

Australian Bananas



Australian
Banana
Growers

ISSUE 73 | APRIL 2025

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Your Congress.*

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6-8 August 2025
Gold Coast**

Pip Courtney

+ Jana Pittman
+ Billy Collett
+ Industry experts
+ Hot topics
+ Social events
+ more





I believe that the best way to achieve positive outcomes or results, both politically and agriculturally, is to be a member of a single united industry body.

Peter Molenaar, NSW Banana Grower (left)
with Deputy Chair, Stephen Lowe



Leadership



Advocacy



Communications



Networks



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Front cover: ABC Landline legend Pip Courtney is your host at the 2025 Australian Banana Industry Congress.



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A NOTE FROM THE CEO

Leanne Erakovic

As I sat down to reflect on 2025 so far, I was a little surprised to realise we are barely four months in. It feels like so much has happened since we last met here in December.

Our chair, Leon Collins, has highlighted the devastating impacts of severe weather already this year on the opposite page. I want to echo and highlight his comments around ABGC advocacy and the importance of getting your views in front of key decision makers.

At the time of writing, the Federal Election campaign has kicked off in earnest and strong industry advocacy is more important than ever. I invite all banana growers to become members and add their voice to our efforts. We also welcome affiliate members—individuals, businesses, and organisations who want to support a strong, united industry voice when it matters most. Contact members@abgc.org.au for more.

Based on member guidance, ABGC has developed

a range of election priorities which members can view on ABGC's Member Portal. As your industry representative, we are hard at work addressing issues affecting your day-to-day business activities such as compliance burdens and access to workers. And we continue to advocate for stronger biosecurity to better protect your farming business.

Working for you in disease management

I'd encourage you to check out some significant updates regarding ABGC's management of TR4 on behalf of industry. From page 34, you can find out about our surveillance strategy, a new name for the program – reflecting our grower-focussed approach – and meet our TR4 surveillance officers.

As this experienced and thoroughly trained crew gets ready to hit the ground in Far North Queensland, ABGC is also preparing to farewell one of our longest serving Bunchy Top inspectors in New South Wales.

Wayne Shoobridge has been instrumental in efforts to keep Bunchy Top contained for the past

three decades and he will be missed by our team and growers across Northern New South Wales. On behalf of everyone at ABGC and the countless growers you have helped, thank you Wayne. Enjoy those caravanning adventures. You can read more about Wayne on page 28.

Farming families getting it done

Our Communications Officer Skye Orsmond caught up with Kennedy Valley growers and ABGC members, Jeff 'Dicko' Dickinson, his wife Vanessa and sons Shane and Jackson recently. How inspiring to read about their love of growing beautiful fruit, and their optimism and success despite the challenges farming has thrown their way. Like so many families, Dicko and Vanessa have welcomed the next generation into their banana business and the future is looking better because of it. You can read more from Page 12.

As always, I encourage you to reach out to and support your ABGC. Get in touch anytime via ceo@abgc.org.au to talk about how we can work together for a profitable and productive banana industry.



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





CHECKING IN WITH THE CHAIR

Leon Collins

If there's one thing that has become clearer to me in 2025, it's that decisive action is needed on our major transport routes to support our industry into the future.

It is hard to believe that Far North Queensland can still be isolated from the rest of the country when we grow and supply so much produce for Australia. That's on top of the needs of communities across this region who can't access basic supplies when roads go under water. I'll tell you what, it's lucky we love bananas up here because that's all that was on shelves for a good chunk of February.

Working with ABGC's CEO Leanne Erakovic, Stakeholder Engagement and Advocacy Manager Kathryn Dryden and our ABGC members, we estimated the banana industry was losing about \$20 million per week while major transport corridors were cut during severe weather.

Given we are seeing more frequent and intense weather events, we are calling for State and Federal Governments to prioritise upgrading these important freight routes. Road closures shouldn't stand in the way of delivering Australia's favourite

fruit, let alone supporting communities across the Far North.

We've had the opportunity to raise this issue with a number of politicians and decision makers, including Opposition Leader Peter Dutton, Member for Kennedy Bob Katter and Senator Susan McDonald. We've also held a number of meetings with Queensland Minister for Primary Industries, Tony Perrett, including hosting a visit to ABGC Deputy Chair Stephen Lowe's farm to really highlight the impact of these weather events. Our advocacy efforts, in collaboration with other horticultural groups, drove home the need to increase disease relief grants to \$75,000.

I'd encourage you to visit QRIDA if you haven't yet to find out if you're eligible.

I also want to acknowledge those growers in New South Wales who are still assessing damage after ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred. With damage of up to 80 per cent in worst affected areas, it's going to be a long road to recovery. At the time of writing, concessional loans are available, but there is no doubt grants would be invaluable in helping to cope with losses and continuing to future proof farms.

Banana Congress 2025

On a much lighter note, Banana Congress is fast approaching, and I'd encourage you to consider being part of the 2025 event. Between the Science Symposium and plenary program, you can rest assured you'll leave informed and inspired.

However, I really want to use this opportunity to emphasise the other important part of our industry event: simply getting together. The benefits – and enjoyment – gained by having growers, supply chain representatives and researchers under one roof cannot be overstated.

It's a rare chance to network with people from across the country and indeed from around the world. I've been to all Congresses since they began and found them incredibly entertaining and useful, but it's those conversations away from the 'main event' that stay with me too.

Please take advantage of ABGC Member and early bird discounts if you can, and join me at RACV Royal Pines Resort on the Gold Coast from 6-8 August. I also want to give a huge shout out to the banana businesses who have once again thrown their support behind this event (see page 39 for all the details). It's going to be a brilliant few days.

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):**

2014	371
2015	371
2016	393
2017	414
2018	388
2019	372
2020	382
2021	403
2022	375
2023	371
2024	369

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>

SCHOLARSHIPS OPEN

Applications for 2026 Nuffield Scholarships are open now and close on 16 May.

Nuffield Australia will award up to 20 scholarships this year, enabling the sharing of knowledge that creates a sustainable and profitable food and fibre industry. Some of these scholarships target specific agricultural industries, while others are open to a wider range. Nuffield Scholarships are open to Australian primary producers and those working in the agricultural industry, typically aged between 28 and 45.

Shortlisted applicants will be interviewed during June and July. Successful recipients will be announced at the Nuffield Australia National Conference in Adelaide from 8-10 September.

Find out more and apply at www.nuffield.com.au/how-to-apply

QLD RURAL PLANT CODE OF PRACTICE

The Rural plant Code of Practice 2024 commenced on 23 September 2024.

What's new in this Code?

- Comprehensive tractor safety guidelines (incorporating content from the revoked 'Safe design and operation of tractors Code of Practice').
- Guidance on the use of modern technologies like drones, quad bikes and side by side vehicles.
- Updated content including new diagrams and crucial safety instructions.

Updates to the Code are expected to have significant positive impacts on work health and safety outcomes on Queensland farms. It will also support the agricultural industry to meet its work health and safety legislative obligations.

For more information, visit [Worksafe QLD](https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au).

LOCAL GROWERS BRING SMILES TO STUDENTS

Students across NSW and North Queensland are reaping the benefits of their local growers' generosity, gaining hands-on experience and enjoying delicious, farm-fresh bananas.

In Coffs Harbour, grower Paul Shoker recently welcomed students from St Paul's Kempsey, giving them a firsthand look into the world of agriculture and banana farming. Jess Sinton's Prep Class at Good Counsel Primary was all smiles as students

proudly carried their favorite fruit snacks in their Australian Bananas cases.

At Mission Beach State School, students enjoy the sweet taste of locally grown bananas, generously provided by Steve and Richelle from MBL Bananas.



Steve Lizzio (above) from MBL Bananas.



Good Counsel Primary School students in Innisfail (above). Students from St Paul's Kempsey (left) on Paul Shoker's farm in Coffs Harbour.



Mission Beach State School (left and above) love their bananas!

ELECTION A-PEEL

Sure, election campaigns can be a bit bananas – but the Australian Banana Growers' Council is working to ensure this industry, that contributes some \$1.3 billion to the economy, is not forgotten.

Priorities, developed with ABGC members, include:

- Biosecurity
- Reducing the compliance burden
- Workforce
- Rising input costs and retail market power

The ABGC's advocacy team is funded by members. Members can read more, and download a copy of the Election Priorities document, via the Members' Portal.



ADVERTORIAL

LEARN FROM INDUSTRY-LEADING TRAINERS WITH CHEMCERT'S AQF3 CHEMICAL ACCREDITATION COURSE

Are you involved in the application of pesticides or herbicides?

Enhance your skills with ChemCERT Training Group (RTO 90855) AQF3 Chemical Accreditation course. This nationally recognized program is led by highly skilled trainers who use best practices and the latest methods in safe handling and application of chemicals.

The AQF3 course covers essential topics such as the safe transport and storage of chemicals, determining suitable weather conditions for spraying, and understanding chemical application issues. The course includes conducting risk assessments, implementing hazard control measures (including spray drift), integrated pest management, and record-keeping requirements to ensure full

compliance with industry regulations.

This course is ideal for council workers, bush regeneration staff, horticulturalists, farm owners, spray contractors, pest controllers, and groundkeepers. The one-day course runs from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm, with an additional 2-4 hours of pre-course reading required. To enrol, participants must be at least 16 years old, have a reading level equivalent to a year 10 student, the course is delivered in English, and complete a Language, Literacy, and Numeracy (LLN) test.

ChemCERT's AQF3 course is priced at \$380 for initial accreditation and \$350 for re-accreditation.

The assessment process includes multiple-choice questions, short answer questions, spray plans, incident reports, and practical tasks such as calibration, spill clean-up, and nozzle cleaning. The accreditation is valid for five years, but please check state licensing requirements.

Led by industry-leading trainers with extensive experience, including agronomists, researchers, and commercial spray operators, ChemCERT ensures you receive the highest quality training.

For more information and to enrol, visit www.ChemCERT.com.au or call 1800 444 228.

ChemCERT AQF3 Chemical Accreditation



AHCCHM304 Transport and Store Chemicals
AHCCHM307 Prepare and Apply Chemicals to Control Pests, Weeds and Diseases

What's Covered?

The AQF3 course covers the safe use, transport, and storage of chemicals. Available face to face at over 100 locations around Australia, you'll get support from highly skilled industry-based trainers with best practice and latest methods.

Upcoming Course Dates:

01/05/25 Bundaberg	15/05/25 Cooktown
01/05/25 Mareeba	21/05/25 Emerald
09/05/25 Innisfail	22/05/25 Cairns

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PROGRESS IN INDUSTRY-MANAGEMENT OF TR4

By the time you're reading this, the Australian Banana Growers' Council will have recommended surveillance for Panama disease tropical race 4 in Far North Queensland.

The efforts, delivered by ABGC Grower Support (Biosecurity) – formally known as the TR4 Control Program – help to safeguard Australia's banana industry from the devastating effects of this disease.

This vital, industry-led program, supported by government, is designed to detect potential outbreaks of TR4 early, enabling growers to take swift action and limit the spread of the disease that could threaten Australia's banana crops. You can read more about the surveillance strategy from page 34.

The Australian Banana Growers' Council has also welcomed Elisha Farmer to the role of Acting Program Manager for ABGC Grower Support (Biosecurity). Elisha has been with ABGC for some time and brings a wealth of project management experience to the position.

The ABGC would also like to recognise the contributions of former Program Manager Geoff Wilson who recently departed the organisation to pursue other opportunities. ABGC wishes him every success in future.



Elisha Farmer, and the TR4 team, can be contacted at growersupport@abgc.org.au



MENTAL HEALTH HELP FOR AG

A major coalition has sent a powerful message calling for immediate action to address the mental health crisis in agriculture.

The Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) recently joined thirty other rural and healthcare organisations to launch a joint statement to address the crisis disproportionately affecting people in agriculture.

The group is calling on the Government to make an immediate investment of \$50 million over five years to address the crisis.

"No one gets into farming thinking it's going to be easy," ABGC CEO Leanne Erakovic said. "However, it's hard to prepare yourself for just how tough it can be at times."

"Our growers are dealing with the day-to-day challenges of running a business and supporting their families. But there are so many other elements outside their control: natural disaster, skyrocketing costs, biosecurity and workforce challenges – just to name a few.

"We believe proactive steps to improve mental health and wellbeing in agriculture are crucial and cannot come too soon."

Dr Tim Driscoll, Royal Flying Doctor Service Queensland Section's State Manager – Mental Health, and Chair of the steering committee leading this initiative, said the statistics are sobering.

