TR4 Program and membership priorities.

Pictured from L-R: Gary Fattore (QLD Director), Andrew Serra (QLD Director, Chair of the Finance, Risk and Audit Committee), Dr Rosie Godwin (R&D Manager), Leon Collins (Chair, QLD Director), Stephen Lowe (Deputy Chair, QLD Director), Doriana Mangili (WA Director), James Howe (QLD Director), Tayla Mackay (QLD Director), Stephen Spear (NSW Director), Michelle McKinlay (Industry Strategy Manager), Leanne Erakovic (CEO), Amy Spear (Communications Manager) and Geoff Wilson (TR4 Program Manager).

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.

① Most commercial banana growers in Australia pay the banana levy – but there are some exceptions. Essentially, a producer of bananas (the person who owns the bananas immediately after harvest) is liable to pay the levy. A producer will NOT be liable for levies if, in a financial year, the total quantity of bananas sold by retail sale amounts to less than \$100 of levy. More detail on exemptions from paying the levy and other information can 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
2020	382
2021	403
2022	375
2023	371

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* (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 industry's part of the cost-sharing deed with the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for TR4 containment.

It also funds the pre-existing commitments – Torres Strait Exotic Fruit Flies Eradication Response, PHA membership/meetings and Government levy collection.

Further information: Leanne Erakovic, ceo@abgc.org.au

Phone – 07 3278 4786. More info on the levy rate:

<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/levies/rates/bananas>

JEN CREMA GRADUATES LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Tully banana grower Jen Crema was among a cohort of 12 emerging agricultural leaders who recently graduated from the nationally-recognised Diversity in Agriculture Leadership Program.

The program is facilitated by the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) and is supported by 30 corporate partners who make a pledge to make change towards diversity in their workplaces.

NFF Chief Executive Officer and previous program mentor, Tony Mahar, described the 2024 cohort as passionate, articulate and intelligent.

"This exceptional group of women has worked extremely hard over the past few months and have already made a huge impact in the ag industry," Mr Mahar said.

The Program is committed to fostering a more inclusive and equitable agricultural sector. This unique initiative connects and empowers leaders to elevate their careers, expand their networks, and drive meaningful change within the industry.

Jen Crema has been instrumental in revitalising the Banana Women's Network. She shared her program experience with attendees at a recent dinner. Check out the pictures on Page 43.

The next round of applications for the Diversity in Agriculture Leadership Program opens on 8 March 2025 (International Women's Day).



Jolyon Burnett (Chair – NFF Horticulture Council), Sarah Corcoran (Jen's mentor and CEO of Plant Health Australia), Jen Crema, Richard Shannon (Executive Officer of NFF Horticulture Council).

GRANTS AVAILABLE FOR DIGITAL AGRIBUSINESS SOLUTIONS IN NSW

The On Farm Connectivity Program assists Primary Producers to take advantage of digital agribusiness solutions to boost productivity and improve safety. It aims to help increase efficiency and competitiveness, improve knowledge of farm tech and benefit safety on-farm.

Rebates of up to 50% of the cost of eligible equipment are available, with a minimum rebate of \$1,000 (GST exclusive) and a maximum of \$30,000 (GST exclusive) on offer.

There are 5 broad categories of eligible connectivity solutions and associated eligible equipment:

- Low Power Wide Area Networks (LPWAN)
- Connectivity Equipment
- Environmental monitoring
- Farm management
- Remote automation and control

You can find the list of eligible equipment categories and sub-categories online, along with the list of approved suppliers.

Scan the QR code to find out more.



GROWERS FEATURE ON REEF AND RIVERS PODCAST

Award-winning banana growers Steve Lizzio and Richelle Miles shared their story of successful, sustainable farming on the Reef and Rivers Podcast.

Their business, MBL Bananas, won the Future Farming Award in 2023. Produced by Wet Tropics Waterways, the podcast showcases what the banana industry has achieved since environmental management guidelines were introduced.

Tune in: wettropicswaterways.org.au/steve-lizzio/



Steve Lizzio and Richelle Miles won the Future Farming Award in 2023, presented at Banana Congress.

SHARNANA HAS PLENTY OF A-PEEL

A 2-metre-long shark-banana hybrid won hearts and minds at the 2024 Sculpture by the Sea exhibition in Sydney.

'Sharnana' by Drew McDonald was awarded the Allens People's Choice Award and the Kids' Choice prize, as voted by exhibition visitors.

"The illogical nature of 'Sharnana' – a shark emerging from a peeled banana – mirrors the

chaotic nature of our existence," Mr McDonald said. "But 'Sharnana' isn't about dread and despair; it's about embracing the surreal humour of life's contradictions and finding joy in the everyday."

"I'm thrilled and deeply grateful for the joy and engagement 'Sharnana' has inspired in adults and children, showing just how much we all love a bit of playful absurdity in our lives no matter how old we are."



Photo courtesy of Sculpture By The Sea 2024 (GCarr).

MOST EXPENSIVE BANANA

Those in the banana industry know the value of a single banana is much higher than what we see on the grocery shelf.

The months of careful work required to grow each and every piece of fruit, the years of building and establishing a viable farm – it's no mean feat.

But it seems we've been calculating the value of the humble banana, and of our industry, incorrectly. A single, ripe banana is, in fact, worth almost 10 million Australian dollars. 'Comedian', created by artist Maurizio Cattelan, was an artwork involving a single banana duct taped to a wall. The news around its AUD \$9.5 million sale to cryptocurrency entrepreneur, Justin Sun, has been hard to miss these last few months. Thankfully, reports suggest Mr Sun has since consumed the fruit and found it particularly tasty. No word on the duct tape as yet.



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INSURING FARM FUTURE WITH BIOSECURITY

WANGAN GROWERS RECOGNISED WITH NATIONAL AWARD



Adam Fennessy PSM, Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Leanne Erakovic, CEO, ABGC, Shayne and Blaise Cini, Karden Qld Pty Ltd (Edari Bananas), Hon Julie Collins MP, Minister for Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry and Michelle McKinlay, Industry Strategy Manager, ABGC.

Shayne and Blaise Cini, of Karden Qld Pty Ltd (trading as Edari Bananas), have been recognised as the 2024 Australian Farm Biosecurity Producer of the Year.

The Australian Biosecurity Awards celebrate individuals, groups and organisations that have shown a commitment to supporting and promoting Australia's biosecurity and the systems that underpin it.

The Cinis were presented with their award at a ceremony on 25 November at Parliament House in Canberra. "We are proud to have been strong advocates to slow the spread of this devastating disease [Panama TR4]," Blaise said.

For Shayne and Blaise, on-farm biosecurity is an insurance policy – for themselves and for future generations.

Their 220-acre banana farm borders the South Johnstone River, south of Innisfail in the town of Wangan. As fourth generation farmers (second generation banana growers), their eyes are firmly on farm succession and protecting their property from pests and diseases, such as Panama disease Tropical Race 4.

While they've always been mindful of best practice farming, the detection of Panama TR4 in Queensland in 2015 – under an hour up the road in the Tully Valley – prompted a more focussed but pragmatic approach to safeguarding their business.

"We focussed on the things we could do immediately first, like signage, footbaths and designated entry points," explained Blaise. They were easy things that we had control over and weren't hard to do."

NAVIGATING CHALLENGES

With their farm crossing two main roads, and incorporating a road separating blocks, the next steps weren't quite straightforward and required some out-of-the-box thinking.

Over a three-year period they developed a strategy and plan which resulted in:

- Constructing two internal creek crossings to minimise road traffic

- Designing and constructing two wash down facilities at crossings within the property
- Upgrading roads and installing new drainage pipes (on a public road) to mitigate flooding from other adjacent properties
- Fencing around the entire property (completed over time, and with three-strand wire where needed before more substantial fencing was installed)
- Installing two boot spray facilities at access points

While Panama TR4 remains contained to the Tully Valley, the efforts of Shayne, Blaise and their team demonstrate forward-thinking, preventative measures that go above and beyond basic biosecurity.

The Cinis have invested significant personal funds to properly prepare their farm, including for major earthworks, extra equipment to limit machinery movement, disinfectant supplies and more. Fortunately, they were able to tap into Shayne's construction and welding background to create innovative (and more cost effective) solutions in some areas too.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

While the investment is impressive, it's far from a set and forget situation. With the future firmly in mind, Blaise developed a series of biosecurity training videos to be used as part of staff inductions and as an ongoing resource for the team. In addition, they've implemented a visitor register, signage (internal and external) and a feral pig management program, which includes trapping and on-ground shooting.

Feral pigs are known to move dirt between properties and are a likely pathway for TR4, as well as causing severe environmental damage.

Their approach to biosecurity as a whole is industry leading. "It's important to talk about it, write down the steps and have a plan in place," Blaise said.

Shayne and Blaise are open in talking about their experience, fronting media campaigns and educational videos. In doing this, they show other growers what is possible – from the basics through to more advanced measures to protect their own farms.

In fact, starting with those smaller goals is exactly what Blaise advises: "take little steps, so it doesn't seem like a huge, unachievable undertaking."



Earlier this year, Blaise and Shayne Cini hosted representatives from the Australian Banana Growers' Council and Biosecurity Queensland on their farm to illustrate the realities of biosecurity for banana growers.

SHARING EXPERIENCE

In 2020, Blaise and Shayne contributed to a series of videos produced by Biosecurity Queensland and the Australian Banana Growers' Council designed to target other growers, potential farm workers and visitors to their region.

In the videos, they spoke honestly and openly about the threat of Panama TR4 as growers, and detailed the practical measures these different audiences could take to help secure the future of the industry.

You can watch some of these videos at www.panamatr4protect.com.au

As part of promoting these videos, which were shared extensively on social media, Blaise and Shayne also participated in a media release and spoke to journalists about the campaign.

Now, with industry at another crossroads when it comes to TR4, the Cini's have again stepped up to be part of the conversation around disease management into the future and bringing other growers on board.



On behalf of industry, the Australian Banana Growers' Council congratulates Shayne and Blaise on this well-deserved recognition of their biosecurity efforts.

There are a range of resources available for other growers looking to refresh or kick start their on-farm 'insurance' through biosecurity:

- www.panamatr4protect.com.au
- www.abgc.org.au
- www.betterbananas.com.au

I KNOW WHAT MOTHER NATURE DID LAST SUMMER...

TAKING A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO MANAGING THE 'BEFORE AND AFTER' OF SEVERE WEATHER EVENTS

Last summer's rainfall average of 421.9 millimetres was 30 percent above the 1961-1990 average for Queensland.

Mossman, north of Cairns, recorded the highest single-day total when 714mm fell on December 18, after Tropical Cyclone Jasper swept across the coast. While the totals tell a story, one that varies across the regions, even they can't properly convey the impact on banana crops, farm infrastructure and public infrastructure. Flooding, erosion and prolonged waterlogging were among the challenges faced by many. Some flood-ravaged communities in the Far North were cut off for weeks.

"Prepare for everything, and be prepared for anything." Ranal Currie

Cyclones, flooding, fire – banana growers across Australia are exposed to a range of catastrophic weather events throughout the year. Here are some reminders and tips to help you get prepared.

RnR OF A DIFFERENT KIND – RECORD AND KEEP RECEIPTS!

To access grants and funding after a severe weather event, it helps to have photos and records saved.

