

November 2008

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NSW Minister for Primary Industries Sydney Basin Horticulture Tour

The NSW Farmers' Association hosted the NSW Minister for Primary Industries, the Hon. Ian Macdonald, on a tour of the horticultural industry in the Sydney Basin on Monday 17 November 2008. The tour was attended by Peter Darley, Horticulture Committee Chairman, Members of the Horticulture Committee and about 40 Members. The tour commenced at Richmond, where the Young Farmer of the Year, Tally Matthews provided the Minister Macdonald with a guided tour of the Richmond Vegetable Demonstration. During this part of the tour the Minister announced a grant of \$20,000 to the Vegetable Demonstration Farm to continue its research into horticultural best practices and the performance of new vegetable varieties in the Sydney Basin.

As part of the tour an industry lunch was held at Coachella Restaurant, Windsor and it showcased some Association members' local produce prepared by local chef, Allan McCartney, including cold meats from Bringelly Bacon & Small Goods, mushrooms from Elf Mushrooms, and Broken Bay Oysters. At the conclusion of lunch, the Minister was presented with the findings of a recent Horticulture Australia Ltd study tour of agribusiness parks in the Netherlands and Belgium as there is potential to implement these models within the Central Coast plateau. The Minister then visited Elf Farm Supplies at Mulgrave, Australia's only indoor mushroom substrate producing facility. The tour concluded with a trip to Elf Mushrooms, Vineyard, the largest mushroom producing facility in NSW as well as a visit to White Prince, the mushroom packaging, marketing, and distribution facility.



Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3

Photo1: Minister Macdonald, Mathew Fensom - General Manager White Prince Mushrooms and David Tolson - Elf Mushrooms.

Photo 2: L to R. David Tolson - Elf Mushrooms, Minister Macdonald, Chef Allan McCartney and Rob Tolson - Elf Farm Supplies.

Photo 3: Minister Macdonald and Tally Matthews.

Hail Storm – North Coast and Central Coast

Following recent severe hail storms on the North Coast the Association held discussions with the NSW Department of Primary Industries as well as with the Office of the Minister for Primary Industries regarding the need for an Agriculture Natural Disaster Declaration for the area. The NSW Minister for Primary Industries,

Hon Ian Macdonald announced Natural Disaster Relief assistance would be available to farmers affected by the hail storms. Under the announcement primary producers in the Mid North Coast, Northern Rivers and the Tenterfield and Kyogle regions can apply for loans of up to \$130,000, at 2.85 per cent interest per annum with a two-year interest free and repayment free period. Further information is available from www.raa.nsw.gov.au or by phoning 1800 678 593. The Association has also written to Minister Macdonald in order to thank him for the timely response for the declaration and the Association has also requested that due to the significant loss of production and the damage to infrastructure which was caused by the storms, the NSW Government should investigate the provision of further assistance mechanisms to help primary producers and particularly horticulturists recover from the hail storm.

Following recent adverse weather in the central region the Association is working closely with NSW DPI to determine the level of damage incurred. Once the damage is known the Association will be seeking that appropriate Government assistance is provided.

NSW Department of Primary Industries Research Stations

The NSW Government has announced that the Department of Primary Industries ('DPI') Research Stations at Alstonville - Centre for Tropical Horticulture, Berry, Condobolin, Glen Innes, Gosford - Centre of Excellence for Market Access and Greenhouse Horticulture, Griffith - Centre for Irrigated Agriculture, Temora, and Jindabyne Hatchery will be closed over the next 3 years. In total three of these stations are heavily involved in Horticulture industry research. Details on the announcement are yet to be received by the Association, particularly how DPI intends to deliver vital research services which are currently provided at the Research Stations as well as plans for the research projects which are currently being undertaken at these Stations.

Management of Flying Foxes

The Association has responded to concerns by Members following the announcement that the Queensland Government will no longer permit the killing of flying foxes from 1 September 2008 for crop protection because shooting has been determined an 'inhumane' practice by the Queensland Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. The Association understands that the NSW Minister for Environment and Climate Change has asked the Department of Environment and Climate Change to establish a review of the current licensing arrangements, as a result of the Queensland Government decision and research being undertaken in NSW. The report of the review is due prior to the commencement of the 2009/10 fruit growing season. The Association has written to the Minister for Primary Industries and the Minister for Environment and Climate Change seeking a meeting to discuss the concerns of Members. The Association recognises licenced culling to be the most cost effective way of managing flying foxes and if this practice is to cease in NSW, exclusion netting appears to be the only other suitable management option. However, exclusion netting is highly costly and it requires a large upfront cost to growers (based on conservative figures, the average orchardist would need to outlay \$225,000 to cover this new cost). To make such a significant cost affordable, the Association is seeking significant financial assistance in order to meet the costs of establishing exclusion netting.