"A farmer dies by suicide every 10 days. That's up to twice the rate of the general working population," Dr Driscoll said.

"Poor mental health and suicide is having a devastating impact on rural families, communities and businesses right now, and we need federal help to fix it.

"The wellbeing of people in agriculture is impacted by increasingly complex and compounding events like weather and natural disasters, financial stress, and geographic or social isolation."

Read more at www.nff.org.au

For further information on where to access farmer-friendly help, visit nff.org.au/mental-health-resources/ or call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

BIOSECURITY LEVY SCRAPPED

In a welcome decision for banana growers and the broader horticulture industry, the Federal Government recently scrapped the proposed Biosecurity Protection Levy.

ABGC has been able to fight for banana growers on this issue, thanks to industry-minded growers who invest in advocacy initiatives.

Banana growers already contribute significantly to biosecurity, through the PHA levy and their own investments.

To become a member and support the sustainability of the banana industry visit: www.abgc.org.au/membership

UNLOCK THE FULL POTENTIAL OF BANANA CROPS

In the competitive world of banana growing, achieving consistent high yields and premium-quality fruit is essential for profitability.

YaraRega® offers banana growers the reliable nutrition solution they need to maximise crop performance while maintaining sustainability and ease of application.

Derived from the old Norse word for 'rain', this innovative formulation has a special coating that protects the granules during storage and handling, yet dissolves easily in water.

According to Yara Regional Sales Manager, Paul Crack, YaraRega® products are at least 99% soluble, with any residues having a negligible particle size of less than 100 microns.

"YaraRega® delivers a balanced and efficient source of essential macro and micronutrients for optimal growth and quality across a wide range of crops," Paul says.

"More importantly, they are highly water soluble and can be delivered via macro, micro and overhead sprinklers or furrow irrigation systems.

"Alternatively, they can be broadcast as a soil application before anticipated rainfall or irrigation."

YaraRega® is available in three formulations in Australia, each tailored for different crop stages.

YaraRega® 15-7-13 provides balanced nitrogen and potassium for vegetative growth, while 9-0-30 is ideal for fruit development and improving shelf life.

Up to 50% of the nitrogen in YaraRega® is present as ammonium nitrate, ensuring immediate plant availability while reducing losses caused by volatilisation.

Banana crops require high levels of potassium (K) for improved fruit quality, shelf life, and disease resistance, making YaraRega® an excellent option.

The 9-0-30 formulation delivers a high potassium content with chloride levels below 2.5%, ensuring it's safe for sensitive crops like bananas.

The sulphur and magnesium in YaraRega® formulations also aids in chlorophyll production and improves nitrogen use efficiency.

"Electing to use a nitrate-based fertiliser like YaraRega® can significantly improve nitrogen availability to your crop, compared to urea-based products," Paul explains.

"It's a win-win for both growers and the environment, helping reduce greenhouse gas emissions while improving productivity."

YaraRega® complements the rest of the Yara range, including YaraTera® water-soluble fertilisers, YaraVita® foliar micronutrients, and YaraLiva® calcium nitrate fertilisers, providing an integrated crop nutrition solution for all production systems.

To celebrate the versatility and performance of YaraRega®, Yara is offering customers the chance to win one of two overseas trips through its YaraRega® Northern Lights Promotion.

Every farmer who orders and takes delivery of YaraRega® products between March and December 2025 will receive one entry for every 25 kg bag purchased or 48 entries per 1200 kg bulk bag.

Yara is committed to helping Australian banana growers thrive by offering advanced products, expert advice and a genuine focus on sustainability.

Its fertilisers are manufactured in Norway to world-class quality assurance standards, with the highest quality in raw materials sourced to guarantee exceptional purity and performance.

Yara's local agronomy team is ready to support you with tailored crop nutrition solutions and practical advice to achieve your goals.

For more information about YaraRega® and the Northern Lights Promotion, contact your local Yara representative or visit yara.com.au



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YaraRega™ The top drop for fertigation.

YaraRega water-soluble NPK compound fertilisers are the easy way to deliver a balanced supply of plant-available macro and micronutrients to field and tree crops using your existing pivot, sprinkler or drip irrigation system. These premium quality fertilisers feature a special coating that protects granules during handling and storage – yet dissolves readily in water. Contact Yara or your rural supplier and find out how YaraRega can turn your irrigation water into a top drop.

Growing a nature-positive food future.

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yara.com.au 1800 684 266



WILDLIFE FRIENDLY FARM FENCING

Wildlife-friendly fencing has been installed at Howe's Farming.

"We fenced for biosecurity purposes and didn't use barbed wire on the top strand," James Howe explained.

"There's nothing worse than seeing an owl hung up and broken-winged on barbed wire. It's also for bats. Nothing deserves to die like that.

"We've got 10km of fencing to do now, to replace a 20-year-old fence that's seen a few battles, and we'll be replacing the top barbed wire with a straight wire there too."

Terrain NRM's Tony O'Malley said the top wire of fences cause 86 per cent of entrapments. At risk wildlife in Far North Queensland include masked owls, spectacled flying foxes, mahogany gliders, yellow-bellied gliders and greater gliders, all of which are endangered species.

"There are fencing options that can minimise risks to wildlife while still being effective for farming – and landholders are adopting these new solutions.

"We have a new factsheet with a range of options – whether you're putting in new fences or maintaining existing fences.

"Top strand options include barbless double-strand twisted wire (barbed wire without barbs) or plain wire."



LATEST HORT STATISTICS HANDBOOK

The 2023/24 Australian Horticulture Statistics Handbook is out! It provides a comprehensive insight into 75 horticultural products including fruit, nuts, vegetables, nursery, turf, and cut flowers. Visit the Hort Innovation website to access the full report.

Key banana data highlighted in the handbook:

- 368,735t produced and valued at \$697.8m
- 90% of Australian households purchased bananas, buying an average of 847g per shopping trip
- 13,551 ha under production

Australian Horticulture Statistics Handbook 2023/24



Out now!

For more information, visit www.terrain.org.au/wildlife-friendly-fencing



Come and say g'day to ABGC at the Ag and Innovation section!

May 28, 29 and 30
Mareeba Rodeo Grounds



Brought to you by Tableland Rotary Clubs of Atherton & Mareeba

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%

www.ultimateagri.com.au

Image courtesy of Better Bananas





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QBAN SCHEME FACILITIES



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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

DICKO'S BANANAS

AWARD-WINNING KENNEDY VALLEY FARM KEEPING THEIR HEAD ABOVE WATER AND EYES ON THE PRIZE

Skye Orsmond, Communications Officer

Nestled between the grand mountains of the Kirrama range and clear flowing waters of Kennedy Creek is a prize-winning banana farm run by the Dickinson family.

Jeff "Dicko" Dickinson, his wife Vanessa and sons Shane and Jackson, run the 70-acre property with the intention of growing premium, sustainably grown bananas... and winning a few show prizes along the way.

It's a team effort in the small operation. Shane does the cutting, Jackson dehands, Vanessa and Dicko keep the wheel spinning and pack and Vanessa's father stacks the cartons onto the pallet, ready for market.

"We send to Brisbane and Sydney and get a lot of regional orders for our fruit."

"Our neighbour saw our fruit out in Winton recently and sent us a photo."



Aftermath: Kennedy Creek filled with debris and dead trees.

Pick of the bunch

The long list of Tully and Innisfail Show accolades, most recently including Champion Ratoon Bunch, as well as first and second place in Heaviest Plant Bunch at the Innisfail Show and first prize for Heaviest Plant Bunch at the Tully Show last year, demonstrates the pride and attentiveness they take when it comes to growing a bunch of bananas.

As we approach a particular block at the back of the farm, I can sense it's one of his best. The plants are tall, sturdy and lush and despite the recent flooding, there's a thick ground cover and beautiful big bunches hanging.

Peering around the paddock, Dicko points out a bunch hanging proudly, "that one's got good potential."

Despite being thrown several setbacks from Mother Nature last year and earlier this year, Dicko and his family have a vision, and passion for growing quality produce, and getting the most of out of the plant, and soil it grows in.



Dicko with his Champion Bunch at the Tully Show in 2015.

Soft and crumbly soil – the right recipe for premium bunches

It's clear that plants not impacted by recent flooding are 'in a good paddock' on this farm.

Low inputs, a fine-tuned application and spraying regime are working wonders, and the proof is in the product.

Dicko attributes the lack of water stress, lowering the nitrogen inputs and getting the phosphorus application right to the winning recipe.

"My nitrogen input for 2022 was 86 kilos to the hectare, and 2023 was 92 kilos to the hectare."

"There's no need (for high N application) – there is no need."

Dicko points out another showstopping bunch and estimates it'll reach about 45kg. "That beautiful 3-carton bunch there is not because of nitrogen being pumped in, but because of phosphorus levels being on the mark."

"We're running below the maximum allowed for phosphorus, and it's producing good fruit."

"I've been farming for 20 years – previously Eddie Jensen grew bananas on this block, it's had bananas on it since 1983. During that time has only been fallow for 3 years. It's the best it's been."

"We try to be as sustainable as much as possible. I try to limit weed spraying. I do a ground spray in November and again in April for beetle borer and thrips."

"We don't do any nematode treatment, none at all. I used to, but I found I had more problems with nematodes when I used to treat – keep on top of your borer and you won't have a problem."

"Most farmers go on a 10 month turn-around, we're going on 6 months. We got a pretty good turnaround, and that's what we want. You don't make money taking 12 months to grow a bunch."



Weathering a rough start

"Demoralising" is the word Dicko uses to describe the recent weather impacts that affected twenty-five percent of their farm and damaged roads and irrigation.

The property was impacted by TC Jasper, two severe storms in January, and rainfall and flooding from the Tropical Lows in early February.

"We try – but some years have been extremely hard. This year it was looking good, but we got the storms then the rain, and now the heat behind it hasn't helped."

"It will be a lower production year, overall. They're saying the industry will be 20% down on production, I think it'll be higher."

"We had non-stop rain for 7 days, a total of 2330ml in 14 days (during the February lows)."

Jackson adds, "before all the rain the bunches were looking beautiful now, they've shortened right up."

"They'll be right (the plants), but instead of having fruit for winter, we'll have it in spring."

"We've got bunches here that should be two cartons to the bunch that we're bagging at the moment, but now we're flat out getting a carton out of them, that'll be it."

"I reckon it's dropped about 10,000 cartons off production for the year. So that adds up."

Despite the losses, the family remain optimistic and see a silver lining that the trees are still standing – "you've got to give a little to get a little."

"Yes we might have less production, it's not just here, it's everyone," Dicko said.



Damage sustained during the February flooding.



Trapped debris shows the height the flood waters reached.



The torrent of water caused erosion, water logging and plant loss.



Shane, Jeff, Jackson and Bingo Dickinson.

Leading the next generation

There was a point when the outlook for the farm was uncertain for Dicko and Vanessa.

"Well, it was either keep in or get out. But both of our boys showed interest in coming back on farm."

"Jackson did the cane for one season in Ingham, and didn't like it."

"Shane is a harvester driver, he's done two seasons in Ingham. On the weekends he'll do that."

With a chuckle Dicko adds, "I've had to pull them into line sometimes."

Their daughter Erica, who is an Agribusiness Manager in Ayr, also helps on the farm, putting her accounting degree and certificate in Agribusiness to good use by assisting with the business' financials. Shane currently grows Ducasse, and Jackson grows

Cavendish bananas on the property.

"I don't stand in the way, I just get the water on for them if it's part of the cycle."

Unfortunately, the harsh realities of farming in the Wet Tropics were experienced in Jackson's first year of managing his own block, that he'd planted in September last year.

Thirty percent of the plantation, irrigation and topsoil was completely wiped out by flood waters.

"The plants were just about to come into bunching, then we had 3m of water through the block, water sat on the end of the block for over a week and drowned the trees. Then the sun came out and cooked them."

Jackson will forge ahead and plans to have the block re-lasered so he can replant soon.



Jackson lost thirty percent of newly planted block, irrigation and valuable topsoil in the February floods.



Jeff, Jackson and Erica Dickinson at the Tully Show banana weigh in last year.

Recovering for a record breaker

The farm was successful in gaining a \$5000 Primary Producer Flood Assistance grant from QRIDA to help with the repairs and clean up required after the flooding.

This monetary support, and their intrinsic optimism leaves me feeling hopeful for the path ahead.

"Considering we've had significant rain, they've definitely lifted in the last 10 days, hey Jack?" Dicko remarks.

"Last week – it's turned around, the plants are bouncing back, and we've started irrigating again."