- Take photos and videos of any damage caused by a weather event – this includes fencing, roads, equipment, machinery, causeways, cartons and packaging. (When possible, include an object for scale, to help demonstrate the size of the damage.)
- Keep receipts/invoices and other payment records saved, or in a safe, dry place.
- Check you have a financial plan, adequate insurance and a safety procedure.
- Keep a list of disaster contacts, including your QRIDA Regional Area Manager (if you are in Queensland).. It is also advised that you contact QRIDA before making a grant or funding application.
- Secure bunch covers and other plastics where possible.

PREPARING BANANA CROPS FOR TROPICAL CYCLONES: KEY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Bananas are highly susceptible to wind damage, and even low-category cyclones or severe thunderstorms can cause significant losses. Here are the essential steps to protect your crops and minimize damage:

1. Assess Crop Development

Evaluate the stage of your banana blocks. More uniform blocks, like plant crops or early ratoons, are easier to manage. Focus on blocks with heavy bunches, plants close to bunching (4-6 weeks), or those 2-3 months from bunching, as these are more vulnerable to wind damage.

2. Consider Canopy Removal

Removing the canopy of unbunched plants before a cyclone reduces wind resistance and minimizes the risk of plants rolling out. However, this comes at a cost: canopy removal can reduce bunch weight by 35-50% and lower the proportion of large fruit (220-260mm) by up to 35%. For low-category cyclones, it's often best to delay canopy removal until the last practical moment.

3. Proper Canopy Removal Technique

When removing the canopy, avoid cutting too low on the stem. Full deleafing (leaving the stem intact) is recommended, as it strengthens the plant and better supports future bunches. Cutting below the 'throat' weakens the plant, increasing the risk of damage.

By assessing crop development, carefully considering whether to remove the canopy, and using the proper technique, banana growers can reduce cyclone damage and protect their crops for future harvests.



Image courtesy of Better Bananas

Canopy removal reduces wind resistance and significantly reduces plant losses from 'roll outs'.

KEY CONTACTS AND WEBSITES

In an emergency, call 000

QRIDA

Regional Area Manager for North Queensland: Sam Spina

0429 497 757 | sam.spina@qrda.qld.gov.au

Better Bananas

Better Bananas is an initiative of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and Hort Innovation, supported by the Australian Banana Growers' Council.

It provides up-to-date information on banana research and development.

13 25 23

betterbananas@daf.qld.gov.au

Queensland DPI Agriculture Disaster Impact Survey

This site should be used to report damage:
bit.ly/QldDisasterSurvey

Please note, after a severe weather event, someone from ABGC or DPI (or another body in other states) may call you to gather information or to help with this survey. This is to ensure decision-makers have the information they need to make timely funding decisions if possible.

NSW Regional Recovery Programs

nsw.gov.au/grants-and-funding/regional-recovery-programs

- Growers in NSW can also check out the new resource 'Managing subtropical horticulture in extreme wet weather', produced by the NSW Government (pop it in your search engine).

WA Emergency Relief and Support Services – Recovery

wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-communities/emergency-relief-and-support-services-recovery

Bureau of Meteorology

bom.gov.au



New workshops for FNQ banana growers in 2025

SOIL HEALTH & BIOLOGICALS

- ✓ How soil works & the basics of soil health
- ✓ How to assess the health of your soil
- ✓ Improving soil health overtime
- ✓ Demystifying biological products

To find out more contact
Molly on 0419 602 864
or molly@abgc.org.au





Updates on advocacy and membership are brought to you by the ABGC's Stakeholder Engagement and Advocacy Manager, Kathryn Dryden.

LISTENING TO THE INDUSTRY

YOUR VOICE, OUR DIRECTION

At ABGC, we strive to serve and represent the banana industry with integrity and purpose.

To ensure we're delivering value to our grower members, supply chain partners, and the broader industry, we recently conducted a survey to hear directly from you. This was an opportunity to share your thoughts on what's working well and where there's room for improvement.

The survey was open to all industry stakeholders including growers, vendors, suppliers, retailers, government representatives, and others. With nearly 200 responses, the feedback provided invaluable insights that will help guide our efforts in supporting the banana industry moving forward.

What We Learned

While the survey covered a wide range of topics, a few key themes emerged:

- ABGC's role in advocacy remains a top priority for growers and industry stakeholders alike, particularly around issues like workforce, compliance, market challenges, and biosecurity.
- Compliance burdens were a recurring concern for growers, with calls for streamlined processes to reduce the burden of cost and other associated pressures they face.

- The importance of clear, timely communication and opportunities for engagement were highlighted across the board.
- Stakeholders emphasised the need for tailored support to reflect the diversity of regions and respective issues/needs within the industry.

Where We're Headed

Your feedback reinforced some of the key priorities we've been working on while also highlighting areas for improvement including:

- Strengthening our representation on grower-specific issues
- Working to reduce compliance burden through advocacy and practical solutions
- Continuing to ensure timely, transparent communication and providing more opportunities for stakeholder input
- Addressing the unique needs of growers and stakeholders across different regions

These actions align with our commitment to improve our value proposition and services to members.

Thank You for Your Input

This survey was about more than just gathering data—it was about starting a conversation with the people who drive this industry forward. Your perspectives help us refine our focus and ensure that ABGC continues to deliver meaningful support and advocacy for its members.

Congratulations goes to Hampson Brothers and Edith Todd who won the 2 x \$500 grocery vouchers as a result of their participation in the survey.

We're grateful to everyone who participated and shared their insights. While the survey has closed, our commitment to listening and learning remains open. We welcome your thoughts and ideas at any time—because your voice helps shape the future of our industry.

Together, we grow the future of Australian bananas.

To become a member and further enhance ABGC's actions to support a sustainable Australian banana industry, complete the form at abgc.org.au/membership or contact members@abgc.org.au | 0455 553 596.

ABGC: Striving for a Stronger Banana Industry

Workforce & Labour

Compliance & Regulation

Market Competition

Sustainability

Let's Grow Stronger Together!

Join us! Be part of the united voice shaping the future of the industry...

www.abgc.org.au/membership

ELECTION FOCUS:

ADDRESSING BANANA INDUSTRY CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

The Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) plays a critical role in advocating for the needs of banana growers across the country.

Whether it's pushing for practical policies, championing biosecurity, or securing better support for growers, the ABGC ensures that the voices of banana growers are heard at all levels of government. With the Federal election fast approaching, the ABGC is stepping up its efforts to ensure growers' priorities are top of mind for decision-makers.

A recent industry survey has highlighted several areas that need urgent attention and long-term solutions at the policy level. Rising production costs remain the biggest challenge, alongside increasing regulatory demands, pests and diseases, and weather-related risks. These challenges highlight the need for practical policies and stronger support to ensure the industry remains viable.

Labour laws and workforce availability were also identified as critical concerns. Streamlining labour regulations and improving access to and retention of skilled workers is essential.

Encouragingly, 95% of recent survey respondents believe the ABGC plays an important role in keeping the banana industry sustainable. This strong backing reinforces the need for continued representation of growers and their needs, industry-focused communications, and strengthened biosecurity measures.

The ABGC has already taken these priorities to Members of Parliament during the recent Queensland State election and is extending invitations to newly elected MPs and leaders to visit banana farms in Far North Queensland. These farm visits provide a hands-on opportunity for decision-makers to better understand the realities of farming and the pressures growers face from policy and market-driven obligations.

"The ABGC is committed to advocating for grower-members at all levels of government, particularly as the Federal election approaches," ABGC CEO, Leanne Erakovic, said.

"Our focus is on driving outcomes that uphold the high standards our industry is known for, while ensuring banana-growing businesses remain resilient, sustainable, and rewarding for growers and their families," she said.

Members are encouraged to contribute ideas, solutions, and examples of experiences that will help ABGC's advocacy efforts in the leadup to the Federal election. Contact members@abgc.org.au or 0455 553 596 to share your thoughts.



PARTNERSHIPS THAT DRIVE BANANA FARMING FORWARD

Get to know ABGC's Affiliate Member: NuEdge

Transforming banana plantations starts with the right partnership—one that brings together innovative products, expert support, and a commitment to sustainable farming. By working directly with banana growers, NuEdge delivers programs designed to optimise plantations and meet sustainability goals.

Success comes from understanding each farm's unique needs. Tailored nutritional programs enhance soil biology, improve plant health, and build resilience to challenges. Growers using NuEdge's flagship banana nutrition program have seen stronger plants, better fruit quality, and higher yields—proving the power of science-backed solutions for sustainable agriculture.

It all comes down to the synergy between people and products. NuEdge agronomists work directly with growers, offering practical advice and expert

insights to craft strategies that deliver real results in the field. Combined with advanced fertilisers, bio-stimulants, and soil conditioners, these tailored solutions ensure measurable outcomes while supporting long-term soil and plant health. Ongoing innovation ensures that NuEdge stays ahead of industry challenges, developing new solutions that prepare farms for the future. This holistic approach supports not just healthy crops, but a thriving, sustainable banana industry.

To celebrate our partnership with ABGC, NuEdge is offering ABGC members an exclusive introductory 10% discount on banana nutrition programs for the month of December. Let's build a better future for banana farming together. Contact us today to see how NuEdge can help your farm achieve more.

www.nu-edge.com.au



ABGC has begun profiling its Affiliate Members, to share information with growers and recognise their support of industry. Keep an eye out for more in coming editions of Australian Bananas! Affiliate Members are also welcome to contact communications@abgc.org.au to inquire about a discounted advertising rate.

BANANAS ARE IN OUR BLOOD

FARMING, FAMILY, AND FOSTERING FOUNDATIONS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

By Skye Orsmond

There's no mistaking that bananas are more than just a business for Jade Buchanan and her family.

As I walk through the Nourish packing shed, nestled in the lush hills of Nerada, I'm welcomed by the upbeat rhythm of Pacific Islander music, smiling faces, and a fast-paced, well-oiled operation. Freshly picked bananas roll down the conveyor belt, and pallets of packed bananas are being loaded into the back of a truck.

Jade's mum, Cathy, is revisiting the past, packing bananas, while her youngest daughter, Jorja (17), who's about to begin a degree in Agri-Business at UQ, cleans and organises. Jade's son, Tallan (6), is busy loading empty boxes, and Miki (22), the farm's Operations Manager, greets me with a firm handshake. I notice her nails - unpainted and speckled with sap and dirt. A good sign, I think, when meeting a farmer.

It's clear that this family farm is built on hard work, grit, determination, and, above all, a deep passion for the land.

The 270-acre Nourish farm in Nerada is one of three farms in the business, with additional properties in Wangan and Bartle Frere. But this is more than just a farming operation - it's a legacy, passed down through the generations.

Family Ties

Jade and her ex-husband Craig Buchanan (LMB Farms) grew up in the banana industry, and their family ties run deep. Jade's parents, Terry and Cathy Hampson, worked on Craig's family farm in the early years.

"As kids, they knew their way around a banana farm," recalls Cathy. "I can remember Jade at two years old and Craig at four, running around the farms."

Despite the early exposure to the banana industry, Jade and Craig were initially determined to leave it behind. "We always said we'd never get back into bananas," Jade said. But after spending years



working on a cattle station near Georgetown, they made the decision to return north and re-enter the banana business.

"We've always taken opportunities that others walked away from," Jade reflects.

