

# SOUTH AUSTRALIAN

## HORTICULTURE INDUSTRY BLUEPRINT 2021

*Supporting Growth  
in Horticulture*



# HORTICULTURE COALITION OF SA

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The organisations which make up the Horticulture Coalition of SA in 2021 are:

- Almond Board of Australia Ltd
- Apple and Pear Growers Association of SA Inc
- AUSVEG SA
- Citrus SA
- Nursery and Garden Industry of SA Inc
- Olives SA Inc
- Onions Australia
- Pistachio Growers' Association Inc
- South Australian Chamber of Fruit and Vegetable Industries
- SA Produce Market Ltd
- Summerfruit SA
- Women in Horticulture

June 2021

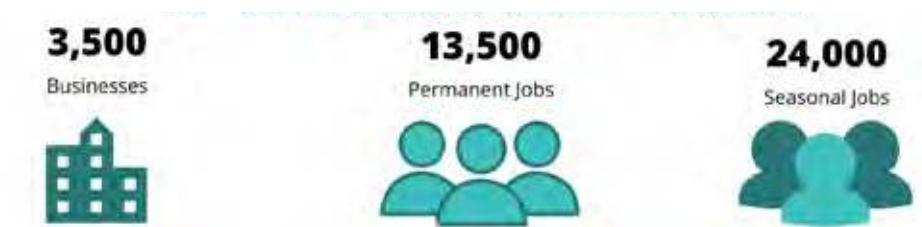
Every effort was made during compilation of this document to gain input and feedback from the member organisations of the Horticulture Coalition of SA. Recommendations have been compiled through early 2021 and are based on market conditions, policy and legislation at that time. They are intended as broad guidelines to drive the over-arching interests of horticulture in South Australia, where common themes have been identified. The policies of individual member groups may vary in detail or due to changing circumstances over time.

# HORTICULTURE IN SA

Horticulture is an important growth industry in South Australia, contributing significantly to the local economy and regional employment, and as the supplier of fresh, local fruit, vegetables and nuts is also integral to many other sectors including health, tourism and education.



Data from PIRSA Scorecard 2019/20



Horticulture production and exports continue to experience strong growth, with value of exports rising from \$203 million in 2014 to \$374 million in 2020.

This blueprint highlights areas of opportunity for government to support industry achieve its growth target.



**Growth target \$5 billion in Gross Revenue by 2030.**



# KEY PRIORITY AREAS

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Continued growth of the South Australian Horticulture Industry is only possible through the following policy support and focus areas.

Commitment is sought for:

## Biosecurity

- Eradication of fruit fly outbreaks from South Australia and strengthening of fruit fly control systems to preserve South Australia's fruit fly free status.
- Support for development of end-point treatment facilities for alternative pathways to domestic and export markets.
- Consultation and collaboration with industry on plant biosecurity.
- Addressing risks of derelict orchards in the new Plant Biosecurity Act.
- Continued support for honey bee biosecurity and compliance officers.



# Water Security

- Critical water needs for maintaining permanent plantings and the production of food in South Australia are considered alongside critical human water needs and water for the environment.
- Make the cost of water under the Northern Adelaide Irrigation Scheme economical for growers.
- Preserve irrigator's water licence rights at 100% of entitlement.
- Protection of the state's water sharing agreement for the Murray Darling Basin and improvements to water management within the Basin system.
- Implementation of additional flood mitigation strategies to protect the Northern Adelaide Plains from future flood events.



**Water availability,  
security &  
affordability are  
critical for  
horticultural  
production.**



# Workforce Development

- Continued investment in programs such as the South Australian Government's \$5 million labour workforce program which will facilitate places and quarantine for international workers under the Seasonal Worker Program and development of a travel bubble with the Pacific Islands.
- Progression of the Commonwealth Government's initiative to source primary industry labour from a network of Asian countries based on demand areas of industry in South Australia.
- Funding support for an industry managed workforce planning and development role.
- Improved engagement of the secondary education sector through the development of horticulture (or food production) pathways.
- Ensure priority occupations in the horticulture industry such as Production Horticulturalist and Skilled Horticultural Worker are on the South Australian State Nomination List.
- Support for a Certificate based Traineeship program for Production Horticulture to provide a pathway for the development of a skilled workforce.





# Business Sustainability

- Investment support for on-farm efficiencies and innovation, including the adoption of AgTech, through mechanisms such as grants and low interest loans.
- Trade and export support through provision of market intelligence, support for new market development and market diversification and for export freight coordination support.
- Review of land tax and stamp duty exemptions to ensure that they are available to all businesses that grow, process and market horticulture produce.
- Advocate for a federal parliamentary enquiry into insurance costs, particularly regarding associated fire risk with EPS coolroom panels.
- Minimise regulatory fees and charges, particularly those relating to trade, including export and audit fees, and ensure timely processing of government services and decision making.