There's no doubt that "it's been a journey" Dicko reflects.

"There was a bunch last year, it was 106 kgs going ripe – went ripe the week of the Tully Show unfortunately."

"It's my mission to break the all-time record of 92kgs."

I ask if this block will produce a record breaker, and he assures me with a grin and air of hope and confidence, "Don't worry, we will win it, one day."

QLD DISASTER RECOVERY

North and Far North Tropical Low, 29 January - 28 February 2025

Grants of up to \$75,000 are now available to those impacted by recent flooding in Far North Queensland (29 January – 28 February). Eligible replanting is now also included in this grant.

Disaster Assistance Loans and Disaster Assistance (Essential Working Capital) Loans are also available to assist primary producers, small businesses and non-profit organisations with re-establishing normal operations.

Closing date: 14 February 2026

You can read about how ABGC's advocacy contributed to this disaster assistance on page 18.

Tropical Cyclone Jasper, associated rainfall and flooding, 13 - 28 December 2023

Applications are still being accepted for those affected by Tropical Cyclone Jasper (13-18 December 2023). Grants of up to \$75,000 are available. **Closing date: 30 June 2025**

Tropical Cyclone Alfred and Severe Weather, 1 - 16 March 2025

Grants of up to \$25,000 are available for any eligible Southeast Queensland growers who were affected by ex-TC Alfred. Disaster Assistance Loans and Disaster Assistance (Essential Working Capital) Loans are also available. **Closing date: 2 April 2026**

To find out more about any of the disaster relief mentioned here, visit: www.qrida.qld.gov.au/primary-producers

NORTH QUEENSLAND'S WILD WEATHER TAKES A TOLL ON BANANA GROWERS

Banana growers in North Queensland have faced extreme weather challenges this year.

Severe storms affected growing areas south of Tully in January, and extreme rainfall from tropical lows caused major flooding in the Tully, Johnstone and Herbert and Burdekin River catchments.

The prolonged wet conditions and lack of sunshine will likely affect banana production and quality in the coming months. Many farms are still in recovery mode, dealing with infrastructure damage—particularly to roads and crossings.

February saw record-breaking rainfall, with Townsville recording 1,033mm in just the first eight days of the month.

Other areas, including Rollingstone, Cardwell, and Halifax, experienced their highest-ever monthly rainfall, with totals ranging between 1,500mm and 1,700mm.

Flooding led to repeated closures of the Bruce Highway and caused significant transport delays throughout February and into March, as the Seymour River south of Cardwell flooded multiple times.



Paul Lardi on his Tully Valley farm after extreme weather earlier this year.

THE AFTERMATH OF ALFRED



Image taken by Steven Norman, NSW DPI

Growers across Northern New South Wales are still counting the cost of the rain and extreme wind brought by an unusually southern-tracking tropical cyclone earlier this year.

While Alfred was downgraded before he made landfall, the ex-TC still proved devastating, with over 80 per cent of plantations destroyed in the worst affected areas.

Despite making every effort to protect their hillside patches, including stringing and propping, the industry is looking at a long recovery, just two years after the last severe weather event wreaked havoc.



EXTENT OF DAMAGE

The most severe damage (>50%) is concentrated in northern NSW, particularly in the Byron and Tweed regions. The most affected areas include Murwillumbah, Mullumbimby, Fernvale, Chillingham, Cudgen, and Ballina.

Steven Norman, Subtropical Horticulture Development Officer, was contacted by a representative of a Tweed region grower community with limited English literacy. The representative reported widespread and severe damage to banana plantations within this group located in Tweed region.

DAMAGE REPORTS

Tweed-Byron Region

- Over 80% destruction of banana plantations in the worst-affected areas.
- Trees uprooted from the roots or snapped mid-trunk.
- Loss of high-grade fruit due to fruit rubbing and bruising.
- High winds stripped remaining leaves, affecting fruit development.
- Younger plants lost leaf structure, impacting growth moving into winter.
- Uprooted stools require significant labour for replanting, delaying the next productive cycle (12 to 24 months).

- Estimated yield reductions of up to 50% for the next 12 months for those most affected.
- Increased vulnerability to future high-wind events due to weakened plant stool root structures.

Coffs Harbour & Nambucca Region

- Damage ranges between 5-25%.
- Primary damage includes uprooted trees and snapped trunks.
- High fruit loss due to bruising and stripping of protective leaves.
- Some growers forced to heavily prune, reducing expected yields by at least 50%.
- Eroded roads and blocked gullies due to heavy rainfall, impacting farm access.





LONG-TERM RISKS & CHALLENGES

• Increased Disease & Pest Risk:

- Dead plant material increases the risk of banana weevil borer infestations.
- Soil-borne diseases like Panama disease may spread more easily through spores and water runoff, threatening farm viability.

• Infrastructure Damage:

- Fallen native vegetation (e.g., gum trees, eucalyptus, and pines) has damaged roads, banana plantations, and farm infrastructure.
- Growers are using their own labour and machinery to clear debris and restore operations.

• Soil & Water Management:

- Heavy rainfall caused severe erosion and nutrient leaching, reducing fertiliser effectiveness and crop performance.

PREPAREDNESS EFFORTS

Growers implemented proactive measures such as tying down and propping banana plants before the cyclone. Some growers employed full-time workers for a week to secure their crops, significantly reducing overall losses. This effort should be recognised and compensated as part of disaster recovery assistance.

Images thanks to Steven Norman, NSW DPI, and a number of growers who were willing to share their own pictures.

SUPPORT FOR GROWERS

At the time of writing, growers in disaster-declared areas have access to Concessional Loans up to \$130,000.

Ex-TC Alfred is a 'Category B' weather event, which the NSW Government states is for serious, but generally localised natural disasters. The next category – 'category C' – includes grants for those affected and is "usually considered once the impacts of the disaster on affected communities have been assessed." Category C assistance is requested from the states and requires agreement from the Prime Minister.

As one banana grower noted at a TC-Alfred information session, the grants that were available in 2022 were invaluable in starting to future-proof their properties. "The money spent on sealing roads has essentially saved those same roads this time round," he said.

While the bitumen is testament to the importance of these grants, it hasn't saved the tonnes of fruit that has been – and will continue to be – impacted by the extreme winds brought by ex-TC Alfred.

Some farms will take a year or more to properly recover, and the path to getting back up and running will be much tougher without assistance.

"We're not big growers," the Northern NSW grower said. "The banana industry here is already on a knife's edge in many ways. These grants mean we don't have to dip into our own pockets, when there's not a lot there to start with."

Please keep an eye out for any updates regarding disaster relief: www.raa.nsw.gov.au/disaster-assistance/declarations



REPORTING DAMAGE

It's crucial that any grower affected by extreme weather or natural disaster in New South Wales, report the damage to the Primary industries natural disaster damage assessment (PiNDDA). While the survey itself is not a request for help, the information gathered through this system helps to inform the disaster funding process.

Simply search for PiNDDA or visit: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/emergencies/emergency/community/primary-industries-natural-disaster-damage-survey

Please reach out to Steven Norman if you need help completing your survey: steven.norman@nsw.dpi.gov.au

You can also contact the Australian Banana Growers' Council via info@abgc.org.au



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

ADVOCATING FOR GROWERS

ABGC'S RECENT WINS AND ONGOING INITIATIVES

Over the past few months, the Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) has been actively engaging with government leaders and policymakers to ensure the voices of growers are heard. From securing disaster recovery assistance to pushing for better infrastructure and reducing compliance burdens, ABGC's advocacy efforts have delivered tangible results for the banana industry.

Government leaders witness first-hand the impact of disasters

In early March, Queensland Minister for Primary Industries Tony Perrett MP, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries Director-General Graeme Bolton, and Disaster Response Coordinator Andrew Cripps visited Stephen Lowe's banana farm in Tully. This visit provided a crucial first-hand look at the devastating impact of recent floods, including fruit spoilage, plant loss, riverbank erosion, and damage to farm infrastructure.

ABGC Chair Leon Collins used this opportunity to highlight the urgent need for grower support packages to aid recovery efforts. Such direct engagement has contributed significantly to the result where government has lifted their response package from Category C (\$25k grants) to Category D to support affected farmers in their recovery activities with grants of up to \$75k (closing 14 February 2026). ABGC were able to pass on details of the impact across the industry, thanks to members sharing information and photos. ABGC will continue to remind government that no works can be done until paddocks have dried out.

Fighting for stronger transport infrastructure

ABGC has been leading discussions on the need for a resilient road network to support banana growers, particularly in flood-affected areas. In February, ABGC representatives met with key political figures, including Opposition Leader Peter Dutton, Queensland Premier David Crisafulli, KAP Member for Kennedy Bob Katter, Senator Susan McDonald, and Member for Hinchinbrook Nick Dametto. The focus of these discussions was on long-term infrastructure solutions, particularly strengthening the Bruce Highway and Western transport routes to minimise supply chain disruptions.

We are aware that Bob Katter took this issue to Parliament with formal detailed banana industry impact information to support his proposal, prompting the Prime Minister to commit to fixing the Kennedy Highway—a significant step forward for banana growers reliant on this transport link. Lobbying continues in this space to see broader longer-term fixes to our major transport routes, particularly with the ongoing wet weather we continue to experience in the North.

Reducing compliance burdens and improving biosecurity

ABGC's advocacy initiatives have also addressed the complex and costly compliance burdens our members are concerned about. In a recent meeting with Queensland Primary Industries Minister Tony Perrett, ABGC emphasised the need to streamline overlapping compliance regimes and increase the availability of auditors. Minister Perrett, along with the Food Farmers' Commissioner Charles Burke, acknowledged these challenges and committed to working with industry on practical solutions. In conjunction with this, ABGC continues to seek collaboration with key members of the supply chain who have some influence in this space.

ABGC Chair Leon Collins said, "We want to work together to simplify compliance while maintaining high standards in product quality, safety, worker rights, and environmental sustainability."

Biosecurity remains a key concern for the banana industry and the ABGC Advocacy team continue to raise border protection as a priority for industry. The Minister confirmed that 100 new biosecurity officers are being recruited across Queensland, with ABGC pushing for dedicated officers to protect the banana industry and prevent the spread of plant diseases that threaten livelihoods.





ABGC CEO Leanne Erakovic, Queensland Minister for Primary Industries Tony Perrett, ABGC Chair Leon Collins and ABGC Stakeholder Engagement and Advocacy Manager Kathryn Dryden.

Boosting market transparency and fair pricing for growers

ABGC values strong partnerships with retailers, wholesalers, and all stakeholders across the supply chain who support the banana industry.

Leon said, "We are committed to having open discussions and collaborating on fair, practical solutions that benefit the entire industry."

Given Government are working more in this space, ABGC extended the conversation with Queensland Food and Farmers Commissioner Charles Burke. He was interested to understand the banana industry perspective on the importance of price transparency among other things.

Delivering Results Through Media and Industry Engagement

Our advocacy efforts have not gone unnoticed. ABGC's media presence in recent months, has reached over 81.5 million people through online, radio, and print media, ensuring the industry's challenges and needs remain front and centre. ABGC Chair Leon Collins and CEO Leanne Erakovic have participated in numerous interviews, reinforcing the importance of government action to support growers, particularly relating to disaster response and the need for long-term fixes of transport corridors.



THESE WINS ARE ONLY POSSIBLE WITH YOUR SUPPORT

The advocacy wins and progress outlined here would not have been possible without the support of grower members who invest in the industry.

All commercial growers have a stake in the industry, and your contributions enable ABGC to engage directly with government leaders and policymakers, ensuring the voices of growers are heard. ABGC has a small advocacy team who are responsible for activities across the whole organisation.

CEO Leanne Erakovic said, "The more growers who invest in ABGC, the more we can do to fight for action and secure a prosperous industry into the future."



If you're a grower and not already a member, now is the time to join and strengthen our industry's voice. Become a member today and help us continue to fight for real change.

Email members@abgc.org.au or visit abgc.org.au/membership to sign up.

IN PICTURES



SA BANS PLASTIC PLU STICKERS

South Australia will be the first Australian jurisdiction to ban plastic produce stickers that are not AS certified compostable.

The ban will apply to plastic labels affixed to fruit or vegetables for sale in South Australia but will not apply to fruit produced in South Australia that is sold into other markets outside the state.

More than 80% of South Australians have access to a green-lidded organics bin service and many South Australians are keen home composters. While plastic produce stickers should be removed, this does not always happen. The ban will ensure that plastic produce stickers do not turn up as a contaminant in compost outputs.

What will be banned?