They founded LMB Bananas with their four children in tow, pioneering several important practices in the industry. Their farm was one of the first to achieve Best Management Practices (BMP) accreditation, as well as Sedex and Freshcare Environmental certifications.

"We've always strived to be innovative and are happy to trial new processes for the industry," Jade says.

She attributes the family's success to their willingness to take calculated risks, foster a positive workplace culture, and maintain a balance between the practical and business aspects of farming.

"Profit sharing is something we introduced to ensure our farm managers get their fair share. It makes staff feel valued and encourages them to give their best," Jade explains.



Operations Manager Miki Buchanan in the field with some of her team.

PASSING ON THE LEGACY

Nerada Nourish Operations Manager, Miki Buchanan.

As we drive around the farm in the buggy, Miki proudly points out the newly planted blocks - contoured, laser-levelled, and planted with precision. Her pride in the land is palpable, and it's clear that this passion has been passed down through generations.

"I love that no two days are the same. There's always something new to learn. You never truly know everything, even when you think you do," Miki says.



Cathy Hampson reminiscing in the Nourish packing shed.

Miki's grandparents, Terry and Cathy, grew bananas in the El Arish and Bingil Bay areas in the late 70s. As we stand in the modern, efficient packing shed, Cathy reflects on how things have changed over the years.

"Things were very different back then. It blows me away how far the industry has come," Cathy says, smiling. "I can remember having our kids in a playpen while I packed bananas off the two-tiered poly pipe wheel. If the kids were naughty, I'd threaten to put them in a carton and send them to Melbourne," she laughs.

"We had no power, so at night I'd go to the shed and bring a tractor battery up to the house in a wheelbarrow, just to watch a bit of TV before bed," Cathy recalls. "It's funny how you just accepted the way life had to be back then."

Jade, too, recalls the early years with a sense of nostalgia. "Early mornings were the norm.

I remember stapling boxes as a kid and helping in the packing shed. On weekends, Dad used to wake us up at 3 a.m. and we would drive to the markets in Townsville to sell seconds," she says.

Cathy also reflects on the challenges the family has faced. "In 1986, our farm was wiped out by Cyclone Winifred. To earn an income, we bought a takeaway at Mission Beach and I worked there seven days a week until we got back on our feet," she says.

The Roots to Success

Teamwork is at the heart of this family farm's success. Nourish recently won the 2024 Mackays Marketing Coles Supplier of the Year award, a prestigious honour recognising their commitment to sustainably grown, high-quality bananas, year-round.

Jade and her partner, Luke Horsford, each play to their strengths.

"Luke excels at the practical side of things, and I focus more on the business side," Jade explains. "It's about backing people and having belief in them, especially in a family business."

As a family, they're committed to making smart decisions for the future. "We all (Jade Buchanan and her partner Luke and Craig Buchanan and his partner Teresa) think it's important to keep making smart business decisions, for the best interests of the next generation," Jade says.

Farming may be a tough road, but after visiting Nourish, it's clear why it's such a rewarding and fulfilling journey for multiple generations.

"It's their choice to make it their destiny," says Cathy.



Caption: L-R: Logan Buchanan, Jade Buchanan, Jorja Buchanan, Bennett Buchanan, Miki Buchanan, Tallan Horsford (front).

Jade's eldest daughter, Logan, is a corporate lawyer based in Cairns but hopes to return to the family business in the future. Their son, Bennett (20), works at both Nourish and LMB Farms and has completed a trade in boiler making.



Bennett Buchanan works at both Nourish and LMB Farms.

FINAL DECISION FOR CHLORPYRIFOS

The Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) has released their regulatory decision on chlorpyrifos. All products containing chlorpyrifos registered for use in bananas will be cancelled (this includes impregnated bunch covers).

There is a 12 month 'phase out' period to allow use of products already in the supply chain or on farm but does not allow manufacture or import.

- Bunch spraying can continue up until 30 September 2025.
- Bunch dusting can continue up until 31 May 2025. Bunch dusting is permitted under PER14240 which expires 31 May 2025. This permit will not be renewed.

APVMA cites worker health and safety concerns as well as environmental reasons for the cancellation.

Growers should be planning and trialling how they will manage bunch pests without applying chlorpyrifos. Changing to alternative chemicals may not be as simple as changing chemicals, especially if changing practices from dusting to bunch spraying. Chemical control, particularly for banana rust thrips, can be directed at the soil dwelling pupal stage, as well as the adults and larvae on the fruit and the plant. Consider the whole bunch pest management strategy.



MORE INFORMATION

Information is available on the ABGC website abgc.org.au/chlorpyrifos-review/

For more information about the review visit the APVMA website –

www.apvma.gov.au/chemicals-and-products/chemical-review/listing/chlorpyrifos

Grower video case studies available on the Better Bananas website – betterbananas.com.au/videos/

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GOING BANANAS AROUND THE GLOBE

Out Of This World

Taiwan's Space Agency (TASA) is using satellite technology to combat the Fusarium Tropical Race 4 (TR4) fungus, which threatens banana crops in Guatemala and Belize.

At the 2024 International Forum on Applied Technology in Guatemala, TASA showcased how satellite remote sensing is used for disease monitoring.

Fusarium TR4 can cause up to 100% yield loss in Central America's key banana-growing regions. TASA's FORMOSAT-5 satellite measures near-infrared light reflection from plants, helping assess crop health. This technology has been successfully used for three years to manage Fusarium TR4's spread, setting a new standard in satellite-based solutions for banana diseases.

Banking On It

The World Bank has joined the Global Alliance against Fusarium TR4, a coalition focused on combating the disease threatening the banana industry in Latin America. TR4, caused by the Fusarium fungus, endangers banana crops, crucial for food security and small-scale farmers' livelihoods.

The disease has spread to countries like Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela. At a meeting in Panama, the World Bank and stakeholders from the banana sector discussed efforts to tackle TR4, with a pilot project planned in Ecuador to develop resistant banana varieties, support small farmers, and strengthen biosecurity.

The alliance has already made progress in

prevention, cultivating resistant varieties, and implementing control methods. The World Bank reiterated its commitment to supporting agricultural projects that benefit small farmers and improve food security.



BANANA PERFORMANCE REVIEW FROM QUANTIUM

Through a Hort Innovation R&D investment, Quantum has provided a summary of banana performance at Woolworths for the 52 weeks ending 25 June 2024.

The scan data measures all purchases through Woolworths stores including households and businesses. This covers the purchasing behaviour of about 16 million Australian customers.

Key changes for this period include:

- **Bananas now trending down in volume**

Higher prices have contributed to volume trending down slightly, leading to deacceleration of value growth between January and June 2024.

52 week volume is relatively flat compared to last year. WA, VIC & NT were the only states/territories

to have both volume and value growth.

- **Online share of value sales continue to grow**

Online continues to outpace instore growth with bananas seeing double-digit volume growth online as shoppers continue their online journey with fresh fruit.

Similar to June 2023, fastest growth came from QLD, SA and WA as these centres catch up to NSW.

- **Metro share of value sales remained stable**

Bananas in Metro stores have a higher average price than Supermarkets.

- **Kids pack continues to gain share especially online**

The Kids 5 Pack is the number two banana SKU (stock-keeping unit).

A reduction in price has contributed to volume growth.

This SKU has shown greatest price elasticity in bananas.

Other points to note:

- When it comes to sales performance, Cavendish drove the trends. However, some other items – including Kids 5 Pack – all saw value growth. Lady Finger declined in both value and volume sales. Eat Later Bananas continued to see significant value and volume growth.
- Online shoppers were less price sensitive than instore shoppers, and online continues to outpace instore growth.
- Lady Fingers are more appealing to shoppers in Metro stores.

SEE WHERE YOUR LEVIES ARE GOING

The latest Banana Fund snapshot is available online by visiting horticulture.com.au/growers/banana-fund. You can also download the industry's 2024/25 Annual Investment Plan and access an overview of marketing activities.

WORLD-FIRST HORT VENTURE CAPITAL FUND

The world's first horticulture-focused venture capital fund has been launched to help combat the rising costs of farming and declining fruit and vegetable consumption in Australia.

Led by Hort Innovation in partnership with Australian-headquartered investment firm Artesian, a non-levy co-investment fund of up to \$60 million is on offer to high-growth, early-stage startups. The aim is to fast-track innovative products and services from inception to market readiness.



Hort Innovation chief executive officer Brett Fifield.

Hort Innovation chief executive officer Brett Fifield said now more than ever, the need to diversify investment approaches and bring onboard new thinking to benefit industry is critical.

"The Australian horticulture industry is facing unprecedented challenges - high production costs, labour issues, extreme weather impacts to name a few," he said.

"On top of that, Australian fruit and vegetable consumption dropped by up to 8 per cent to June 2023, compared to the year before.

"To address these challenges head on, Hort Innovation has partnered with Artesian to build bigger, bolder investments in innovation and create a flexible investment framework to accelerate research and development.

"By investing in startups, we are enabling fresh ideas, never-before-seen technologies, and new ways of thinking to make growing easier, more sustainable and cost-effective, and lift consumption."

Artesian will manage the Hort Innovation Venture Fund, with initial investments in eligible businesses to be made over the next five years.

Key Hort Innovation Venture Fund focus areas include:

- **Increasing productivity:** Helping Australian growers to become more adaptable, resilient and financially sustainable. This may be in the

use of AI to predict what to do and when to do it, new automation options, or the use of satellite technology to guide decision-making.

- **Sustainability:** to deliver new innovations Australian growers of fruit, vegetables, nuts, turf and nursery plants can employ. For example, enhancing monitoring capabilities to optimise water use and viable options to reduce chemical use.
- **Consumption:** to drive demand and meet changing consumer preferences and encourage healthy living. For example, naturally breeding produce that is nutrient dense, with a long shelf life while being aesthetically pleasing.
- **Workforce:** Opportunities to upskill existing industry participants and expand local career opportunities in horticulture, particularly in the science and technology arenas.

The Hort Innovation Venture Fund is the first new fund to be rolled out through Hort Innovation Frontiers.

Launched in June, the dedicated co-investment program will invest up to \$500M over the next 10 years to seize big opportunities and develop solutions to horticulture's major challenges.

For more, go to the Frontiers website at www.frontiers.au.

BENCHMARKING TO DRIVE PROFIT AND IMPROVE WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION

OPTTIMO IQ PROVIDES BETTER BENCHMARKING

- Completely FREE (funded by Hort Innovation through your levies)
- Identify ways to improve your farm's bottom line
- Data is secure and presented anonymously
- Interactive – if a critical mass is achieved, you'll be able to access a personal dashboard that evolves over time
- Includes a FREE, world-standard carbon calculator – get your data in now to be prepared for 2025
- Assistance to input your data, just a few hours a year (ask us if we can make the process even quicker through your accounting software!)
- Personal help when you need it



Eric Schluter is the Project Manager for Opttimo IQ. He'd love to hear from you – give him a bell on 0400 707 352 for a no-obligation conversation.



Benchmarking offers one of the most effective ways for growers to gain control, prepare for potential hard times, and build a sustainable business.