Royal Botanic Garden Relocation of Grey Headed Flying Foxes

The Association has responded to concerns by Members following the application by the Botanic Gardens Trust to relocate the Grey Headed Flying Fox camps from the Royal Botanic Garden (RBG), Sydney. The population is estimated to be 5000 – 20000 bats based on last year's approximations and under the proposal the flying foxes would be relocated to 4 proposed alternative sites being Ku-ring-gai Flying-fox Reserve (13km north-nor-west of the RBG); Woolooware Bay (20km south); Mangrove Island (20km south-west); and Still Creek (24km south-west). The Association recognises that damage is occurring to trees within the RBG due to the roosting of the flying-foxes and therefore does not wish to see the loss of important trees from this heritage site. However the Association expressed its concerned that the relocation of the RBG Flying Fox camps to outer Sydney will further impact upon stonefruit and horticultural producers in the Sydney Basin. The Association has therefore requested the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change take into consideration the impacts the relocation of flying fox camps closer to fruit growing areas will have on

horticultural production in the Sydney Basin and the need for financial support for growers who incur production losses due to flying foxes as well as grants to erect exclusion netting.

Workforce from Abroad Labour Scheme

The Federal Government has announced a three year seasonal worker scheme for the horticulture industry. The Association has provided National Farmers Federation and Horticulture Australia Council with information regarding potential pilot areas within NSW. The regions selected for the Pilot Scheme are the Swan Hill – Robinvale region in Victoria and the Griffith region in NSW. The Pilot Scheme will also examine the benefits to the Australian economy and to employers within the horticulture industry who can demonstrate that they cannot source local labour. Visas will be available for Pacific Seasonal workers from Kiribati, Tonga, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea to work in Australia under the Pilot Scheme which will run for three years. Horticulture growers operating in the two regions will need to apply to their local advisory body for access to Pacific Seasonal workers and the growers will need to advise the advisory body of the estimated number of Pacific Seasonal workers that they require, the duration that these workers will be required, and the specific skills and abilities required by these workers. Further information is available from on the Pilot Scheme is available from: <http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Individual/Migrant/Informationforgrowers.htm>

Horticulture Annual General Meeting

The Horticulture Committee held their Annual General Meeting and Conference on Monday 28 July 2008 (Delegates took the opportunity to discuss the various facets of the industry with guest speakers including NSW Minister for Primary Industries Hon Ian Macdonald, Michael Batycki - Woolworths, Mark Blue - Chep Crates, Robert Belcher - Sustainable Agricultural Communities Australia and Michael Cashen -Tocal. Guest speakers provided information on a number issues including managed investment schemes, the new Chep/Woolworths crate and the Woolworths Quality Assurance program.



2008/09 Horticulture Committee Members: John Robson, Chris Nelson, Peter Darley, Jeff McSpedden, John Cade, Geoff Moar and Fred Haskins.

Horticulture Code of Conduct

The Association has welcomed the recommendations from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission ('ACCC') Inquiry into Grocery Prices regarding the Horticulture Code of the Conduct. The ACCC report recommends that retailers, exporters and processors should be included in the Horticulture Code of Conduct, on the spot fines for breaches of the Code should be introduced and a price should be determined before delivery as this would be a major step towards solving the problem of traders switching from acting as a hybrid merchant/agent within a single transaction. The Association has concerns about the length (24 hours) of the grace period for the rejection of produce on quality grounds and the Association is also looking at the implications of the recommendation to exempt D Shed in the Sydney Markets from the Code. The Association is currently preparing some comments which will be provided to the Horticulture Code Committee for their consideration. Horticulturalists are being encouraged to protect themselves against opportunistic merchants,

with the ACCC's horticulture code protecting growers. The ACCC says that they can only protect growers with a formal written contract. Agreements covered by the code must specify important conditions such as when growers are to be paid and when produce can be rejected – all of which provide growers with greater protection. The code is currently under review but the ACCC will continue to enforce the current code and take action where blatant breaches occur. For further details visit www.accc.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/849462

2008 Apple Promotion

As part of the Apple and Pear Australia ('APAL') promotional funding, the Association provided apples to the Narani Child Care Centre, Kogarah on Thursday 21 August 2008. The Chairman of the Horticulture Committee, Peter Darley and apple grower donated boxes of apples for the children's families to buy, with all proceeds being donated to the children's ward at St George Hospital. Approximately 5000 apples will be donated to the 2008 Annual Sydney Special Children's Christmas Party on Wednesday 10 December.



Peter Darley, Chairman Horticulture Committee, provides apples to the Narani Child Centre.

AUSVEG Annual General Meeting

AUSVEG the peak national vegetable and potato grower body held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) on Monday 24th November. The new Board was appointed and will comprise of seven state-representative directors, one from each state and the Northern Territory, and up to two skills-based directors. The state representatives have been appointed as follows: John Brent, Queensland (interim Chairman); Geoff Moar, New South Wales; Romeo Giangregorio, South Australia; John Said, Victoria; Jim Trandos, Western Australia. Representatives from Tasmania and the Northern Territory will be determined shortly.

New Horticulture Policy Officer

Jason Cappello has recently joined the Association as the Horticulture Policy Officer. Jason completed a Bachelor of Applied Science in Viticulture at Charles Sturt University Wagga in 2005 and he grew up on his family's vineyard property in the Riverina at Griffith. Jason has worked in the wine industry including Miranda Wines which is now part of the McGuigan Simeon and Wine Grapes Marketing Board in Griffith. In his role with the Association Jason will be responsible for undertaking research and for providing policy advice to the Horticulture Committee whilst also working on behalf of the Association's Horticulture Members.