- Plastic produce stickers that are not AS certified compostable (conventional plastic stickers on produce such as apples, pears, avocados, bananas, citrus fruits, kiwi fruits and pineapples)

The ban comes into place on 1 September 2025. Based on industry feedback that raised concerns about availability of AS certified compostable produce stickers in time for the ban coming into place, there will be a **3-year temporary exemption until 31 August 2028** for:

- Plastic produce stickers certified compostable to ATSM D6400 (US Standard), EN 13432, TUV OK compost INDUSTRIAL or TUV OK compost HOME

What won't be banned?

- AS certified compostable plastic produce stickers, and before 1 September 2028, plastic produce stickers certified compostable to ATSM D6400 (US Standard), EN 13432, TUV OK compost INDUSTRIAL or TUV OK compost HOME
- Paper produce stickers
- Labelling produce using laser or similar technology



UNLOCKING GROWER SOLUTIONS TO INDUSTRY PROBLEMS

Hort Innovation Frontiers, in partnership with Startupbootcamp and Cluster Connect, has launched a new program designed to drive innovation that will tackle the most pressing challenges in horticulture.

The Australian-Grown Innovation program, which is for Australian growers and those across the horticulture supply chain, will accelerate grower-led innovation through three stages of mentorship. The aim is to turn great ideas into commercially viable products and services that make a real difference on the ground.

Over the next five years, the program will run a number of cohorts through three stages of mentorship to unlock transformative opportunities and deliver practical solutions to real industry challenges such as: intergenerational farm transfer solutions, climate resilience strategies, value-added product innovation, technology-driven solutions harnessing AI, and supply chain improvements.

All solutions created will deliver on solving these challenges through a requirement to meet one of the five overarching Frontiers themes: healthy living, adaptation and resilience, market access, disruptive technologies and capability building.

Search 'Hort Innovation Frontiers' to find out more.

MANDURAH CRAB FEST

March 15-16, 2025: Carnarvon Sweeter Banana delighted foodies at the Mandurah Crab Fest recently, taking part in the Yellow Brick Road along with a bunch of WA's best produce.



HAVE YOUR SAY ON HORT INNOVATION INVESTMENT PLANNING

Hort Innovation's five-year industry Strategic Investment Plans (SIPs) expire by June 30, 2026, and moves are under way to shape future investment planning.

Key questions they are hoping to tackle include, what should future investment models look like and how far ahead into the future should they look? The Strategic Horticulture Investment Framework (SHIFT) program has released a Discussion Guide to spark thoughts and conversations and encourage the submission of ideas.

Contact shift@horticulture.com.au for more.

COUNTDOWN TO WITHDRAWAL OF CHLORPYRIFOS

Tegan Cavallaro and Ingrid Jenkins – Queensland DPI | Dr Rosie Godwin – ABGC

Time is ticking on the use of chlorpyrifos in the banana industry. Last year the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) released their regulatory decision to cancel all uses of chlorpyrifos in bananas. There was a 12 month 'phase out' period to allow use of products already in the supply chain or on farm. Here are some important dates to be aware of.



Permit PER14240 expires. This means that the application of chlorpyrifos mixed with talc will no longer be allowed. This permit will not be renewed.



All uses of chlorpyrifos (e.g. bunch spraying) must cease in bananas.

Important considerations

- Changing to alternative chemicals may not be as simple as changing chemicals. Especially if changing from dusting to bunch spraying, consider the whole bunch pest management strategy.
- Before use of any chemical:
 - Confirm the registration status by checking the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority website portal.apvma.gov.au
 - Check product label and permit rates.
- Consider resistance management.
- Good bunch spray coverage is important to get effective control of bunch pests.
 - Consider which equipment set up to use and how best to achieve good coverage with recommended volumes.
 - Staff training is important for calibration and application of pesticides.
 - Additional training will be required for farms transitioning from bunch dusting to spraying.
- The rate for bell injecting spinetoram, listed in the minor use permit (PER87198), is different to the label rate for bunch spraying with spinetoram.
- When changing from bunch dusting to spraying, consider if other elements of bunch pest and disease management need to be considered, e.g., reducing fungal damage by increasing air flow in bunch covers.
- Regularly calibrate equipment and check application techniques and revisit product label and permit rates.
- Check the storage requirements of chemicals and only mix volumes required for immediate use.
- Always comply with WH&S directions on labels and permits when applying chemicals, including wearing personal protective equipment.

The chemicals that are registered for control of banana rust thrips that target the soil-dwelling pupal stages can be applied by stem injection, stem spray and/or band application (always check label directions). Timing of these applications should be carefully considered and applied ahead of high-pressure periods which can help reduce banana rust thrips pressure.

Registered or permitted chemical actives for application to the bell and/or bunch to manage the main bunch pests (Banana rust thrips, Banana flower thrips and Banana scab moth)

Active ingredient	Chemical group – mode of action	Bell injection	Bunch spraying
Acephate	1B	✓	✓
Bifenthrin	3A	✓ Only SC formulation registered for bell injection	
Spinetoram	5	✓ (Permit 87198) Note – Rate is different to label rate used for bunch spraying	✓
Spinosad	5		✓



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/

“Ingrid and I have been visiting growers as they are making changes to their bunch pest management practices. This has led to some good discussions about different options, experiences and things to keep an eye out for. We want to share our learnings from the bunch pest trials we have undertaken, so I encourage growers to give us a call” – Tegan Cavallaro

ABGC's R&D Manager



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RECIPE FOR SUCCESS: BANANAS GROWN IN MICROBIAL SOUP

Tony Pattison
and **Hazel Gaza-**
Department of
Primary Industries,
South Johnstone,
Queensland.

Paul Dennis and
Anna-Belle Clarke-
The University
Queensland, St Lucia,
Queensland

In the world of banana growing, soil microbes are the secret ingredients that turn an ordinary banana farm into an abundant plantation. This recipe especially crafted for the discerning banana grower, transforms any farm into a vibrant functioning ecosystem, where beneficial organisms work together to overcome limitations by boosting nutrient cycling, improving organic matter recycling and fending off diseases like Panama disease.

Follow this guide to cultivate a thriving banana plantation, rich in microbial diversity and resilient to environmental stress.

Ingredients

1. Neutral Soil pH

Just like all things, the foundations are important. Soils are the foundation of a successful banana crop, and maintaining a soil pH around 6.5 to 7.0 creates the ideal environment for beneficial microbes to flourish. This balanced acidity not only helps microbes recycle nutrients but also ensures that banana roots can absorb essential nutrients effectively.

2. Fertiliser Management

Fertilisers add the spice to your banana crop. Applied carefully and ensuring just the right amount your plant needs, can add that little bit more resilience to your banana plants by ensuring a diverse microbial blend in the soil. Overuse of nitrogen, especially ammonium sources, can tip the pH and disrupt microbial communities. Proper fertilisation practices, and even slow-release or organic fertilisers, support both plant growth and microbial stability.

3. Vegetative Ground Cover Management

A living mulch of cover crops, such as legumes or grasses, serves as the dressing for your soil. These plants not only suppress weeds and prevent erosion but also add organic residues that feed soil microbial diversity. A robust vegetative ground cover also helps moderate soil temperature and moisture levels, creating a consistent habitat for the microbial community.

4. Organic Amendments

Composts, some manures, and wood chips are carbon-rich additives that boost soil structure and microbial life. These amendments improve water retention, aeration, and the overall health of the soil. They are particularly effective in enhancing the populations of beneficial bacteria and fungi that form the microbial core essential for disease resistance, stimulating plant growth and nutrient cycling.

5. Environmental Stress Management

Just like any great dish, when the conditions are right the results are even better. Banana growers must manage environmental stresses, such as extreme temperatures, erratic rainfall, and flooding. Proper irrigation, drainage systems, and strategic shading or windbreaks help to maintain a stable environment, reducing stress on both banana plants and their microbial allies.



Good ground cover not only suppress weeds and prevents erosion but also add organic residues that feed soil microbial diversity.



Windbreaks help maintain a stable environment, reducing stress on both banana plants and their microbial allies.



Australian Centre
for International
Agricultural Research



This work is supported by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research with support from the University of Queensland and the Queensland Government.

Method

1. Prepare Your Soil Base:

Begin by testing your soil's pH and nutrient levels. If the pH is too acid, amend it with generous applications of lime before planting. The aim is to create a balanced soil where beneficial microbial communities can thrive.

2. Mix in the Organic Amendments:

Blend in high-carbon amendments with your soil and give them a bit of time to decompose naturally before adding your bananas. For a bit extra you may want to spread a thin layer of nutrient rich organic products over the planting area to help retain moisture and nutrients. These amendments act as both food and shelter for beneficial microbes.

3. Establish a Living Mulch:

Establish vegetation cover between your banana rows. Their roots work in tandem with the banana's, exuding organic compounds that attract beneficial bacteria such as *Bacillus* and *Pseudomonas*. This living mulch not only adds extra organic matter but also enhances soil structure and water retention.



By creating a dynamic "microbial soup" in your soil that bolsters plant defences, enriches nutrient cycling, ultimately leads to a healthier, more productive banana crops. "Get your soil health right and productivity will follow".

4. Apply Balanced Fertiliser:

Only use fertiliser to meet the nutritional needs of your banana plants, without overwhelming the soil's microbial balance. Customise your fertiliser applications by adding little bits often, which are best applied with a little bit of water, but not too much.

5. Add Beneficial Microbes:

Consider inoculating your soil with microbial consortia that include key players of the core banana microbiome. These microbes work synergistically to suppress pathogens like Panama disease while promoting root growth and nutrient uptake. Be sure to use only high-quality products, from reputable manufacturers that you are sure will add some benefit to your soil and plant. Purchasing beneficial microbes can be difficult, so cultivating your own beneficial microbes in the soil can be cheaper and work better for you in the long run.



For a bit extra you may want to spread a thin layer of nutrient rich organic products over the planting area to help retain moisture and nutrients, which act as both food and shelter for beneficial microbes.



Customise your fertiliser applications by adding little bits often, which are best applied with a little bit of water, but not too much.

6. Monitor and Adjust:

Regularly observe your soil moisture, temperature and overall plant health. Fine-tune your irrigation and shading practices to ensure that environmental stresses are minimised. Keep an eye on nutrient levels and adjust your amendments and fertiliser application as needed. Do not over apply fertilisers containing nitrogen, as this only encourages spoilage organism like plant-parasitic nematodes and Panama disease.

By carefully blending these ingredients and following the method, you can create a dynamic "microbial soup" in your banana soil. The "microbial soup" bolsters plant defences, enriches nutrient cycling, and ultimately leads to a healthier, more productive banana crops that remain productive for longer. As suggested by one successful banana grower, "get your soil health right and productivity will follow". This recipe not only protects against diseases but also transforms your banana farm into a sustainable, self-renewing ecosystem - a masterpiece of good farming.



Carbon rich amendments are particularly effective in enhancing the populations of beneficial bacteria and fungi that form the core banana microbiome, essential for disease resistance, stimulating plant growth and nutrient cycling.

USING DRONES AND DATA TO MONITOR FERTILISER UPTAKE

For the first time in Australia, drone images have been used to delineate fertiliser rate differences in banana plantations.

Marcus Bulstrode, from the Advanced Coastal Farming Systems (ACFS) team, within the Natural Capital and Sustainability group of the Department of Primary Industries (DPI), has flown multiple flights over the Banana Nutrient Rate Trials project site at the South Johnstone Research Facility since it was planted in October 2023. The project is delivered by DPI and funded through the Queensland Government's Queensland Reef Water Quality Program.

Marcus explains the challenges and opportunities of working with bananas. "Bananas present unique challenges for remote assessment compared to other crops, due to their complex canopy structure,

rapid growth cycles, and crop management activities. However, the layout and design of the Banana Nutrient Rate Trials site, combined with improvements in analytical vegetation algorithms, has meant that I could focus on specific areas to identify visual differences across the crop that correlated with different fertiliser rates," Marcus said.

In November 2024, the trial entered its second year. Nitrogen rates were changed in a factorial manner, either increasing, decreasing, or staying the same as in the first year. "By the end of December, we could identify changes in leaf colour that related to the new rates of nitrogen. The ability to visually track these changes in real-time is fantastic," Marcus said.

Alex Lindsay, DPI's Banana Nutrient Rate Trial Project Leader, said the patterns seen in the drone mapping matched ground-level spot checks of leaf colour using a chlorophyll meter. "It provides

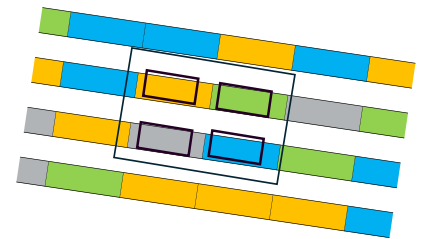
confidence that the fertiliser is being utilised by the crop as planned across the trial site," Alex said.