By participating in benchmarking programs, like those offered by Opttimo IQ, growers can access valuable insights, which allow them to:

- Boost profitability
- Drive innovation
- Prepare for unexpected downturns
- Enhance work-life integration

Benchmarking:

A clear measure of success and resilience

Benchmarking offers growers the chance to compare their farm's performance against industry averages, revealing opportunities for improvement and ensuring they're prepared for market fluctuations. By understanding how costs, yields, and efficiency stack up, growers can identify specific areas to improve, for example, through reducing waste, lowering production costs, or increasing yields. These insights directly impact profitability but also build resilience, helping growers see how prepared they are to weather difficult periods. Think of benchmarking as a safety net, allowing growers to identify weaknesses before they become liabilities.

Driving Innovation:

Breaking the cyclone of complacency

Regularly assessing performance against industry benchmarks provides inspiration and incentive to adopt innovative techniques, machinery, or practices that boost efficiency and productivity.

For instance, benchmarking might reveal that a certain percentage of growers have minimized rejected fruit through specific post-harvest practices. By exploring and implementing these techniques, growers can make immediate improvements.

Work-Life Integration: Efficiency for a better lifestyle

Benchmarking isn't just about numbers; it's also about lifestyle. For many growers, the insights provided by benchmarking can lead to a more manageable business. Running an efficient and profitable farm often translates to fewer crises and more control over time.

Rather than working longer hours to cover inefficiencies, benchmarking insights allow growers to focus on what matters most and make intentional, data-driven improvements.

Preparing for the Unknown: Strengthening the business for hard times

Agriculture is inherently unpredictable. Benchmarking provides a proactive approach to building resilience against these challenges, be it extreme weather or price fluctuation. By identifying areas for cost reduction, yield improvement, and operational efficiency, growers create a buffer that can be critical during tough times.

Investing in a sustainable future

By participating in benchmarking, banana growers contribute to a stronger, more resilient industry. Each grower's data adds to the bigger picture, providing insights that help the entire sector navigate both prosperity and hardship. For those who may be hesitant to break old patterns or try new methods, benchmarking offers a safe, structured way to build resilience and make small improvements that have big impacts.

In an industry where the next season is never guaranteed, benchmarking is more than just a tool—it's a pathway to security and growth. It means you're no longer navigating challenges alone. Instead, they're part of an industry-wide effort to grow stronger, smarter, and more sustainable. By joining this effort, growers are preparing themselves not just to succeed in the good times, but to thrive even when things get tough.

Visit opttimoq.com.au to find out more.

THE PATH TO QCAV-4 AND BEYOND

James Dale, Centre for Agriculture and the Bioeconomy, Queensland University of Technology (QUT)



INSIGHTS INTO THE GM BANANA

QCAV-4 is a genetically modified Cavendish banana with excellent TR4 resistance. It is the first GM banana to be released for commercial production.

The Banana Biotechnology Program at QUT started the project to develop a Cavendish banana with resistance to Panama Disease tropical race 4 (TR4) more than 20 years ago. At that time, TR4 had very limited distribution. In Australia, it was only present in the Northern Territory and internationally in Taiwan, China, Indonesia and Malaysia. It is now widespread in Asia, the Middle East and established in Africa and South America, and of course in Queensland.

At QUT, we had already developed technology to genetically modify bananas and, in the early 2000s, my colleague, Rob Harding, and I set about identifying a banana gene that could provide resistance to TR4. A PhD student, Santy Peraza-Echeverria, identified a gene we called RGA2 in a wild seeded banana, *Musa acuminata ssp malaccensis*; this gene had all the hallmarks of a potential TR4 resistance gene.

We transferred that gene into Cavendish embryogenic cell suspensions, individual banana cells that when cultured can be grown into whole plants. We regenerated a number of plants each containing the new RGA2 gene and each of these were multiplied to become individual "lines". We were unable to test these lines for TR4 resistance at that time as the fungus causing TR4 could not and still can't be used in Brisbane for glasshouse challenges. However, in 2011, we were offered the opportunity to test our GM Cavendish lines in a field trial in the Northern Territory. TR4 was already well established in the Northern Territory. We subsequently received approval for a field trial from the regulator of genetically modified organisms in Australia, the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR). The small trial of seven lines of Cavendish containing the new RGA2 gene together with non-GM Cavendish and other controls was planted in 2012. After three years, four of the seven lines were showing very high levels of TR4 resistance with two lines outstanding. Unfortunately, the trial was terminated as part of the first banana freckle eradication program in the Northern Territory.

In 2018, we were allowed to start a second much larger field trial at the same location in the Northern Territory and this included the four promising lines from the first trial as well as non-GM Cavendish as controls. We measured infection rates, bunch weight and cycle time over five cycles, the plant crop plus four ratoons. After the five crop cycles, the TR4 incidence in the non-GM Williams and Grand Nain Cavendish lines was 84% and 66% respectively

whereas the best performing GM line was QCAV-4 with just 2% infection which represented just one infected plant which was in the fourth ratoon. Importantly, QCAV-4 had virtually the same yield as the equivalent non-GM Cavendish. That trial continues today but most of the non-GM Cavendish are dead.

In 2023, we made the decision to apply to the regulators OGTR and Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) for a licence to release QCAV-4 for commercial production (OGTR) and consumption (FSANZ). These applications required extensive documentation to demonstrate that QCAV-4 was extremely safe for human consumption and for the environment. In 2024, both approvals were granted and QCAV-4 became the first GM banana released for commercial production in the world. And we now have confirmation that the fruit of QCAV-4 tastes just like a well grown Cavendish banana should. However, there are no plans to commercially grow or market QCAV-4 in Australia at this time. This banana is the safety net for Cavendish production in Australia if TR4 becomes a major limiting factor for banana production in Queensland.

There is also more to do. QCAV-4 has only been trialled in the Northern Territory; we are planning trials in southeast Queensland and north Queensland to determine whether it performs as well in Queensland as it has in the Northern Territory.

QCAV-4 contains an additional banana gene but, even so, it is genetically modified and there are reservations among some consumers regarding GM generally. If QCAV-4 were to be marketed in Australia, these bananas would need to be labelled. There is an alternative technology, gene editing, that doesn't involve adding a new resistance or any other gene to bananas. Rather, it involves editing genes already present in bananas. This is an outcome that can and does occur naturally and therefore is not regulated as GM by OGTR in Australia. The Banana Biotechnology Program at QUT is now using this technology in an attempt to generate TR4 resistant Cavendish as good as QCAV-4. The most advanced of these gene edited bananas are already in the field.



Distinguished Professor James Dale from QUT.

STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS WITH GROWERS

New South Wales

A recent visit to Coffs Harbour brought the Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) closer to over 20 growers in New South Wales. Kathryn Dryden (Membership and Advocacy) and Amy Spear (Communications) from ABGC met with growers during farm visits and a dinner, discussing the unique challenges and opportunities facing the region's banana industry. The visit highlighted the diversity within Australia's banana-growing regions and the common passion for family-run businesses that keep the industry thriving.

Kathryn, who is based in Far North Queensland, noted the differences across growing environments. "The NSW growing environment is so different from Queensland, which is different again from WA. We have so much diversity in our industry, not just in topography and climate, but also in markets, business models, and the varieties grown and sold," she said. Despite these differences, nearly all growers share the common thread of being family-run businesses with a deep commitment to growing bananas.

Western Australia

In August, the ABGC Board and Executive Leadership Team travelled to Carnarvon to meet with the country's western-most growers.

The trip coincided with ABGC's quarterly board meeting and the WA Banana Roadshow, hosted by the National Banana Extension and Development Program team.

A huge thank you to those growers who gave up time to come along to events, or host the team on-farm. It was inspiring to see the innovative, exciting things happening in WA!



QBAN SCHEME FACILITIES



Mission Beach Tissue Culture Laboratory and Nursery	07 4068 8553	sdlavis4@bigpond.com	Lindsay Road (PO Box 326), Mission Beach QLD 4852
Lowes TC Pty Ltd Laboratory and Nursery	02 4389 8750	Greg@lowestc.com.au Patricia@lowestc.com.au Natasha@lowestc.com.au	202 Tumbi Rd, Tumbi Umbi NSW 2261
SIVAL FARMING TISSUE CULTURE NURSERY	07 4068 8559	sdlavis4@bigpond.com	Dati Road, Walkamin QLD 4872
Yuruga Laboratory and Nursery	07 4093 3826	admin@howefarms.com.au	5970 Kennedy Highway, Walkamin QLD 4872
Ausplant Nursery	07 4662 4934	brady@ausplantnursery.com.au	72 Winton St (PO Box 766), Dalby QLD 4405

BANANA BITES: WHAT'S BUGGING YOU?

A growers' guide to Sooty mould and management of associated insects

What is Sooty mould?

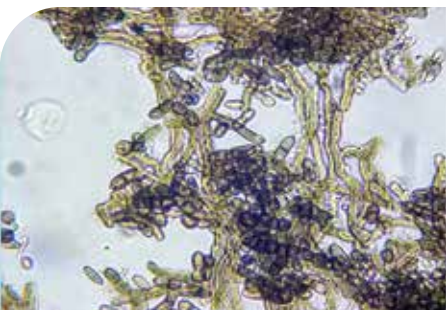
Sooty mould presents as superficial fungal growth characterized by dark, sticky, charcoal-like deposits on plant surfaces, particularly leaves and fruit. Sooty mould is prevalent across all banana growing regions in Australia. In Far North Queensland, conditions are particularly conducive due to warm temperatures and high humidity, creating optimal conditions for fungal growth.



Layers of sooty mould fungal growth on fruit.

Sooty mould problems

Sooty mould is caused by the build-up of fungal spores, particularly from the genus *Cladosporium*, which thrive on honeydew secreted by sap-sucking insects. Sooty mould poses a significant challenge for banana growers as it is difficult to remove from fruit. Layered sheets of fungal growth obstruct photosynthesis, which can reduce growth rates and lower fruit yields. The fungal growth stains the fruit peel, causing cosmetic damage, resulting in fruit unsuitable for market.



Sooty mould (*Cladosporium sp.*) spores.

Associated insects and management

In Australia, the banana aphid (*Pentalonia nigronervosa*), and several mealybug species (*Dysmicoccus brevipes*, *Planococcus minor* and *Planococcus citri*) are the principal pest insects associated with sooty mould development in bananas. Populations of sap-sucking insects often increase due to the activities of sugar-feeding ants, which protect and nurture sap-sucking pests, promoting the production of honey dew for sooty mould growth. Effective management should target sap-sucking insects and ant protectors to reduce honeydew and thereby sooty mould. Utilising registered products for bunch protection will reduce ants and associated insects. Furthermore, cultural practices such as ant baiting and removing plant debris can significantly reduce ant populations and minimise sooty mould.



Banana aphids (*Pentalonia nigronervosa*).

Increased incidence

Increased incidence of sooty mould has been observed this year due to a prolonged wet season and changes in pesticide application practices. The incidence of sooty mould is likely to continue to increase, with the deregistration of pesticides and application method changes (i.e. bunch dusting to bunch spraying) which alter the coverage and efficacy of pesticides, impacting the growth conditions for fungal pathogens.



Ants farming aphids.

Future of Sooty mould

To combat sooty mould, adopting an integrated pest management approach with regular monitoring and targeted strategies is imperative. As the availability of registered pesticides declines due to manufacturer withdrawals, health and safety concerns, and subsequently a shift toward sustainable alternatives, understanding the biology and ecology of sooty mould and associated insects will become increasingly crucial for protecting bananas in Australia.