Reports on Recent Association Horticulture Meetings Horticulture Committee Meeting

The Association's Horticulture Committee held a meeting in Sydney on Monday 27 October 2008. Guest speakers included representatives from the NSW Department of Primary Industries, Syngenta and the NSW Chamber of Fruit and Vegetables. The speakers addressed a range of issues including Biosecurity, flying foxes, the Horticulture Code of Conduct and chemicals.

Ground Truthing of Vegetables

Representatives from the Horticulture Committee attended a meeting at the University of Western Sydney, Richmond on Tuesday 19 August 2008 to discuss initial results, progress to date and future directions of the HAL funded Vegetable Ground Truthing Project. The funding for the project was secured by the Association to gain a greater understanding of the vegetable industry within the Sydney Basin. It is thought that this study can be used as a template for other vegetable regions.

Apple and Pear Australia Annual General Meeting and Members Forum

The Chairman of the Horticulture Committee, Peter Darley attended the Apple and Pear Australia Limited ('APAL') Annual General and Members forum which was held in Hahndorf, South Australia. Key issues discussed included low interest loans for hail netting, apple imports from New Zealand and the case currently at the World Trade Organisation. Horticulture Australia Limited provided delegates a summary of apples and pear marketing and an overview on the campaigns which were run throughout the year.

Richmond Horticulture Meeting

The Chairman of the Horticulture Committee, Peter Darley attended a meeting on Monday 20 October 2008 at Richmond. There were a number of guest speakers at the meeting who provided Members with updates on the vegetable groundtruthing project in the Sydney Basin, Minor Use Permits, Varroa mite and drumMUSTER.

AUSVEG Constitution Teleconference

AUSVEG held a Special General Meeting on Friday 24 October 2008 in order to consider the adoption of the new constitution and the amendments which were proposed by the Association. The amendments were passed which will see that under the new constitution, all national vegetable and potato levy-payers will have the opportunity to become members of AUSVEG and therefore vote to elect the AUSVEG Board of Directors.

Chemical Compliance in the Sydney Basin

The Association recently held a meeting with Department of Environment and Climate Change ('DECC') in order to discuss issues of non-compliance relating to chemicals in the Sydney Basin. The main issues of non-compliance identified were record keeping and chemical storage. Other issues identified included the role of chemical re-sellers and some misleading advice they give growers and the chemical accreditation expiry. The Association will work closely with DECC in order to address and overcome these issues.

Motions Passed - 2008 Horticulture Annual General Meeting

H2008/03

"That the Association speak to Banking Australia regarding special conservation loan for hail netting structure, to explain the necessity to allow covenant to go over the first mortgage in this situation, which would benefit the banks"

H2008/04

"That the Association lobby the NSW Minister for Agriculture to allow owners and that lease orchards to obtain the special conservation loan for hail netting in own right with suitable security"

H2008/05

"That the Association lobby state and federal Government to fund work with NSW DPI to identify ways to manage European Wasps"

H2008/06

"All farmers, farm contactors and their employees should be exempt from the costs for the new five-year renewal of forklift and front-end loader licenses"

H2008/07

"Immediate action should be taken by the Federal Government to stop the increasing number of horticultural products entering Australia"

H2008/09

“That the Horticulture industries support the bee industry in their fight to keep varroa mite from entering this country”

H2008/11

“That the Association reaffirm its position of maintaining culling of Grey Headed Flying Fox under commercial license in commercial Orchards”

H2008/12

“That the NSW Farmers’ Association lobby the NSW Government to retain the positions of plant Bacteriologist and Bacterial Diagnosticians positions at the Department of Primary Industries”.

H2008/13

“That the NSW Farmers Assoc. lobby both state and Federal bureaucrats and if necessary, politicians to change the current rules concerning backpackers extending their work/travel visa by working on regional farms. As the rules currently stand, the postcode of the farm determines whether work on the farm in question can qualify a backpacker for the 3 months required”

H2008/14

“That the Association oppose the implementation of calculated volumetric allocations on surface water dams in the Sydney Basin”

H2008/01

“That the Association takes urgent measures to require the ACCC to be more effective in its enforcement of the Horticulture Code of Conduct”

Passed for discussion with the committee

H2008/02

“That the Association write to the Organic Federation of Australian to seek the details of the HACCP procedure used by its growers to ensure that the produce they sell is safe for Human consumptions.

Motion should be withdrawn until September. At the discretion of the committee

H2008/08

“The Federal Government should rectify the mistakes made concerning the ‘Mandatory Code of Conduct’. Supermarkets, their agents and exporters should be included in the code of conduct to make it fair for everyone and to utilize the code properly”

Left on the table for discussion with the committee

H2008/10

“That the NSW Farmers Association’s Horticulture Committee strongly oppose CSIRO plans to close the Merbein Horticulture research laboratory”

Leave on the table and progress to Executive Council