Marcus has recently added a LiDAR sensor to further enhance data collection and analysis, to complement the multispectral and high resolution RGB (red, green, blue, or "visible" spectrum) imagery. This addition expands the potential to identify areas that could benefit from precision farming methods. "Having a well-managed nutrient rates trial nearby is a real asset for doing this work and has facilitated collaboration between projects under the Reef program. We expect the results from this work will be transferred to others working in the banana industry."

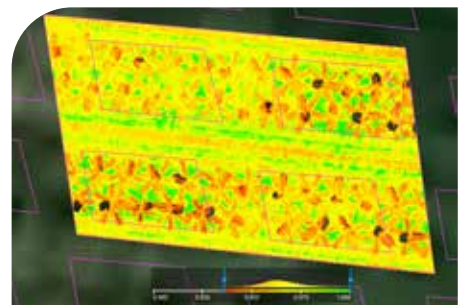
This activity highlights how scientists from different projects can work collaboratively with the aim of improving productivity and minimising environmental impacts.



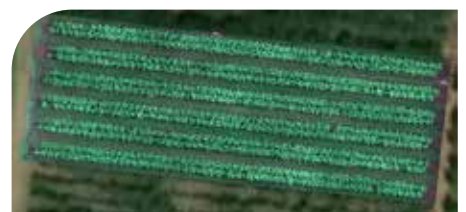
Marcus Bulstrode, from the Advanced Coastal Farming Systems team (QLD DPI).



Trial design – different colours show different nitrogen fertiliser rates



Multispectral image



RGB (visual) image

BANANA BMP'S BEST PRACTICE FUND



Delivered by ABGC to support growers to achieve productivity & environmental stewardship

Funded by the Queensland Government's Queensland Reef Water Quality Program for improved water quality outcomes

The Best Practice Fund supports projects that reduce nutrient, pesticide and sediment runoff from banana farms in Great Barrier Reef catchments. The Fund contributes up to 50% of the total project cost, to a maximum of \$30,000 (excl GST).

The final round opens late 2025. Contact the BMP Team to find out more.

bmp@abgc.org.au
0457 924 518

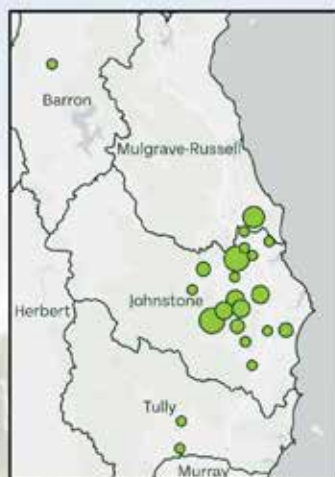
39 growers



improving practices on

1,940 ha

of banana farms in Great Barrier Reef catchments



20 upgraded spreaders



15 erosion and sediment control projects



9 side-throw slashers



7 fertigation systems



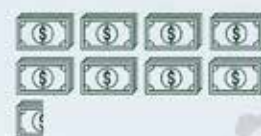
2 equipment & machinery for permanent beds

1 trial to increase soil carbon



\$1.83 million

invested on farm



\$849,007 from the Fund



\$981,496 from growers

The Banana BMP's Best Practice Fund is funded under the Banana Best Management Practice (BMP) Project (2023-2026). The Banana BMP is funded through the Queensland Government's Queensland Reef Water Quality Program and delivered by Australian Banana Growers' Council in partnership with growers.



MAPPING SKILLS

In February, the ABGC Best Practice team held its first farm mapping drop-in day at the South Johnstone DPI.

Banana growers from the Johnstone and Tully catchments attended the hands-on workshop, where they were guided through the steps for creating their own digital farm maps using the free-to access Queensland Globe web platform.

Growers also learnt how to access a large variety of free online land use data, such as land title parcels, topography maps, bore locations, electrical

networks, conservation zones and soil type boundaries.

These maps are easy to edit and print out on the go when you need them, whether it's preparing for your next audit, or strategizing future on-farm planning.

Missed out on the workshop this time? Ready to ditch your hand drawn farm maps and want to learn how to set up your own easy-to-edit online maps?



ABGC Extension Officer Molly Blake presenting at the first farm mapping drop-in day.

Get in contact with Molly from the BMP team on 0419 602 864 or molly@abgc.org.au to see how we can help. You'll be the first to know the next time we run a mapping drop-in day. Alternatively, we can visit the farm and take you through the steps one-on-one to help you get started.

UPPER DARADGEE BANANA GROWER'S RIVERBANK REVEGETATION SUCCESS STORY



From left – Grower Michael Cardillo, with the fabulous JRLG team: Elizabeth, Sharmaine, the two Lukes, and team leader Adrian. Special mention to valuable team members Yolanda and Tammy who aren't pictured.

Eleanor Sibree, ABGC Best Management Practice Graduate Extension Officer, Agricultural Extension Work Placement Program
Images by Skye Orsmond, Communications Officer

A thriving example of land stewardship is flourishing on Michael Cardillo's banana farm.

With a significant portion of his farm boundary running along the mighty Johnstone River, limiting his environmental footprint through good farm design and management is always front of mind for Michael.

Being a third-generation farmer, over the years he has pursued several projects to improve sustainability on-farm, including fitting a GPS

auto-steer to his tractor to support a permanent-bed system and reduce soil disturbance. This was co-funded through the Banana BMP's Best Practice Fund, which is designed to help support growers to improve the quality of water running off their farms.

However, Michael's latest endeavour isn't nearly as high tech, involving basic environmental principles and the help of a strong team willing to get their hands dirty.

In the early days, the focus of agriculture was to maximise production areas with the mindset that higher yields equal greater returns. Instead, Michael has another approach, looking at the

"environmental resilience of his farm as a significant marker of its success."

To help him on this quest, Michael engaged Adrian Hogg from Johnstone Region Landcare Group Inc (JRLG) and his "action team", a dedicated crew of workers and volunteers supported by the Queensland Government's Reef Assist program. Together, they have revegetated a stretch of over 1km on Michael's farm.

What was previously a bare streambank is now thick with native plant species, each with its own loyal following of insects, birds, and other vital pollinators.

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICE



A valuable part of the process that can't be forgotten. Dedicated volunteers potting and giving the plants a great start to life back at the nursery. Image thanks to JRLG Facebook page.

"Once you get the plants in the ground, nature just figures the rest out," Adrian said. "Apart from some basic bank grading initially, the plants themselves have really done all the hard work."

In total, over 12,000 trees have been planted on Michael's farm, with roughly another kilometre of plantings still to take place on another portion of the property. This will keep Adrian's team busy, with his seed-sourcing and planting crew complimented by loyal volunteers who pot and propagate back at the nursery. The nursery houses between 60-100 plant species, with all seeds sourced locally and of varieties known to thrive in the area.

Apart from occasional slashing and spot-spraying during plant establishment, the ongoing long-term maintenance of the project has been minimal.

"The overall benefits far outweigh the early efforts", Michael said. "It's a win-win situation. We've now extended out our production time, slowing the pace of erosion and keeping valuable soil on farm."

Adrian said that whilst revegetation is by no means free, it is a far less expensive and fool-proof method for streambank stabilisation and land remediation. The team is always willing to discuss new revegetation projects, and welcome community volunteers and people simply getting the word out about their work.

"Sometimes landscape repair has a simple solution, requiring only a small head start from us, then leaving the rest to natural processes," Adrian said.

This project and others delivered by the JRLG team have been funded through the Queensland Government's \$33.5 million Reef Assist program under the Queensland Reef Water Quality Program. The goal of this Reef Assist 2.0 project is to improve water quality flowing to the Great Barrier Reef through a range of revegetation projects and landscape remediation initiatives.

The Agricultural Extension Work Placement Program and the Banana BMP's Best Practice Fund are also funded through the Queensland Government's Queensland Reef Water Quality Program.



The streambank before and in the early stages of revegetation. Trees in the ground stabilize the bank, providing valuable groundcover and reducing and slowing the effects of future erosion.



What we're looking at now after over two years of growth. A rapidly growing rainforest stretch well on its way to mirroring across the river.



Evidence of the great work being undertaken by Michael Cardillo and the Johnstone Region Landcare Group.

To discuss revegetation opportunities or how you can assist the Johnstone Region Landcare Group Inc. team in their efforts, call Adrian on 0487 890 684 or email johnstonelandcare@gmail.com

Further information on the Queensland Government's Reef Assist Program is available at <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/coasts-waterways/reef/reef-program/reef-assist>

DECADES OF DEDICATION TO BATTLING BUNCHY TOP

Skye Orsmond, Communications Officer

After thirty years working as a Banana Bunchy Top Virus (BBTV) inspector, Wayne Shoobridge will be hanging up his hat at the end of June this year.

After experiencing the impact of Bunchy Top in his own banana patch, Wayne appreciated how devastating the disease can be and soon after took on the job opportunity as an inspector.

"My 18-acre farm in Murwillumbah was wiped out by BBTV in 1995. I was forced to look for another source of income, and saw the job advertised."

"It was devastating to see my plantation get knocked down, and I didn't want other growers to go through that. I wanted to educate other growers on how to find Bunchy Top themselves. If they keep their eyes out, and know the symptoms, they wouldn't get wiped out like I did."

Wayne worked in a contract inspector position for the Banana Industry Committee (BIC) in NSW for three years, from 1995 to 1998, before taking on a role with Australian Banana Growers' Council.

"I've seen a lot of changes over the years. Growers have come and gone, there's been changes with the ABGC, and lots of different Government rules and regulations."

"I've kept in contact with people and growers I've worked with over the years. Being a grower myself, I've felt very accepted, and it's been good connecting with others in the industry."

From market stalls, to roadshows, field days, BGA meetings, backyards and farm inspections – Wayne has spread his knowledge and educated people on the disease far and wide.

The COVID pandemic in 2020 coincided with Wayne's decision to stop farming bananas.

"I wanted to get some weekends to myself, farming is non-stop, so I've just been focussing on inspecting for the past five years."

Wayne and his wife Ann have three sons, who all gained trade qualifications.



BUNCHY TOP



"I suggested they all get a trade before considering farming, and they've all stayed in their trades. One's a nurse, one's a tiler and one's an electrician."

"If they ever want to come back to the farm, they can, but at least they have trades under their belts."

Wayne and Ann are looking forward to retirement, and plan to caravan around Australia together.

"We've just had no power for eight days due to ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred, so we've been staying in the caravan. We really enjoyed it actually; it gave us a taste of what's ahead, we can't wait to get in the caravan and go places."

All of the current Bunchy Top Project team appreciate Wayne's efforts. Project Leader Rosie Godwin has had the pleasure of working with Wayne across a number of years and evolving projects. "Wayne has always played a critical role as part of the Bunchy Top Project Team. He really understands the challenges that all banana growers face, and as a result his advice to fellow growers on Bunchy Top is always appreciated and acted upon,"

she said.

Importantly, Wayne has played a major role in passing on his learnings and experience to new inspectors and growers. Bunchy Top Project Manager Grant Telford said, "Wayne has played a huge role in the training of not only growers, but also a series of new inspectors. He always goes over and above to support growers, inspectors and project managers."

ABGC CEO Leanne Erakovic said Wayne's commitment to the banana industry and passion for helping fellow growers has made a significant difference over the years.

"His hands-on experience and dedication to educating others have shaped the future of banana farming, particularly in managing Bunchy Top. On behalf of the entire team, I'd like to thank Wayne for his outstanding contribution and wish him a well-deserved retirement filled with new adventures."

BUNCHY TOP TEAM EXPANDS MESSAGING

The Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) Banana Bunchy top team continues to listen to feedback and expand its library of resources to help commercial growers stay on top of this potentially devastating disease.

The Bunchy Top team is part of the Hort Innovation-funded 'Multi-pest surveillance and grower education project' (BA21003).

Project Manager Grant Telford said: "Commercial growers in northern New South Wales, within the current containment zone, face a higher risk of impacts from Bunchy Top. ABGC project staff numbers are limited in this area, so every grower who gets on board to inspect their property, self-

manage, and seek advice when needed essentially adds an additional member to the team. This is crucial for supporting control and containment."

"We have growers who have successfully eradicated Bunchy Top on their properties through their own efforts, with support from ABGC's experienced inspectors," he added.