Check out the first Banana Bites article featured in the August 2024 edition of *Australian Bananas*, on ant related problems and their management. This regular feature is brought to you by the Banana Integrated Pest and Disease Management program (IPDM) (BA21004) team at the Queensland DPI.

**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

VIGILANCE IS KEY IN CONTROLLING BUNCHY TOP IN THE WARMER MONTHS

Sam Stringer, Operations and Extension Officer

As the temperature rises, so does the risk of Banana Bunchy Top Virus (BBTV) spreading in banana plants in backyards and farms.

Warmer months are a critical time for banana farmers to monitor their crops closely, as both the virus and its vector, the banana aphid, are more active during this period. Here's what you need to know to protect your farm.

Why BBTV is a bigger threat in warmer weather

As banana plants experience increased growth in the warmer months, this makes it easier to spot BBTV symptoms. At the same time, aphid activity peaks, increasing the risk of the virus spreading. Even if your farm has never experienced BBTV before, or isn't in one of the BBTV zones, it's vital to remain vigilant. An unwitting introduction of an infected plant nearby can rapidly escalate into a widespread issue.



Identifying BBTV symptoms

Early detection is key to managing BBTV. Watch for the following signs:

- **New leaves:** Look for pale, smaller, and narrower leaves compared to usual growth.
- **Dark markings:** Look for dark dot-dash lines that hook into the midrib and dark green lines running vertically along the midrib.



How to Respond to BBTV

If you detect BBTV symptoms on your farm, act quickly to prevent the virus from spreading:

- 1. Notify the National Bunchy Top Project** if this is a new infection and you haven't had BBTV previously or in several years. If you are not in a BBTV zone (South East Queensland or Northern New South Wales), also notify Biosecurity Queensland.
- 2. Destroy infected plants:** Remove and destroy any infected plants promptly.
- 3. Treat for aphids:** Ensure that the banana aphids on infected plants are treated before destruction to stop further transmission.

Farmers who frequently encounter BBTV should remain alert between scheduled inspections. If you find infected plants before inspectors arrive, don't wait—destroy them immediately.

Prevention and support

Even if you've never had BBTV on your farm, maintaining strict vigilance is crucial. BBTV can be introduced through infected planting material or plants brought into your area. To minimize the risk on your property, ensure all planting material comes from certified, disease-free sources.

If you suspect BBTV but are unsure, help is available. Contact the BBTV hotline at 1800 068 371 or email photos of the affected plant to info@abgc.org.au.

An inspector will guide you through diagnosis and, if necessary, destruction methods to contain the virus.

The importance of prompt action

In the warmer months, BBTV can spiral out of control quickly if not managed effectively. Protecting your farm means staying proactive, acting promptly, and treating any aphid infestations to reduce the risk of further spread. By working together, growers can help limit the impact of BBTV and safeguard their crops for the future. If you're unsure of detecting BBTV symptoms on your farm and you are in a BBTV zone, on farm biosecurity and detection training is always available to you. Simply reach out to our inspectors and arrange to accompany them on their regular inspections of your farm or register your interest in attending a BBTV workshop in your area.

Stay vigilant, and don't hesitate to seek assistance if you suspect BBTV on your farm.

BUNCHY TOP AWARENESS IN MULLUMBIMBY

Held in October, the Mullumbimby Plant Fair served as a vibrant gathering for plant enthusiasts, gardeners, and local community members, with one stall standing out for its vital educational mission.

Wayne Shoobridge (Bunchy Top Inspector) and Sam Stringer (Operations and Extension Officer) hosted a Bunchy Top information stall to raise awareness about Banana Bunchy Top Virus (BBTV). The day proved to be a tremendous success, with Wayne and Sam engaging with a wide audience eager to learn about BBTV. They shared essential knowledge about identifying BBTV symptoms, effective destruction techniques, local regulations, and access to clean planting material – crucial or protecting local banana plantations.

One of the highlights was the inclusion of live (but contained) samples of Bunchy Top infected plant material. These samples provided attendees with a unique hands-on learning experience, making it easier to understand the diseases telltale signs. The visual aids were invaluable in helping visitors recognise symptoms in their own plants.

Wayne and Sam's efforts at the Plant Fair are part of a broader initiative to equip the community with the knowledge and resources to combat the spread of BBTV, thus playing a key role in safeguarding the region's banana industry and encouraging responsible plant care.



ABGC Operations and Extension Officer Sam Stringer engaging with community members in Mullumbimby.

ADVERTORIAL

ULTIMATE AGRI LEADS THE WAY

Farming is never easy and as growers look to get greater returns on their investment in crop nutrition, they are increasingly turning to specialty products, including highly refined primary elements and ameliorants, to optimise soil health and crop growth.

These investments not only include primary NPK products, but agricultural lime and gypsum which are vital inputs to improve broadacre soil structure, enhance moisture retention, address imbalances in soil pH and potential toxicity to crops - and Ultimate Agri is leading the way.

Gypsum and other soil ameliorants like agricultural lime might seem like old school products but their effectiveness and success is well proven.

This demand for refined products suitable for fertigation, boom spraying and applying in liquid formulations at sowing, led to the development of a range of innovative and unique flowable gypsum and lime-based products by Victorian-based Ultimate Agri Products.

However, the highly refined calcium and sulphur product, Gyp-Flo has remained a firm favourite

among long-time users for its unique chemistry and fine (5 micron) particle size.

Ultimate Agri Products managing director, Glenn McDonald started off as a vegetable grower in 1983 and was always interested in new technology.

He started researching new liquid suspensions to replace the old bulk gypsum and lime, and by mid 1999 Gyp-Flo and the lime-based product, ph Plus were released on the market.

Gyp-Flo is a liquid suspension of calcium and sulphur applied to improve soil structure by reducing sodium build-up and increasing calcium levels in the soil.

"Gyp-Flo is much easier to handle and apply via boom spray, drip systems and overhead irrigation compared to spreading bulk gypsum, not to mention the dust issues.

"Gyp-Flo is also a great source of calcium and sulphur for plant nutrition and its benefits have made it a mainstay source of nutrition among leading corporate horticultural growers, including intensive vegetable production and tree crops," Mr McDonald said.

Both Gyp-Flo and ph Plus remain leaders in their field due to their suspension technology and results.

The properties of the Ultimate Agri Products provide a stark contrast to bulk products, as shown in the table below:

Availability/solubility	
Bulk lime and gypsum	Ultimate Agri Products
Bulk gypsum: 0.24%	Gyp-Flo Liquid Gypsum: > 80%
Bulk Lime: .00015%	ph Plus Liquid Lime: > 80%



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Providing Solutions Since 1997

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CALL NOW FOR A FREE QUOTE: 1800 003 244

STOPPING TR4 IN ITS TRACKS: EDUCATING CONTRACTORS ABOUT TR4

The banana industry is the backbone of many regional economies, especially on the Cassowary Coast in Far North Queensland. Protecting our farms from devastating diseases like Panama Tropical Race 4 (TR4) is essential for the industry's future.

Empowering contractors with biosecurity knowledge

The ABGC recently provided an updated resource to help contractors working for the Cassowary Coast Regional Council (CCRC) understand farm biosecurity measures and the threat posed by TR4. This handy pamphlet, titled "Got a Job on a Banana Farm?", provides contractors with the information

they need to play their part in preventing the spread of this disease.

Easy integration for a biosecure onboarding process

This informative pamphlet easily integrates into the CCRC's existing contractor induction materials. Contractors can print copies "as needed," ensuring

everyone receives this vital information during onboarding.

Why contractor education matters

Educating contractors about TR4 is crucial. By understanding biosecurity measures and the potential devastation of this disease, contractors can become valuable allies in our fight to keep TR4 at bay.

BANANA RESEARCHER JANET ROBERTS: A JOURNEY INTO PLANT PATHOLOGY AND TR4 CONTROL

By Glenn Johns

Janet Roberts is a PhD candidate at the University of Queensland, specialising in plant pathology with a focus on the fungal pathogen *Fusarium oxysporum*, which causes Panama disease in bananas.

Her work has become integral in the fight against the tropical race of *Fusarium*, specifically Tropical Race 4 (TR4), a devastating disease that threatens the global banana industry.

ABGC has engaged Janet's expertise to support ongoing research into alternative crops, a critical initiative to assist growers in managing TR4. As part of her work, Janet is conducting an in-depth literature review on TR4 transmission pathways – insights that will inform risk assessments for alternative cropping strategies. This collaboration underscores ABGC's commitment to protecting the banana industry by exploring sustainable practices that can mitigate the impact of TR4 and ensure the long-term viability of banana production.

Janet's path to this critical research began unexpectedly. "My interest in plants started when I worked at Masters in the plant nursery," she recalls. "I enjoyed helping people with their plant problems, which led me to pursue a degree in agriculture and horticulture at the University of Queensland's Gatton campus."

Initially aiming for a career in plant breeding, she soon found her passion in plant pathology, particularly after joining a research project led by Dr Lilia Carvalhais and Professor Andre Drenth, which focused on banana diseases.

This research led to her PhD, where she now concentrates on STR4 (subtropical race 4).

"Once the disease takes hold, you lose the use of that land for decades," Janet explains. "TR4 has the potential to change the direction of the banana industry in a very negative way, as seen in countries

like the Philippines."

Janet's latest project for the ABGC involves conducting a literature review on TR4, a crucial piece of research that will help better understand the pathways of disease spread.

"The literature review will help us identify how the disease spreads—whether through water, soil transfer, or even other crops in the region," she says.

"At the moment, there is no cure for TR4; containment and prevention are key and this review will support efforts to improve quarantine protocols and minimise the risk of spread."

By consolidating existing research into one comprehensive document, Janet hopes to help streamline risk management strategies for the banana industry.

The review will provide farmers, researchers and risk managers with clear and concise data on the risks of TR4 transmission, including potential spread via water, soil, and other crops like sugarcane.

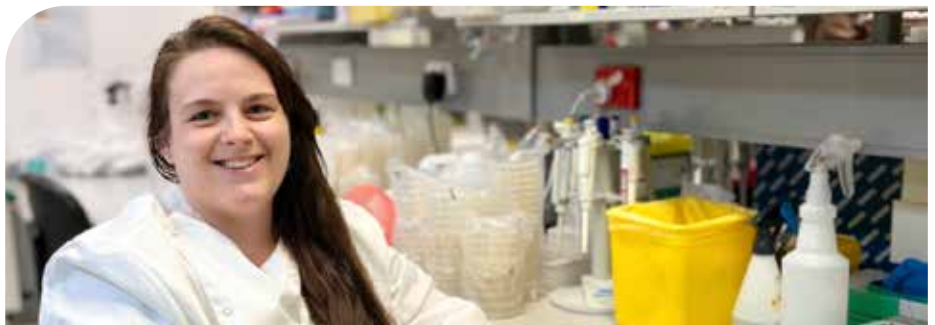
Looking to the future, Janet envisions a career that bridges research and industry.

"In five years, I see myself either transitioning into work or pursuing post-doctoral research," she says. "I've always been open to new opportunities, and I'm excited about expanding my network and exploring other pathogens and diseases that affect agriculture."

Her involvement in this important research and her enthusiasm for collaboration exemplify her dedication to making a difference in the banana industry.

As Janet continues to contribute to the fight against TR4, her work not only strengthens the industry's response but also offers hope for long-term solutions to protect banana crops worldwide.

"It's an exciting journey, and I'm grateful for every opportunity," she concludes. "Hopefully, we can prevent the spread of this disease and help safeguard the future of bananas for generations to come."



PhD candidate Janet Roberts is conducting a literature review on TR4, a crucial piece of research that will help better understand the pathways of disease spread.

ALL-IN SURVEILLANCE PROGRAM TO TACKLE TR4

As a community of banana growers, we've always been strongest when we work together. To keep our industry thriving, we're taking a proactive step to combat Panama TR4.

Starting early next year, an all-in surveillance program will roll out on every commercial banana farm in the Northern Banana Biosecurity Zone, excluding already infested properties. Thanks to recent changes in the Biosecurity Act, authorised

officers now need only to notify property owners, rather than seek consent, before entry—making it easier to expand surveillance efforts across the region.

Growers have shared with the ABGC that they see surveillance as essential, but only truly effective if everyone is involved. That's why this program will be grower-focused and industry-led by the ABGC, with strong support from Biosecurity Queensland (BQ). BQ will work alongside the ABGC as a regulatory partner, helping to ensure compliance through a balanced escalation process that respects growers' expertise while maintaining robust biosecurity standards.

This initiative will also create local jobs, as ABGC has advertised for Field Officer positions to support these efforts on the ground. Together with you, these officers will help us identify and address any potential outbreaks swiftly and effectively.

The ABGC will be here to support you every step of the way. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Together, we can protect our industry and ensure a bright future for banana farming.

UNIFIED EFFORTS TO COMBAT PANAMA TR4 A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

A dedicated working group, led by Geoff Wilson, Panama TR4 Project Manager at the Australian Banana Growers Council (ABGC) and Michael Reid, Chief Plant Health Manager with Biosecurity Queensland (BQ), alongside contributions from both BQ and ABGC teams, has been actively addressing the management of Panama TR4 - a disease that poses a serious threat to Australia's banana industry.

Over the past six months, the group has convened monthly, both in person and virtually, to advance the reintroduction of widespread surveillance across the Northern Banana Biosecurity Zone (NBBZ) following the unsuccessful Informed Consent process, which failed to gain sufficient industry support.

Before ground surveillance can recommence, however, a formal agreement between ABGC and the Queensland Government's Department of Primary Industries (DPI) must be established.

This agreement will outline the working arrangements between ABGC and BQ, particularly concerning the oversight and management of ABGC- authorised officers operating under the Panama TR4 Biosecurity Program.

The working group has been diligently collaborating to develop the policies and documents necessary to support this formal agreement.

A major focus of recent discussions has been on risk-based surveillance, introduced by Dr. John Alawneh, Principal Scientist in Epidemiology and Data Integrity (EDIT) at BQ, DPI.

Risk-based surveillance evaluates factors such as the proximity to known disease outbreaks, environmental conditions and the potential movement of disease carriers like soil and water to identify and prioritise high-risk areas and their surrounding buffer zones, enabling more efficient detection of disease spread through targeted resource allocation.

A global analysis of climatic and environmental factors influencing TR4 prevalence has been used to develop a TR4 species distribution model for Australia.

This model helps identify regions at risk for the establishment and spread of TR4.

The insights gained have been incorporated into the proposed buffer zones and the risk-based surveillance model presented by Dr. Alawneh for integration into the ABGC surveillance plan.

Together, these tools provide a robust framework for combating Panama TR4. Through science-driven strategies and continued collaboration, ABGC and BQ are strengthening the industry's defences against Panama TR4.



SUPPORTING BANANA GROWERS AFFECTED BY TR4

The Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) has begun investigating the feasibility of growing crops other than bananas on farms with TR4.

Beginning with cane, the work is the result of grower feedback and acknowledges that it has

been almost 10 years since the disease was first detected in Tully.

The first steps in the process are comprehensive risk assessments and consultation with a range of growers. This work has now begun.

Looking Ahead

Industry will be kept informed as this work

progresses. Growers and other stakeholders are welcome to reach out to the ABGC team to find out more and share thoughts via info@abgc.org.au.

Through this collective effort, the industry can build resilience against TR4, safeguard the future of banana farming, and explore new avenues for growth.

TR4 PROGRAM IN THE COMMUNITY

National Banana Roadshow Series Highlights Key Issues, including Panama TR4

The recent National Banana Roadshow Series saw strong attendance across Australia's growing regions, with growers and researchers keen to hear from each other about latest updates and on-farm challenges. You can read more about the 2024 events from Page 40.

The ABGC's Panama TR4 Program Manager Geoff Wilson provided a detailed update on the efforts to contain and manage the disease. Geoff announced that surveillance efforts would recommence in early 2025 as part of ongoing efforts to prevent the spread of Panama TR4.

The roadshows underscored the importance of collaboration within the industry to tackle challenges like Panama TR4.

Cassowary Coast Regional Council Biosecurity Roadshow

The Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) was recently invited by the Cassowary Coast Regional Council (CCRC) to present at their Biosecurity Roadshows held in Tully and Mission Beach, Far North Queensland.

During these sessions, Geoff Wilson, Panama TR4 Program Manager, delivered insightful presentations highlighting the various diseases and pests that the banana industry must manage, with a particular focus on Panama TR4.

As part of its ongoing biosecurity efforts, the CCRC is currently drafting the Cassowary Coast Local Area Biosecurity Plan 2025-2029. This plan will include 21 Action Plans, each addressing a priority pest, weed, or animal species in the region. The plan aims to ensure a coordinated approach to managing biosecurity risks.

The CCRC strives to incorporate existing industry and state-level programs into their Biosecurity Plan. As such, the ABGC and other organisations taking a leading role in policy, response, and funding will be included. Notable threats such as Panama TR4, Electric Ants, Yellow Crazy Ants, and four tropical weeds will be featured in the Biosecurity Plan, reflecting the collaborative effort to protect the region's agricultural industries.



NEW CODE MAKES FARMING WITH TR4 MORE WORKABLE

The Australian Banana Growers' Council, on behalf of and in consultation with industry, successfully applied for changes to the Panama TR4 Code of Practice to allow for smaller destruction zones. The updated Code came into place on Monday 30 September, 2024.

The reduction in destruction zone size has the potential to provide a more practical and workable solution to growers farming with TR4, based on best available information.

The changes were passed exactly as proposed by the ABGC after extensive consultation with industry.

Reducing the size of destruction zones will substantially decrease the current approximate cost of \$3000 per destruction zone, not including the loss of production from the plants removed.

View the Code of Practice at www.panamatr4protect.com.au

Queensland Government approved amendment allows for smaller destruction zones on an infested property

↓

Running an infested property now more economical and workable, almost 10 years since the first QLD detection

PRODUCERS IMPROVE CHEMICAL USE RECORDS

Information supplied by Department of Primary Industries (QLD)

Producers across Queensland are taking steps to protect the Great Barrier Reef by improving how they manage and record their use of chemicals. This initiative, led by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI), focuses on reducing pesticide risks in high-priority reef catchment areas.

Since the launch of the Enhanced Managing Pesticide Risks Project in 2019, producers in the Mackay, Whitsunday, Burdekin, and Wet Tropics regions have made significant progress. DPI reports a 65% improvement in how producers use and maintain chemical use records.

As part of the project, DPI has commenced assessments of agricultural enterprises in the Wet Tropics to ensure compliance with the *Chemical Usage (Agricultural & Veterinary) Control Act 1988*. These assessments involve:

- Reviewing chemical records
- In-person or phone conversation about chemical use on the property
- Discussing chemical management practices with producers
- Promoting best management practices (BMP) and programs
- Engaging in pesticide education and awareness discussions

If you receive a letter seeking information relating to chemical use on your property, please make contact with the DPI team, and they will talk through the assessment process that best suits you including what information is required and how to provide a copy of the required information. If you have any concerns or questions regarding the letter, availability or chemical records, please feel free to contact the team.



The DPI team, actively working in the Mackay, Whitsunday, Burdekin, and Wet Tropics regions, includes:



Phillip Morris

With vast industry extension and education knowledge and skills, and experience in government and industry best practice programs.



Andrew Ygosse

Experience in regulatory extension, with years of experience in horticulture, broadacre, apiary, and sugarcane industries, assisting businesses meet compliance standards.



Jessica Turchet

Based in the Mackay Region, Jessica brings extensive experience in engaging and collaborating with producers from delivering industry BMP programs.

For more information about DPI 's pesticide project please search 'managing pesticides' on the department's website daf.qld.gov.au or call 13 25 23. Scan the QR code for guidance on the use of agricultural and veterinary chemicals.



CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS FOR A RESILIENT FARMING FUTURE



It's about the people behind the numbers for agricultural economist Caleb Connolly (DPI).

For Caleb Connolly, working as an agricultural economist is about more than just numbers — it’s about supporting farmers to build resilient, profitable, and sustainable businesses.

As part of the Department of Primary Industries (DPI), he’s helping banana growers in North Queensland make more informed decisions through contributions to the *Banana Nutrient Rate Trials*, a project delivered by DPI and funded through the Queensland Government’s Queensland Reef Water Quality Program.

Caleb reflects on how his career has been shaped by a commitment to supporting regional communities in meaningful ways. “Almost a decade of my childhood was spent growing up in Innisfail,” Caleb says. “After completing a business and law degree, I landed a job at a law firm where robust research was valued. This experience inspired me to complete extra study on trade agreements and Australia’s agricultural trade. My work as an economist now involves research projects across Queensland and supporting farmers to weigh up the specific costs and benefits of farming options and new AgTech.”

“I feel privileged to meet farmers from all walks of life,” Caleb reflects.

“It’s not just about the numbers - it’s about the people behind those numbers.”

Integrating agronomy and economics

The *Banana Nutrient Rate Trials* project aims to identify nutrient management practices that achieve positive financial and water quality outcomes, to

support farm profitability and contribute to the environmental health of the Great Barrier Reef.

At the heart of the project is a focus on understanding production outcomes and the environmental footprint of various nutrient management strategies, particularly nitrogen application rates.

DPI horticultural research staff Alex Lindsay, Catherine Chung, Andrés Morera and Kate Simova-Samuelian gather information on crop growth and yield of bananas grown with different rates of applied fertiliser across multiple sites. Caleb’s role is to analyse the trial data through an economic lens and assess the profitability of different nutrient practices.

“We’re working closely with DPI horticulturists and local banana farmers to understand how different nitrogen application rates affect farm income,” Caleb explains.

“We want the best information to be available so that farmers can make more informed decisions and build lasting legacies for their families and their communities.”

Multi-year project

Caleb has undertaken economic analyses of the plant and ratoon crops of one of the key project trial

sites, and provided the preliminary results to the Project Reference Group and engaged agronomists. This process has included sensitivity analysis of various parameters.

The next step is to finish integrating the data from multiple years and report the returns of the different fertiliser rates on an annual basis. Caleb is looking forward to working with the horticultural team to communicate project findings to the wider industry in 2025.



Caleb Connolly with fertigation tanks for the trial.



Gavin Eilers of Tropicana Bananas, who is a member of the Project Reference Group with Caleb Connolly.

The Banana Nutrient Rate Trials project is delivered by DPI and funded through the Queensland Government’s Queensland Reef Water Quality Program.

NEED A BREAK? SO DOES YOUR SOIL!