Amardeep Singh, a member of the Bunchy Top team, understands the importance of prevention and control. "Bananas are a crop that keeps growing and never sleeps," he said. There is no end to the challenges banana growers face, but he has witnessed first-hand the impact Bunchy Top can have on a property.

"Monitoring for Bunchy Top and keeping your plantation clean are the first steps," he said.

Amardeep has assisted the team by communicating this message in Punjabi (with subtitles) in a new 'Banana Bunchy Top Tips' video. You can watch this video by scanning the QR Code.



The complete collection of all 'Banana Bunchy Top Tips' and other video resources produced by ABGC can be accessed by scanning the QR Code.



Amardeep Singh has always had a love for bananas and a focus on quality banana production. Amardeep has a history of managing his own patch and assisting other banana growers. Amardeep has been a valued member of the Bunchy Top team since June 2022, and since that time has continued to support banana growers in the area in his spare time.

The Hort Innovation project (BA21003) will be finalised on 25 March 2025, however a follow-on project (BA24003) will continue this critical work with a greater focus on supporting ongoing stakeholder engagement.

IMPROVING QBAN TESTING

Dr Kathy Crew and Ms Samantha Stringer

Promising progress is being made on a new diagnostic assay for banana bunchy top virus (BBTV), which could be used as part of the industry clean planning scheme, QBAN.

Dr Gus McFarlane, NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Sydney, spent a week in early February with Dr Kathy Crew, Queensland Department of Primary Industries, and A/Prof John Thomas, The University of Queensland, to continue development of the diagnostic assay. Gus' stay commenced with a field visit to Nambour organised by Ms Samantha Stringer, ABGC, through the bunchy top surveillance project BA21003, to learn about bunchy top disease and collect infected leaf samples for laboratory analysis.

BBTV causes a devastating viral disease, which makes it one of the top banana pathogens worldwide, along with TR4 *Fusarium* wilt, Black sigatoka and bacterial wilt species. It is currently only known to be in south-east Queensland and northern NSW, however the risk of spread to north Queensland poses a continuous threat to production.

Infected plants fail to produce marketable bunches. Leaves are progressively more stunted and upright with chlorotic upcurled margins, discontinuous dark green streaks (dot-dash or morse code pattern) visible from the underside of the leaf. Control requires regular visual inspection to identify symptomatic plants followed by prompt and appropriate destruction measures to minimise spread to neighbouring plants.

BBTV is spread by banana aphids (*Pentalonia nigronervosa* and the closely related species *P. caladii*) and through infected planting material. Regulations around diagnostic testing and plant movement are in place to safeguard the industry. One aspect of these regulations requires all suckers initiated into tissue culture to be tested for BBTV, which is performed under the industry clean planting scheme QBAN. Current testing uses a PCR-based assay on bulk samples of up to 10 suckers.

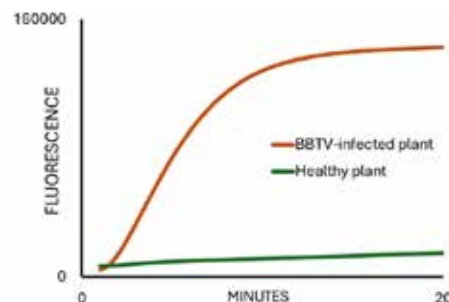
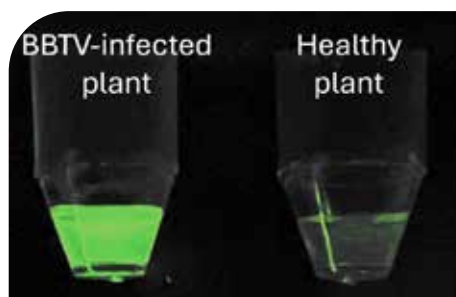
The new test under development uses an isothermal DNA amplification (RPA) to produce thousands of copies of viral DNA, followed by a CRISPR-Cas12a step that generates a fluorescence

signal, potentially offering enhanced sensitivity and specificity over commercially available RPA-based tests. Following sample preparation, this method can deliver results in under an hour. Prior to this visit, assay development was undertaken using synthetic BBTV DNA in a background of healthy plant extract, however validation on real-world infected material is essential.

Laboratory testing during Gus' visit was promising but highlighted that further optimisation is needed. When ready, the new test will be evaluated for sensitivity and cost-effectiveness against the current PCR-based test format, to provide the best possible support for clean planting material sourced through the QBAN scheme.



Banana scientists, surveillance officer and grower in front of BBTV-infected plants and holding a bunch from a BBTV-infected plant. L-R: A/Prof John Thomas (UQ), Ms Samantha Stringer (ABGC), Dr Gus McFarlane (NSW DPIRD), Mr Grant Thorogood (grower), Dr Kathy Crew (QLD DPI), Dr Xiaoyi (Eva) Wang (UQ), Dr Dawit Kidanemariam (UQ).



The new test being developed produces a green fluorescence signal from infected samples, which can be visually detected under UV-blue light (left) or measured with a fluorometer for increased sensitivity (right).

Hort Innovation **BANANA FUND**

This visit was supported by Hort Innovation projects BA21001 (UQ-led) and BA21003 (ABGC-led) as well as Australian Centre for Genomic Epidemiological Microbiology (AusGEM) through the project Bringing CRISPR to the field. Projects BA21001 and BA21003 have been funded by Hort Innovation, using the banana research and development levy and contributions from the Australian Government. Hort Innovation is the grower-owned, not-for-profit research and development corporation for Australian horticulture.

PANAMA DISEASE: WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Tony Pattison and Hazel Gaza- Department of Primary Industries, South Johnstone, Queensland

Banana farms face a persistent threat from Panama disease.

While the 'do nothing' approach may seem appropriate while the disease is contained to a few farms in Tully, it leaves your farm vulnerable, should the disease spread. Inaction paves the way for the disease to rapidly progress to an out-of-control crisis as we commonly see overseas. By understanding the Panama disease risks, outcomes and management opportunities, you can help safeguard your banana farm from following the pattern that occurs overseas.

Outcomes from Panama Disease

There are three outcomes for north Queensland banana growers caused by Panama disease:

- **disease incursion**, where the disease first appears on the farm. Early detection and rapid response are crucial to prevent further spread.
- **disease spread** occurs if the disease is not quickly contained, and the number of infected plants increases exponentially, often aided by environmental conditions and lapses in disease management.
- **loss of livelihood**, occurs in the most severe cases, as widespread crop losses force growers to exit banana production, often permanently.



A banana plant showing typical external leaf yellowing symptoms of Panama disease.

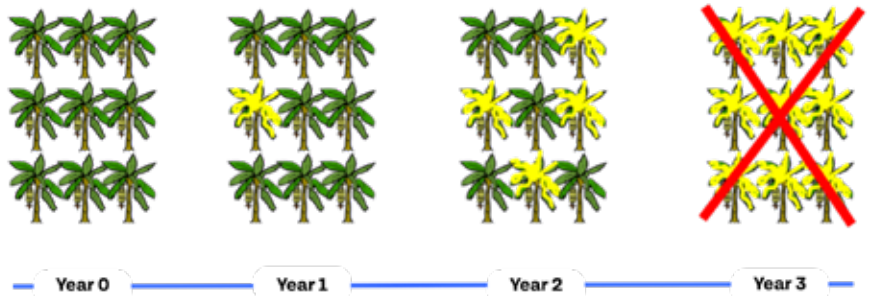


A 5-year-old banana plantation in Laos which has been devastated by Panama disease Tropical Race 4, as a result of the 'do-nothing' approach where prevention, protection, inoculum reduction and people management practices weren't implemented.

Types of Risks for Banana Farms

The risks posed by Panama disease can be broadly categorised into three types:

- **Inherent Risks:** These arise from persistent and unavoidable factors. Growing bananas means there is always an underlying risk of a Panama disease incursion. This risk is independent of farm management decisions and cannot be entirely eliminated.
- **Induced Risks:** These are the direct result of farm management decisions. Choices regarding soil management, planting material, equipment sharing, and even irrigation methods can inadvertently increase the likelihood of disease occurrence. Adopting a "do nothing" approach is one such decision that elevates the induced risks, especially when it means failing to implement proper prevention measures.
- **Avoided Risks:** Proactive measures, such as the use of clean planting material, effective on-farm biosecurity, and regular monitoring, all can minimise risks. Although these strategies require investment and effort, they are critical in preventing rapid disease progression.



Typical Panama disease timeline for an overseas banana farm, where the "do-nothing" approach was common.

Integrated Disease Management and Proactive Practices

Integrated disease management involves combining several strategies into a cohesive system. This approach uses good farm practices, such as vegetative ground covers, optimal soil nutrient management, and monitoring, to provide proactive crop protection. Importantly, it also means recognising that relying on others, such as your neighbours, is not an option. Each banana farm needs to act independently and proactively to reduce its own risk.

A Panama disease Integrated Risk Tool is currently being developed to help banana growers navigate through the risks caused by Panama disease and help determine where the best use of farm resources can be employed to have the greatest impact in disease prevention. By assessing farm practices, the risk tool brings together all of the

risk challenges faced by banana growers and highlights the likelihood of the different Panama disease outcomes, which ultimately can lead to loss of livelihood. By adopting a proactive stance, particularly though prevention, protection and people management, it is possible to safeguard banana crops and reduce the risks caused by Panama disease.



Four Disease Scenarios and Rapidly Changing Risks

Banana growers should be aware that the risk of Panama disease poses is not static, but can shift quickly through four distinct scenarios:

1. Scenario 1 – Disease absence:

Panama disease is not present on the farm or in the surrounding area. Although this may seem reassuring, it should also allow time to adopt strategies to maintain a disease-free status.

2. Scenario 2 – Increased threat:

Panama disease is present in the surrounding area but has not yet been found on the farm. Here, enhanced protection and heightened awareness are required to prevent an incursion.

3. Scenario 3 – Disease incursion:

Panama disease has been detected on the farm but is confined to a few plants. Immediate action, such as containment and inoculum reduction through destruction of infected plants, is necessary to slow the spread.

4. Scenario 4 – Widespread outbreak:

Panama disease is widespread on the farm, causing significant plant losses. At this stage, the risk of complete crop loss and, consequently, a loss of livelihood is high.

Table 1. Panama disease risk matrix combining the scenarios faced by the banana growers with increasing disease pressure with the likely outcomes.

Risk	Likely Fusarium wilt incursion	Likely crop loss caused by Fusarium wilt	Likely livelihood loss caused by Fusarium wilt
Scenario 1 No disease, no threat	Low	Low	Low
Scenario 2 No disease, high threat	High	Low	Low
Scenario 3 Recent disease incursion	High / certain	Medium	Low - medium
Scenario 4 Widespread disease	High / certain	High	Medium - high

Integrated disease management risk	Low	Medium	High	Comments:
Prevention				You have little in place to prevent Fusarium wilt
Protection				To further reduce risk, consider boosting soil biodiversity to slow disease progression.
Reduction				Consider how you will manage an incursion
Resistance				Considering changing to tissue culture
People				You are doing current best practice

An assessment of banana farm practices where Panama disease is in the region but not on the farm, viewed in different risk categories, prevention, protection, reduction of inoculum, resistance and people management, resulting in low medium and high risk outcomes with associated comments.

The progression through these scenarios can take as little as three years, based on overseas experiences. Proactive management decisions on your own farm are the only way to change the outcomes, to ensure you are not left vulnerable if Panama disease progresses around you.

Categories for Risk and Management

Effective management of Panama disease hinges on an integrated strategy that includes five ecological disease management principles:

- **Prevention:** Keeping the disease out through strict biosecurity measures and using disease-free planting materials.
- **Protection:** Refers to strategies and practices aimed at safeguarding banana plants from Panama disease through increasing beneficial soil organisms and creating a soil environment less favourable to Fusarium.
- **Reduction:** Decreasing the disease inoculum through early detection and eradication of infected plants.
- **Resistance:** Utilises banana cultivars that show either resistance to Panama disease.
- **People management:** Emphasises the willingness, motivation and commitment of banana growers and their staff to take proactive steps in preventing and managing plant diseases in their crops.