Eleanor Sibree, Graduate Extension Officer with ABGC's Best Management Practice team

Incorporating a fallow period between taking out a block and replanting it gives banana growers the opportunity to rest and rejuvenate their soil. Paddocks are best left for at least 12 months between crop removal and replanting.

Good fallow management by incorporating carefully selected cover crops can improve nutrient levels, moisture, and sediment retention within the soil. In bananas, it can be highly effective in reducing pest levels, allowing a reduced reliance on pesticides in future years.

Species selection depends on a range of factors, including season, soil type, and the planned fallow length. In 2021, DAF (now DPI) released a list of appropriate winter and summer species (see Table 1 on page 33). Ideally, a mixed species fallow is recommended, with seed mixes available at most local resellers. This ensures there is a variety of species, all with different growth habits, purposes and seasonality to promote constant groundcover and maximize soil health benefits.

In preparing for a fallow, bananas from the previous crop should be fully removed, including the suckers and rhizomes. This can be with the use of a registered herbicide or via manual methods. Nematodes have been known to densely congregate around the last plant left even partially standing in a block. There are some growers even experimenting with some “push-down” mulchers, which offer a manual removal method that’s particularly handy for helping maintain permanent beds.



Visible nodules along legume roots play a vital role in fixing N from the atmosphere and incorporating into the soil.

Soil Moisture Benefits

Adequate groundcover in the fallow period, reduces erosion and will support the maintenance of good soil moisture levels and water infiltration. This will help minimize that precious topsoil loss in high rainfall events. In drier times, bare fallows can be known to lose 65% of the soil moisture through evaporation.

Soil Fertility & Disease-Break Benefits

Fallowing has been proven to improve soil nutrient availability, linked to the increase in soil microbes and beneficial microorganisms. Nutrients such as N, P, and S, are vital to banana growth, and are dependent on breakdown by these microorganisms into forms that are available for plant uptake.

The disease and pest-breaking benefits of a well-chosen fallow crop can last over a number of years. The common parasitic nematode issues faced by banana growers can be reduced, especially when a brassica cover crop such as mustard is grown. The release of toxic alkaloids from the roots of these species acts to fumigate the soil, reducing nematode populations. This is further enhanced after the crop is incorporated, as plants continue to release these compounds during decomposition. Long-serving DPI nematologist, Tony Pattison, stresses the importance of fallow crops containing purely non-host plants, and that it’s worth checking in with your reseller on the actual breakdown of some of the commercially available seed mixes.

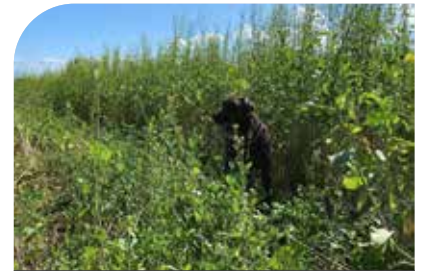
For banana-weevil borer the longer the fallow period, the better. Ensuring enough time for the complete break-down of pre-existing banana bits is essential to establish good control.



A lush sorghum fallow.

GROWER SPOTLIGHT

Established Mission Beach grower Naomi Brownrigg had great success with a 5ha mustard fallow this year.



Naomi's dog, Loki in amongst a healthy-looking mustard crop!

The Sellars farm is on highly weathered red soils that can be prone to nematodes. Naomi believes good control before the next growing cycle beats nematicides and other costly in-crop control methods. The mustard crop was planted in early May and maintained good growth until September. To get the best results, the crop was incorporated into the soil by double discing smaller areas in quick succession, helping speed up organic matter breakdown.

Naomi also had a block under sorghum, which was planted around the same time. Sorghum is a good choice due to its deeper roots, which helps with moisture infiltration and nutrient mining at depth. Aside from some pig pressures, she largely sets and forgets this crop and was keen to trial for a longer-term fallow. Once mature, slashing and allowing to reseed (provided there’s good moisture) should help further growth.

Naomi also soil tests pre-banana planting to get an idea of nutrients and to see if any ameliorations are required. She sees banana growth improvements following the fallow and believes there’s great merit in giving blocks a rest.

To spread the seed for her mustard fallow, Naomi’s husband David uses a basic \$100 planter (see image on page 33) mounted on the back of the tractor “to get the height necessary for spreading.” She says it’s “nothing fancy, but it gets the job done and is best suited for spreading the finer seeds.”

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICE

Table 1. Rotation crops suitable for use with bananas

Winter crops (<6 months)		Summer long fallow >12 months	
Black Jack	<i>Raphanus sativus</i>	Katambora Rhodes grass	<i>Chloris gayana</i>
Caliente	<i>Brassica juncea</i>	Callide	<i>Chloris gayana</i>
Cappuccino	<i>Brassica carinata</i>	Jarra grass	<i>Digitaria milanijana</i>
Must Clean	<i>Brassica juncea</i>	Signal grass	<i>Urochloa decumbens</i>
Nemat	<i>Eruca sativa</i>	Humidicola	<i>Urochloa humidicola</i>
Nemclear	<i>Brassica napus</i>	Vegetated ground covers	
Nemcon	<i>Brassica napus</i>	Sweet smoother grass	<i>Dactyloctenium australe</i>
Terranova	<i>Raphanus sativus</i>	Bahia grass	<i>Paspalum notatum</i>
Tillage Radish	<i>Raphanus sativus</i>	Bermuda grass	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>
Raphanus Doublet	<i>Raphanus sativus oliformus</i>	Broadleaf carpet grass	<i>Axonopus compressus</i>
Summer crops (<6 months)		Cavalcade Centro	<i>Centrosema pascuorum</i>
Sunn hemp	<i>Crotalaria juncea</i>	Narrowleaf carpet	<i>Axonopus fissifolius</i>
Burgundy bean	<i>Macroptilium bracteatum</i>	Pinto peanuts	<i>Arachis pintoii</i>
Sweet Jumbo Sorghum	<i>Sorghum spp.</i>		

DPI Rotation Species – the cover crop should not be a host for parasitic nematodes or banana weevil borer.



Extensive root structure of sorghum at South Johnstone Research Trial. This helps with water infiltration, as well as providing food for valuable microorganisms.



\$100 planter which was best for spreading the finer mustard seeds!

South Johnstone insight

The Banana Nutrient Rate Trial occurring at South Johnstone has incorporated a mixed species fallow planting in the latest stage. Using a 5-species mix, including mustard, sunn hemp, and sorghum, the fallow crop was grown for a year before final paddock preparations for planting in late October.

Queensland Government environmental protection standards for banana farmers

- ✓ Getting ready for your upcoming compliance visit?
- ✓ Not meeting the conditions after your recent compliance visit?

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BE PART OF THE BIGGEST BANANA EVENT OF THE YEAR

AUGUST 6-8, 2025

RACV ROYAL PINES RESORT | GOLD COAST



YOUR HOST: PIP COURTNEY

When it comes to sharing stories from rural Australia, there are few who do it as well as Pip Courtney.

The Landline host and award-winning journalist has a career spanning some 38 years, including three decades on the ABC's flagship rural affairs program.

Pip Courtney is on board as MC of the 2025 Banana Congress, bringing her trademark warmth, professionalism and love of a good yarn to the stage.

It's hard to believe now, but rural reporting wasn't Pip's initial goal. In fact, she wanted to be a political reporter.

After graduating with a degree in Politics and English she joined ABC radio news in Hobart in 1986, but after filing a few political stories Pip realised politics wasn't for her. After seven years in Tasmania working in radio and then TV news, she moved to Canberra to work for Landline in 1993. The rest is history!

She's won numerous awards for her work, including Queensland Journalist of the Year with Sally Sara in 2007, and the international Star Prize for Agricultural Journalism in 2011. Pip was inducted into Queensland's Rural Journalism Hall of Fame in 2018. We can't wait for her to join us on the Gold Coast!



YOUR VENUE

Congress 2025 will be held at RACV Royal Pines Resort, in the heart of Queensland's Gold Coast, midway between the beaches of Surfers Paradise and the rainforests of the hinterland. Only an hour from Brisbane Airport and just 25 minutes from Gold Coast Airport, the resort is perfect for providing a 'banana central' feel to the event.

There are multiple on-site restaurants, spa facilities and a golf course.

A new, dynamic floor plan incorporating the tradeshow exhibition and the speaker sessions will bring fresh energy to the event and provide more opportunities to interact.

SCIENCE SYMPOSIUM

After the success of the 2021 and 2023 events, the Banana Scientific Symposium will again be held alongside the 2025 Banana Congress.

The Scientific Symposium provides an excellent opportunity for the banana research community to share their latest findings, exchange ideas, strengthen connections, and initiate new collaborations.

The symposium will be a full-day event featuring 10-minute scientific presentations followed by Q&A sessions. The event is optional and open to everyone.

PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENTS COMING SOON!

Keep an eye out for some exciting program announcements in the next few months!

In line with our theme – Recharge, Reconnect, Regenerate – our speakers and panels will reflect the diversity of the Australian banana industry and its current opportunities and challenges.

HOWDY PARTNERS!

As excitement starts to build for Banana Congress 2025, a huge thank you to our valued partners who have already thrown their support behind the industry's premier event. Their generosity and support makes Congress possible, and ensures we can bring the best possible program to attendees.

FOUNDATION PARTNER



PRIMARY PARTNER



MAJOR PARTNER



DESTINATION PARTNER



ASSOCIATE PARTNER



R&D PARTNER



If you are interested in finding out more about joining Banana Congress 2025 as a partner, please visit: bananacongress.org.au/partnership/

ABGC MEMBERS SAVE UP TO \$500 ON CONGRESS REGISTRATION

In 2025, the Australian Banana Growers' Council will subsidise Grower Member registrations to Banana Congress, essentially halving the cost. Each financial membership will be entitled to two (2) \$500 registrations.

While the official launch is slated for early next year, early bird registration is now open at bananacongress.org.au.

ABGC Chair Leon Collins acknowledged Congress is a huge investment of time and money.

"However, we believe this event offers a rare opportunity network, learn and come together under one roof," Mr Collins said. "This is why we're giving grower members a special discounted price."

To access the discounted registrations, which also cover entry to the Banana Ball, Welcome Drinks and Tradeshow night, Grower Members will need to use their unique code emailed in late November. If you have any trouble finding it, please reach out to members@abgc.org.au.

"I know the Program Committee are working hard to deliver program that really caters to our industry

as it stands now," Mr Collins added.

"If you've never attended a Congress, this is the perfect opportunity to tap into all that it has to offer."

Affiliate Members will also receive acknowledgement of their ongoing support to industry through a special registration price, saving them up to \$120.



Ray and Jacintha Sambo - QLD Banana grower

ABGC keeps us up-to-date with advocacy, projects and industry developments, allowing us to stay informed in a constantly evolving industry. We are proud to be a member of this organisation.



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NATIONAL BANANA DAY

Update provided by Hort Innovation

This National Banana Day, celebrated on 16 October, Australian Bananas brought a burst of energy to gyms nationwide through launching the Banana Gym Pass, where for one day only, bananas could be used as an entry pass to over 350 gyms!

Funded by the banana marketing levy and delivered through Hort Innovation, this fun initiative was all about celebrating bananas' natural energy boosting properties and encouraging Aussies to stay active and healthy.