Table 2. Farm management practices that induce or avoid risks of Panama disease, linked to likely outcomes for banana farmers and categorised under different integrated ecological disease management principles

Outcome	Principle	Induced risk	Avoiding risk
Disease incursion	Prevention	Poor farm biosecurity	Good farm biosecurity
		Vegetative planting material	Tissue culture
		Sharing equipment	Own equipment
		Irrigation from river	Irrigation from bores or rainforest creeks
		Overland water flow from neighbours	Water diversion, buffers
	Protection	Banana borders	Vegetation borders
Disease spread	People	No staff training	Staff training
	Protection	Acid soil, low pH	Neutral soil pH
		Excessive nitrogen	Optimal nitrogen
		Bare soil	Vegetative ground cover
		Compacted soil	Organic amendment
		Low soil organic matter	Organic amendment
		Continuous banana	Crop rotation
	Reduction	Ignoring sick plants	Report sick plants
	People	Not aware of symptoms	Symptom familiarity
		Infected plants untreated	Destruction
Loss of livelihood	People	Isolation	Grower group

NEW NAME, RENEWED PURPOSE



The ABGC board has chosen to rename the Panama TR4 Control program to *ABGC Grower Support (Biosecurity)* for several important reasons, all aimed at strengthening our support for growers and protecting the industry as a whole.

Since the transition to an industry-led, government backed program, the ABGC has been very aware of the need to put growers front and centre of all activities related to management of this potentially devastating disease.

While it remains essential to share critical information about the disease, we recognise that the former program name had begun to create barriers to engagement for industry. More than that, it reflects where we are 10 years on from beginning this battle. By changing the name, we aim to foster a more open and cooperative environment, enabling us to move forward with greater unity.

The new name, ***ABGC Grower Support (Biosecurity)***, focuses on the positive, proactive, and empowering role the program plays. It highlights our commitment to providing growers with the tools and resources they need to face the challenges posed by Panama TR4 and other potential biosecurity risks. This rebranding shifts the focus from simply responding to a crisis to building resilience and working together for a stronger, more sustainable future for the industry.

Biosecurity is a shared responsibility, and the name change reflects our approach to making all growers feel supported and involved in the industry's protection strategy.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND SURVEILLANCE: UNDERSTANDING TR4 MONITORING ON BANANA FARMS

Glenn Johns, Communications and Engagement Officer

The Australian Banana Growers' Council's surveillance strategy is a proactive approach to monitoring and managing TR4 across commercial banana farms. It's designed not only to detect the disease but also to track its spread and ensure that growers have the tools they need to mitigate risks. This surveillance effort is structured under the broader TR4 Disease Management Plan, which aims to protect the entire banana industry.

The goal of the surveillance program is twofold: to provide early detection of the disease and to give growers confidence in the status of TR4's spread. Growers are understandably concerned about the disease, particularly as it has the potential to devastate crops, especially on farms that have weaker biosecurity practices. As such, the ABGC's surveillance efforts are integral to helping banana growers have confidence in its management.



The Role of Surveillance

Surveillance is a cornerstone of ABGC's approach to managing TR4. It is carried out by trained ABGC Surveillance Officers (SO's) who are authorised to identify symptoms of the disease in banana plants. Early detection is key to controlling the disease before it spreads to neighbouring farms or larger regions.

Surveillance is carried out in a familiar manner (as used in previous surveillance) by walking through banana farms and visually inspecting plants for signs of TR4.

Approximately 80% of a farm's plants are inspected, which helps ensure that any disease symptoms are detected early. If a banana farm is not fully developed, surveillance will focus on the perimeter of the farm, providing a comprehensive check for the disease.

Implementation

The key components of the ABGC surveillance strategy and sequence of prioritisation areas for surveillance are:

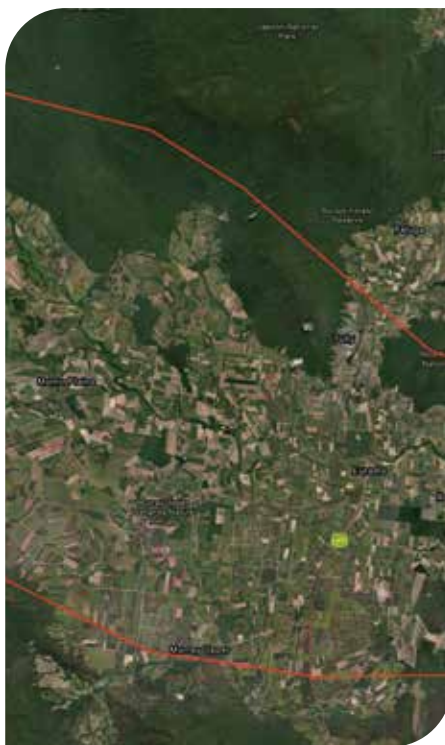
- i ABGC surveillance will commence with high-risk properties in the Tully and Innisfail areas, as identified by a buffer area of 38km radius from known infested properties.
- ii Other banana farms in the greater Innisfail area will receive surveillance following the completion of the initial priority area (38km buffer).
- iii Banana farms in the Tablelands, Mareeba and Lakeland and other remaining areas will be targeted after the greater Innisfail area.
- iv Re-commence surveillance in the Tully-Innisfail buffer area upon completion of the other areas if a new strategy is not yet in place
- v Infested properties will not be subject to surveillance by the ABGC. These growers are expected to undertake their own surveillance and must report suspect plants to BQ as a requirement of section 42 of the Act.
- vi An extra surveillance visit to banana properties impacted by a Tully River flood event will occur within the first 12 months, to commence at approximately 6-month intervals following their previous surveillance event.

This method of on-the-ground surveillance allows the ABGC to monitor large areas effectively, ensuring that potential outbreaks are identified and addressed before they can spread uncontrollably.

Buffer Zones and Risk Management

To prioritise surveillance efforts, buffer zones are established around known infested areas. These zones, typically extending about 38km from the site of infection, serve as protective areas to monitor the risk of TR4 spreading. Factors such as water flow, movement of machinery and human activity are considered in determining the extent of these zones.

The ABGC has developed this surveillance strategy based on scientific principles, using data from past outbreaks and modelling techniques to assess the risk of disease spread. This approach allows the team to focus resources where they are most needed, ensuring that surveillance efforts are both efficient and effective.



Sampling and Diagnostics

Banana plants that are flagged as showing external symptoms of TR4 will be further examined by ABGC SO's, in line with established standard operating procedures based on the approach used by BQ.

If internal examination reveals symptoms consistent with the disease, then a sample will be taken and sent to the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Plant Biosecurity Laboratory for diagnostic testing, in line with established protocols.

Molecular diagnostic tests and vegetative compatibility group testing are used as part of a suite of diagnostic testing to confirm the presence or absence of the disease.



The Future of Surveillance: A Risk-Based Approach

As part of ongoing improvements, the ABGC is moving towards a more refined, risk-based approach to surveillance. This will consider not only proximity to known infected areas but also factors like soil and water movement, the presence of disease vectors, and other environmental conditions that increase the likelihood of Panama TR4 spreading. The risk-based approach aims to focus surveillance on the most vulnerable properties, enhancing the efficiency and accuracy of disease detection.

The new strategy will use science-driven methods and risk-based sampling to predict potential disease hotspots. This approach is expected to make surveillance more targeted, minimizing the impact on farms that are less likely to be infected.

Surveillance for TR4 is essential for the long-term sustainability of the banana industry. Through early detection and systematic monitoring, the ABGC's strategy aims to protect both individual farms and the broader banana growing community. Surveillance will be conducted in the same manner that has been used previously, and draw on scientific methodologies, industry collaboration, and a focus on effective biosecurity practices.

Ultimately, the science behind surveillance is about creating a balance – helping to protect farmers' livelihoods while ensuring that the banana industry remains healthy and viable for future generations.

PROTECTING INDUSTRY

IN CONVERSATION WITH CHRIS, DUSTY AND KIO

In the heart of Far North Queensland, a group of dedicated professionals is working tirelessly to safeguard the banana industry, helping to protect its future and the livelihoods of those who depend on it. Glenn Johns, Communications and Engagement Officer, sat down with ABGC Grower Support (Biosecurity) Surveillance Officers Chris, Dusty and Kio to learn more about their passion for biosecurity.



Chris Collier

For Chris, the path to biosecurity was both a natural progression and a passion. "I spent seven years with Biosecurity Queensland, and during that time, I developed a real passion for this work," Chris shares. "When the opportunity arose to come back to the ABGC, I was more than willing to jump on board. My background in bananas is extensive - I started working with bananas when I was 14. Over the years, I've held various roles, from basic tasks like banana labouring to managing farms and running my own contracts. It's been a journey of learning and growth, and I'm excited to contribute to the industry in this way."

Chris is quick to highlight the thoroughness of his training. "The training has been incredibly comprehensive, both in theory and physical practice. It's provided me with all the skills I need to do my job effectively - from operating quad bikes and updating first aid certifications to understanding legislation, rules, and regulations. It's given me everything I need to ensure I'm delivering on the program's objectives."

"For me, it's about protecting the banana industry," Chris reflects. "I own property in the area, and I've built personal relationships with many of the farmers. But beyond that, it's about the bigger picture. Without bananas, our community wouldn't be what it is today. So, I'm more than happy to do my part to protect the industry, ensuring that it remains strong for years to come."



Dusty Croucher

Dusty has a unique background, having worked in the Biosecurity Queensland electric ant team in Cairns.

"I spent three months working with the surveillance field team up there," Dusty explains. "It's similar in many ways to what we're doing now with the banana industry."

The biosecurity measures, protocols are all comparable. The work I did with electric ants has definitely helped in understanding the biosecurity procedures that are so crucial in the banana industry."

Working with Biodiversity Australia, Dusty has planted an estimated 20,000 plants up and down the east coast.

"Surveillance is critical," Dusty affirms. "This area is home to a dense concentration of banana farms, and surveillance plays a key role in controlling TR4. While we can't eradicate it, it's essential to manage it effectively. The banana industry is vital not just for the local farmers but for the entire community."

"For me, it's about protecting the industry and keeping people employed in bananas," Dusty says.

"Even if that means helping farmers transition into other sectors like sugar cane, we want to keep the community alive and the workforce stable. The banana industry is more than just a job - it's a way of life for many people here."



Kio Hands

Kio, whose experience spans both conservation and the banana industry brings a wealth of experience to his surveillance role, having previously worked with conservation programs for the Capricorn Coast Council and spending several years in the weeds program with the DPI. "Much of the work I've done aligns with biosecurity protocols," Kio explains. "I've also worked extensively in the banana industry, so I'm very familiar with the challenges we face. My knowledge of bananas and biosecurity helps a lot, especially when it comes to managing diseases like TR4. Having already gone through similar processes in the weeds program, I understand the importance of preventing the spread of disease."

"Surveillance is absolutely essential," Kio emphasises. "The banana industry is the backbone of this region's economy. If we can keep Panama disease under control and learn more about its spread, we can help prevent it from affecting even more farms. This knowledge could also lead to the development of more resilient banana strains in the future."

"For me, it's about ensuring the longevity of the industry," Kio says. "Most banana farms are family-owned and have been passed down through generations. Surveillance helps keep these farms alive, allowing them to continue farming and supporting the community. It's all about ensuring intergenerational change - keeping the industry sustainable for the next generation of farmers."

DATA-DRIVEN INSIGHTS FROM BENCHMARKING

This update is an extract from a comprehensive report developed by Opttimo IQ, which can now be viewed via www.abgc.org.au or by scanning the QR code below.

The Opttimo IQ project represents the third benchmarking initiative for the Australian banana industry, following reports in 2011 and 2017.

This report analyses industry performance based on data collected from 2023 to 2024, incorporating historical comparisons adjusted for inflation to provide accurate trend analysis.

Additionally, some growers were able to provide data from 2021 and 2022 which has been incorporated into this report.

This report explores key industry trends shaping grower profitability and efficiency, focusing on production and turnover trends, cost and profitability dynamics, key cost drivers, and the impact of compliance on on-farm production and fruit rejection. Through this analysis, we highlight the factors influencing financial performance and operational challenges within the sector.

Please note, this report represents a limited sample group of production (approximately 1000 ha). More participants would improve the accuracy and precision of these insights. Growers who participate also gain an opportunity to evaluate their year-on-year business (YoY) performance, identify areas for improvement, and consider continuous enhancements for their operations. Time has been allocated within the project to work through the benchmarking results with participating growers individually.

Read the full report:



Opttimo IQ

Banana Benchmarking Project
Seasons 2023 and 2024 Report

Production and turnover trends

- Average banana production per hectare (kg/ha) in 2024 was 27,566 kg, showing a 5% decrease from 2023 and continuing a downward trend from 2021 and 2022.
- Turnover per hectare has improved by 4% in 2024, reaching \$68,858, despite lower production volumes.
- The data indicates that the most profitable growers were not always the highest producers in kg/ha, reinforcing that cost management, pricing strategies, and fruit rejection rates impact profitability more than yield alone.