Participants, from fitness newcomers to seasoned gym-goers, gained complimentary access to popular gym chains like Viva, Goodlife Health Clubs, Fitness First, ClubLime, Plus Fitness, Hiit Republic, Zap, and BFT, simply by presenting a banana as their 'gym pass'. With over 1 million active members across the nation, this partnership was an excellent way to spread the word and encourage banana purchase on the masses.

Multi-channel promotion

To bring the campaign to life, a range of media channels were strategically utilised to maximise reach and drive awareness. These included:

- **Website and banner ads:** The BananaGymPass.com website, with Google Maps integration, helped Aussies find their closest participating gyms. The campaign was also promoted via a banner on the Australian Bananas website.
- **Out of Home (OOH) advertising:** Tailored visuals were placed in high-traffic, retail, office and gym locations, encouraging the public to participate, featuring a QR code to direct people to the Banana Gym Pass website.
- **Social media:** On social media, influencers such as @Tedsthetics and @Habibarvan shared National Banana Day content to their thousands of followers, further boosting campaign visibility. Overall, social media activity generated a reach (the number of people who saw the content) of over 761,000 and received 11,836 engagements (reactions such as likes, comments, shares, and saves).
- **Online video:** A teaser video was featured across YouTube to capture the online audience and encourage participation.
- **Media and radio coverage:** Major outlets such as the TODAY Show, ABC News, 9News, Courier Mail, and HIT Network covered the campaign on their channels, generating 22 million opportunities to see the banana day key messages through 177 pieces of coverage. On radio, live reads helped raise awareness of the day to a broader audience.
- **Gym collateral:** Posters and promotional materials were displayed in gyms and featured in gym newsletters.
- **Retail point of sale (POS):** In-store posters and logos situated in supermarket catalogues and websites boosted visibility, reminding shoppers of National Banana Day at the point of purchase. Displays were featured at 193 greengrocers nationwide.



Additional National Banana Day Celebrations

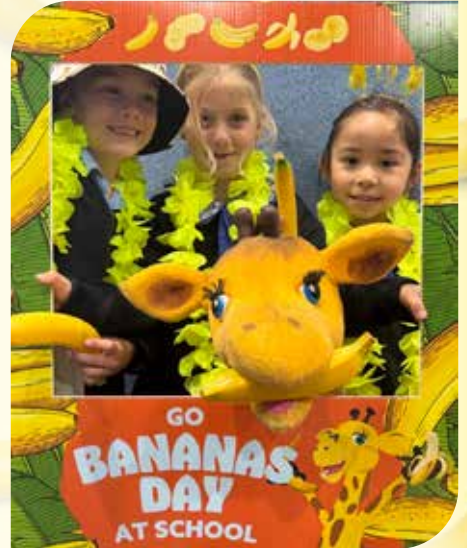
Alongside the Banana Gym Pass public relations (PR) campaign, National Banana Day gained traction through retailers and wholesaler engagement. For example, Coles' 'Banana A-Peel' event, beginning on National Banana Day, pledged to donate 10 cents from every kilogram

of Cavendish bananas sold until 22 October to Little Athletics - supporting equipment purchases for grassroots centres. To celebrate the day, Little Athletics participants created fun banana-themed recipes, with coverage by 7News and Sunrise, offering a valuable PR boost for Australian Bananas.



At the wholesale and independents level, partnerships with Fresh Markets Australia (FMA) and Metcash further amplified National Banana Day's visibility. FMA distributed 193 POS activations in retail outlets, reached an audience of over 94k via social media posts and e-newsletters campaigns, and achieved 337.5k impressions (number of potential exposures) via a printed ad campaign. FMA also hosted a Banana Day event in South Australia, promoting Australian bananas and distributing 1000 banana splits. Similarly, Metcash supported the campaign by distributing 4,000 POS posters across IGA stores, along with 1,000 POS posters and 650 merchandise items to Wholesaler stores.

Kids health education provider LifeEd marked the occasion with 'Go-Bananas-Day', which engaged over 7,360 children from 63 schools nationwide. Participating children learned about healthy eating habits and the nutritional value of bananas, adding fun by dressing up in yellow.



**Access over
350 gyms with
1 of these...**

On the **16th of October**, for one day only, a banana gets you entry to hundreds of gyms around Australia.*



*T&Cs apply.

Event Impact

Overall, this year's National Banana Day was a tremendous success, uniting Aussies nationwide in a fun and energising celebration of bananas and active living. From gym-goers to school kids, the campaign's engaging initiatives and partnerships resonated with diverse audiences, delivering both brand impact and valuable education on bananas' health benefits.

BOOSTING BANANA DEMAND: NEW NATIONAL SAMPLING PROGRAM AIMS TO INSPIRE MORE AUSSIE SHOPPERS



Brand ambassadors will be stationed in fresh produce sections, and will also walk around high-traffic areas in shopping centres.

To boost demand for Australian Bananas in households nationwide, Hort Innovation, in alignment with the Banana Strategic Investment Advisory Panel (SIAP) and funded by the banana marketing levy, is launching a comprehensive consumer sampling program.

Spanning December 2024 to December 2025, the initiative is designed to drive sales and encourage shoppers, particularly light buyers, to purchase bananas more frequently. During sampling sessions, strategically situated in retail outlets, shopping centres, and high-traffic events across Australia, consumers will also learn about the nutritious benefits of bananas to reinforce health messaging and positive sentiment towards the fruit.

In-store sampling at major supermarkets

To engage grocery shoppers, Australian Bananas will conduct in-store sampling at Coles and Woolworths stores across the country. Brand ambassadors will be stationed in fresh produce sections, offering fresh banana samples directly at the point of purchase. With research indicating that 40 per cent of consumers shop without a recipe in mind, the in-store tasting experience will inspire both impulse and repeat purchases, increasing long-term sales.

Shopping centre sampling

Capitalising on Australia's strong shopping centre culture, roaming sampling will take place in high-traffic malls, with brand ambassadors distributing samples and engaging with and targeting shoppers on their path to purchase journey.

Event activations

To further engage with consumers and boost brand visibility, Australian Bananas will also be present at major events like Sydney's Royal Easter Show in April 2025. Attracting up to 800,000 visitors over 12 days, the Easter Show makes an excellent event for directly engaging with a diverse crowd and encouraging trial through sampling.

Maximising program impact

To maximise impact, sampling activities are scheduled to coincide with key selling and promotional periods such as Back to School and National Banana Day 2025. The program will also incorporate a brief consumer survey to gather valuable insights into current consumer attitudes toward Australian bananas. By asking about purchase frequency, barriers to buying, typical purchase size, and usage habits, the survey will reveal important information that can help inform future marketing strategies.

Through the sampling program Australian Bananas aims not only to boost sales but also strengthen long-lasting connections with consumers, keeping bananas top of mind as a go-to snack for Australian households.

By showcasing the quality, freshness, and versatility of bananas, and inspiring new ways to enjoy them, Australian Bananas aims to make a lasting impact on shoppers nationwide - ensuring bananas remain a favorite choice for years to come.

PERTH ROYAL SHOW

21-28 SEPTEMBER

For 15 years, the Perth Royal Show has been part of the Carnarvon Sweeter Banana Co-Operative story.

It's provided an invaluable chance to showcase their tasty fruit to thousands of show-goers in their state capital. Each year, they've grown their engagement and introduced new innovations, and 2024 was no exception.

For the first time, the cooperative joined the Yellow Brick Road to introduce their newest creation: freeze-dried bananas. They also manned their usual popular space in the Farm2Food pavilion, where punters were able to taste their fruit, find out about how bananas are grown in Carnarvon and even sample some gelato.

While the reward for those involved is in the faces of those they engage with, Sweeter Banana was also crowned Best in Show for Agricultural Display by the Royal Agricultural Society of WA! A well-deserved acknowledgement of their hard work and the joy they bring to Perth each year.



Those who've been in bananas for some time may recognise a familiar face in these photos. Tom Day, a former ABGC director and Carnarvon grower, has retired from farming but as we all know, you can never truly leave this industry! Tom's farming tales delighted many showgoers over the week-long event. Once an industry advocate, always an industry advocate!

A shout-out too, to Sweeter Banana business manager Doriana Mangili who coordinates the show displays year-after-year. It's a huge achievement, with the results in the ever-growing number of Sweeter Banana fans.



Images courtesy of Sweeter Banana Cooperative

BANANA ROADSHOWS WRAP UP FOR 2024!

Tegan Cavallaro, Ingrid Jenkins & Sarah Williams, Department of Primary Industries



Tegan Cavallaro, Department of Primary Industries, presenting in Carnarvon in August.

The banana roadshows have made their way around Australia in the second half of 2024!

Starting with Carnarvon in August, the popular series then went to Tully, Innisfail and Mareeba in FNQ and recently finished up with a combined NSW event in Coffs Harbour. Traditionally held every second year alternating with the Banana Congress, this year marks 10 years since the first banana roadshow events commenced.

The Roadshow events were started as a way of bringing together the latest R&D so that growers could attend a single event and hear about a range of topics. The Roadshows have been delivered as part of various iterations of National Banana Development and Extension Programs. The short sharp on-topic 10-minute presentations have been a key feature of the events from the outset. Growers that have attended over the years have always commented on how they like the short

format of the presentations and attendees at this year's series of events reiterated that. One participant said, 'The short direct presentations worked well and conveyed a good amount of info'. Another participant said 'Loved the quick & sharp presentations. The layout was great, especially being time poor with the option to stay back to chat... Great researchers and crew.'

Over the years the roadshows have featured time for discussion. This year was no different as most events featured a "walk and talk" session, which included interactive displays to spark conversations between researchers and growers, and between growers.

In total the 5 events were attended by over 160 growers, agronomists, ag resellers and industry

stakeholders. Tailored based on information available for the different growing regions around Australia, the series highlighted recent findings on research including biological bunch pest control, yellow Sigatoka, Sooty blotch, nematodes, soil health, nitrogen rate trials, and an update on variety development. Also included was an update on the Australian Bananas marketing program and benchmarking project.

The roadshows were well received with 92% of FNQ participants who provided feedback saying that they learnt something new that would assist their business as a result of attending. In NSW, 100% felt the event was good value with the vast majority also indicating they received information that would improve their management of bananas.



The Roadshows were first held in 2014.



The extension team would like to thank all growers and industry stakeholders who attended over the past 10 years. Similarly, the team also thank the presenters involved with this year's (and previous years) roadshow series.

QUEENSLAND

TULLY (29 AUGUST), INNISFAIL (30 AUGUST) AND MAREEBA (6 SEPTEMBER)



WESTERN AUSTRALIA

8 AUGUST, CARNARVON



NSW

21 NOVEMBER
COFFS HARBOUR



BANANA WOMEN'S NETWORK DINNER

21 NOVEMBER, KURRIMINE BEACH

Women working in the banana industry came together at Kurrimine Beach in November to reignite the Banana Women's Network.

It was inspiring to see women of all ages and backgrounds connecting and networking across different areas of the industry.

A big thank you to Jenny Crema for initiating the event, reactivating the group, and sharing personal highlights from the National Farmers' Federation Diversity in Agriculture Leadership Program.



ABGC ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

13 NOVEMBER, TULLY

A record turnout for the ABGC Annual General Meeting, which was held in Tully on 13 November.

Thank you to all the ABGC members who made time to attend the meeting, and to the many who joined us for dinner afterwards.



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