Cost and profitability trends

- Costs per hectare have decreased by 10% in 2024, main contributing cost reductions are labour, packaging and fertilisers and chemicals.
- Gross Profit per hectare shows a substantial recovery, increasing from \$3,963 in 2023 to \$13,127 in 2024.

Key cost drivers

- Labour remains the single highest expense, accounting for 33% of total turnover in 2024, reducing from 37% in 2023.
- Off-site transport costs have increased by three cents/kg from 2023 to 2024, highlighting rising logistics expenses.
- Single-use packaging costs have remained stable at \$0.23/kg despite a slight production decline.
- Fertiliser and chemical expenses have decreased by 40% in 2024. In the fertiliser and chemical analysis, fertilisers contribute up to 55% of this category cost.
- Energy costs (fuel & electricity) increased by 3%.

Compliance and on-farm production fruit rejection

- Compliance costs are a growing burden, particularly for small-to-medium farms, consuming up to 2,000 hours per year, especially for a working couple each inputting 20 to 30 hours a week to compliance.
- Packhouse fruit rejection remains an issue and improving fruit management practices could increase overall production.
- The reduction of rejected fruit directly improves financial returns, with the most profitable growers focusing on minimizing waste.

Recommendations for growers

1. Focus on cost control - Manage labour, transport, packaging, fertilisers, and energy to drive profitability.
2. Monitor on-farm fruit rejection - Reducing waste increases overall production efficiency and revenue per hectare
3. Leverage benchmarking insights - Participating in Opttimo IQ provides data-backed insights to improve farm profitability.
4. Prepare for compliance challenges - Explore solutions to streamline compliance processes and reduce lost opportunity costs.

This 2024 Benchmarking Report provides important insights into industry performance, costs, and profitability trends, equipping growers with data-driven strategies for improving efficiency and financial outcomes. As industry dynamics continue to evolve, ongoing participation in benchmarking will be essential to track progress, identify opportunities for improvement, and ensure a resilient, profitable future for the Australian banana industry. Visit www.opttimoIQ.com.au to find out how you can get involved.

CONGRESS 2025

The countdown is well and truly on for the industry's own Banana Congress, an event that is focussed solely on inspiring, challenging and supporting Australia's commercial banana growers and partners across retail, supply and research.

The 2025 event will be held from 6-8 August at RACV Royal Pines Resort on the Gold Coast, which will become 'banana central' for the duration of the event. While you may not want to leave with so much available on site, the Gold Coast has plenty to offer for individuals, families and partners wanting to extend their stay for business or pleasure.

This year, the Congress team is again working to deliver a dynamic program that begins with the Scientific Symposium on Wednesday, followed by the plenary program on Thursday and Friday.

Among the keynote speakers is Professor Altus Viljoen, Stellenbosch University, who brings a global perspective to the Panama TR4 and varieties discussion.

World champion athlete, doctor, television personality and mum, Jana Pittman, will inspire and uplift audiences. Reptile expert Billy Collett will get you out of your comfort zone (we promise he'll keep the snakes on the stage!) John Moor will bring some practical advice to the succession planning story.

And of course, Landline legend Pip Courtney will keep the show rolling in her capacity as Congress MC.

These engaging speakers are just the tip of the iceberg. The Program Committee is currently firming up panels and speakers covering compliance, agtech, sustainability and workforce issues.

Of course, the social events you know and love will be back and better than ever. From the Banana Women's Luncheon to the Banana Ball, featuring new award categories, plus some new options for those who like to start the day moving!

More than anything, Congress offers you a chance to 'be in the room' where key conversations are happening. There is plenty of time for networking, exchanging ideas and catching up with people from across the country and the diverse banana industry.

Early bird prices are now available, and ABGC members can take advantage of even greater discounts!

Registration includes access to:

- All congress program sessions
- Poster displays
- Morning tea, lunch & afternoon tea
- Welcome Reception
- Tradeshow exhibition evening
- Banana Industry Ball and Awards of Honour

You can register for the Science Symposium separately, but those planning to attend Congress will receive a discount.

ABSTRACTS OPEN!

The banana science and research community are invited to be part of the 2025 Banana Scientific Symposium.

The Scientific Symposium will take place on Wednesday 6 August at RACV Royal Pines Resort on the Gold Coast, ahead of the Congress plenary program on Thursday and Friday.

The event will offer short, sharp presentations across a range of topics, including the latest in banana research, development and extension. After feedback and interest in the last event, there will also be more time for networking and more capacity.

Interested attendees are invited to submit a 150 word abstract. Your abstract should describe:

- the impact or objective of your specific research area for the banana industry
- how your research is achieving this

For more information, and to submit your abstract, please visit the Banana Congress website.

ABGC MEMBER DISCOUNTS!

ABGC Grower Members have access to significantly reduced registrations, with 2x \$500 tickets available to each membership. This is a saving of more than 50 per cent on standard registrations! The ABGC Board made the decision to subsidise Grower Member

registrations in order to make it more accessible for people to get involved. Congress offers unrivalled access to latest research, innovative ideas, banana businesses and – importantly – to fellow growers from across the country and around the world.

GIVE YOUR FEEDBACK

It is not too late to have your say! Though we are finalising panels and speakers now, if you want to share your thoughts or ideas, please feel free to get in touch with Communications Manager Amy Spear via amy@abgc.org.au.

WIN YOUR WAY TO CONGRESS

What's better than registering for Congress at a discounted Early Bird or Member rate?

NOT HAVING TO PAY AT ALL!

All growers who register prior to the early bird cut-off date will go into the draw to win back the full cost of their registration fee, a three-night stay at the RACV Royal Pines Resort Gold Coast, and \$500 towards travel expenses - an enticing package valued at up to \$2,170.



6-8 AUGUST 2025
RACV Royal Pines Resort, Gold Coast
bananacongress.org.au

Ready to be inspired?

The 2025 Australian Banana Industry Congress will feature a strong line-up of speakers including:



Pip Courtney (MC)



Billy Collett



John Moor



Jana Pittman



Altus Viljoen

Panels showcasing innovation and key industry issues to be announced soon. You don't want to miss this.

Congress Partners

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**Whatever your thing
Make your body sing**

cartology

FUELLING AUSTRALIA WITH NATURAL ENERGY: THE LATEST FROM AUSTRALIAN BANANAS MARKETING

Supplied by Hort Innovation

The Australian Bananas marketing campaign continues to deliver strong results, keeping bananas top of mind for consumers and ensuring sustained demand. Through strategic, high-impact activities, marketing investments are reinforcing bananas as the ultimate natural source of energy and helping to drive demand.

A fresh, high-energy campaign

Australian Bananas has dialled up the energy launching a vibrant and refreshed brand campaign across retail outdoor, online, and social media channels – turning supermarket aisles and digital feeds a whole lot yellower.

Bursting with energy and vitality, the new, bold creatives highlight the natural connection between bananas and physical energy. Visuals cleverly link bananas with a swimmer, footy player, and yoga enthusiast, positioning Australian Bananas as the ultimate fuel for an active lifestyle, reinforcing the iconic promise that “Whatever your thing” Australian Bananas are here to help you “*Make your body sing!*”

With its unmistakable yellow branding and dynamic imagery, since January, the campaign has been stopping shoppers mid-scroll, catching eyes in supermarket aisles, and ensuring Australian Bananas remain front of mind when consumers make their purchasing decisions.

Belinda Van Shaik, Head of Marketing, Hort Innovation, said:

“Australian Bananas are all about natural energy, making them the perfect fuel for any sport or active lifestyle. The refreshed brand platform brings that to life perfectly, with sports-focused visuals that are fun and energetic. The bold use of our iconic yellow ensures we’re front of mind and front of trolley for shoppers everywhere.”

Paul Swann, Chief Creative Tinker, Thinkerbell, said: *“We can all agree that bananas are yellow, curved, and bursting with energy. Inspired by these qualities, we created work that embraces vibrant yellow, showcases people in dynamic, curved postures, and captures the spirit of energetic movement.”*

Instore sampling success

With research indicating that 40 per cent of consumers shop without a recipe in mind, direct consumer engagement at the point of purchase—such as in-store sampling—remains one of the most effective ways to increase banana consumption by inspiring both impulse and repeat purchases.

Running from December 2024 through to November 2025 in four major bursts, the consumer sampling program is designed to drive sales and encourage shoppers, particularly light buyers, to purchase bananas more frequently.

Brand ambassadors have been stationed in fresh produce sections of 174 Coles and Woolworths stores across the nation, serving banana samples with Nutella and coconut yoghurt to demonstrate versatility and inspire consumers to consider and consume bananas more often.

Results so far have been positive, with over 21,500 samples distributed from December 2024 to February 2025 – an average of 124 per session. While sales conversion data for 2025 is still being finalised, December 2024 figures showed a strong conversion rate of 50% underscoring the effectiveness of direct interaction.

By creating memorable taste experiences, Australian Bananas is not only helping to drive demand, but also fostering long-lasting connections with consumers, keeping bananas top of mind as a go-to snack for Australian households.

Looking ahead: showcasing Australian Bananas at the 2025 Sydney Royal Easter Show

Australian Bananas are set to take centre stage at the Sydney Royal Easter Show in April, securing a prime position within the Woolworths Fresh Food Dome. With more than 900,000 attendees expected over 12 days, this is a major opportunity to educate and engage consumers while showcasing the industry’s commitment to quality and freshness.

Key highlights include:

- A farm to plate video demonstrating how Australian Bananas are grown, educating consumers in an engaging way.
- Sampling – banana smoothies and fresh banana pieces will be offered to passersby to showcase the delicious taste and versatility of Australian Bananas.
- The introduction of Anna Banana, a fun new animated character designed to engage children and families.
- A chance for consumers to meet a real-life banana grower, hear their stories, and connect with the industry first-hand.

With these initiatives, Australian Bananas continues to elevate its presence, ensuring bananas remain a household staple for years to come.



WEEKLY PURCHASES PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH



Andrew Burns is the banana industry's Supply Chain Engagement manager, working with the Australian Banana Growers' Council and funded by Hort Innovation.

90 – 60 – 30

You might remember I've previously reported these three numbers.

As a reminder, they're to do with our household penetration. That is, how many households around the nation purchase bananas and the opportunity for us to increase those numbers. So, what do they represent?

90

closely represents our household penetration results over a 12 month period. That number highlights that 9 out of 10 households purchased a banana over the last 12 months. This is a healthy number that highlights the favorite fruit status.

60

represents our monthly household penetration results, and highlights that 6 out of 10 households purchase bananas during a month.

30

represents the number of households that purchase bananas on a weekly basis. This number is our opportunity! The question is, how can we lift this figure that shows only 3 out of 10 households are purchasing bananas weekly?

The opportunity gap is large, with 7 out of 10 customers not purchasing bananas and therefore available to convert. The challenge is how we approach this to help convert non buyers to buyers. What actions can we take?

From a true marketing perspective (and as per the marketing update on previous pages), we have taken the following approach.

Winning with retailers and shoppers by hosting retail events to drive consumer purchases, as well as in-store merchandise and staff education for an improved banana shopping experience.

These targeted events are being delivered via differing formats and will continue for the remainder of this year consisting of:

- a) A 12-month sampling campaign across the nation within Coles and Woolworths and a selection of large shopping centres around the country
- b) Exposure to over 900,000 people with a presence at the 2025 Sydney Royal Easter Show

The aim was to gauge any incremental improvements (dollars and kilograms) that could result from the placement of a mid to long term secondary display, endeavoring to capture convenience shoppers and/or light buyers, customers not necessarily shopping the produce department and those not specifically looking for bananas.

After the 12-week project, the results overall were excellent with incremental gains of around 20% in kilograms sold compared to the prior year. This result confirmed that by having bananas available in a secondary location, stores can drive base line sales by capturing additional banana buyers.

The results of our program are being shared, as we continue to work with our retail partners to trial this approach. Both Woolworths and Coles tested the approach via placing an additional banana display separate to the main location at the front of store nationally during this year's back-to-school timing.



We are aware that results achieved were positive, however ideally a test without price being involved would better show the true outcomes. Further updates on this activity and other exciting growth activities will be presented in upcoming magazines.



FEAST OF THE SENSES

30 MARCH, 2025

The Feast of the Senses is North Queensland's premier tropical food experience and the Cassowary Coast's major festival centred around Innisfail. The festival showcases the region's impressive variety of produce including, of course, beautiful bananas. A shout out to all those who helped ensure the Cassowary Coast BGA stand was a hit and to Australian Bananas for their sponsorship.



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