# POLICY DETAILS

This section outlines the Horticulture Coalition of SA's priority policy positions to support growth in horticulture in more detail.

## Biosecurity

Having strong biosecurity systems is critically important in protecting our plant production systems from pest and diseases that are exotic to South Australia. It is also critically important to trade of fresh produce. Biosecurity breaches jeopardise not only our capacity to grow horticultural crops in a safe and sustainable manner, but also our ability to sell our produce to interstate and international markets.

### FRUIT FLY

- Work closely with the horticulture industry to eradicate any fruit fly outbreaks from South Australia to maintain South Australia's fruit fly free status, with a risk-based approach to prioritisation of areas of focus.
- Further strengthen fruit fly control systems to ensure South Australia's fruit fly free status and the Riverland Pest Free Area are preserved.
- Advocate strongly for a new high standard quarantine (checking) station to be built at Ceduna, similar to that at Yamba.
- Advocate for advancements to the National Fruit Fly Protocols to allow for the use of modern and innovative measures to maintain area freedoms, including:
  - The proactive use of Sterile Insect Technology within Pest Free Areas
  - Updated baiting and trapping methods, technology and chemistry
- Advocate for national domestic trade arrangements that are risk and evidence based and achieve strong domestic trade without jeopardising international trade protocols.
- Advocate for national cost-sharing arrangements for the management of Fruit Fly that underpins East-West recognition, including the eradication of Mediterranean Fruit Fly from South Australia in the short-term, and from Australia in the longer term.
- Support the development of a biosecurity precinct at the SA Produce Markets to allow for domestic end-point treatment options required for some export markets and to provide alternative pathways to markets during fruit fly outbreaks.
- Support for implementation of the National Fruit Fly Strategy.
- Continued support for SITplus.





# Biosecurity

## **PLANT HEALTH**

- To be recognised as a leader in plant biosecurity in Australia.
- Retain and enhance the skills and capability of Biosecurity SA within PIRSA, ensuring highly skilled technical personnel, resources and knowledge are in place that can respond effectively to threats and incursions.
- Ensure adequate succession planning is in place for biosecurity staff and knowledge.
- Consult regularly with industry on plant biosecurity to allow for collaboration and two-way flow of information through a mechanism such as an industry consultative committee and continue to build on a government/industry partnership approach to plant biosecurity.
- Increase the capacity within South Australia in areas of plant biosecurity surveillance and diagnostics.
- Work with industry on the regulation of, and compliance activities, for all roadside markets including pop-up markets to reduce biosecurity and food safety risks.
- Ensure that the new Plant Health Act provides adequate provisions to regulate the biosecurity risks posed by derelict and unmanaged orchards, including defining a shared responsibility to managing biosecurity.

## **POLLINATION SERVICES / BEE BIOSECURITY**

- Continued support for maintaining honey bee biosecurity and compliance officer positions to ensure high health and disease-free hives are brought to South Australian farms. Many horticultural crops are heavily dependent on pollination and the services provided by managed hives.



# Water

Water availability, security and affordability are all critical for horticultural production.

## **BROAD WATER POLICY**

- Ensure that critical water needs for maintaining permanent plantings and the production of food in South Australia are considered alongside critical human water needs and water for the environment in any Water Allocation Plan and annual allocations.
- Irrigation allocations should not be cut unless water restrictions are also put in place for urban and other water users.
- Ensure that there is no further erosion of water licence holder's water rights.
- Ensure that new water schemes such as the Northern Adelaide Irrigation Scheme are managed in a way where they deliver water at an economical cost for growers.

## **MURRAY DARLING BASIN**

- Protection of the State's water sharing agreement to ensure that South Australia's share of 1850 GL is protected.
- Urge the South Australian Government to return South Australia's allocation for consumptive irrigation on the River Murray back up to 100% of the total amount of irrigator's entitlements (currently at ~90%).
- Amend the Private Carry Over policy for River Murray water to ensure that irrigators do not lose any of their carry over water entitlement, irrespective of the level of the April opening allocation announcement.
- Place a moratorium on new developments seeking to take water from the River Murray, pending proper consideration of sufficient water deliverability and strategic planning of new plantings to ensure new development does not undermine and devalue historic investment.
- Develop an engineering solution to Barmah choke which is reducing flows.
- Support the ACCC's recommendations on water markets of a centralised database and single source of water market information within the Murray Darling Basin.
- Advocate for the NSW government to oppose moves to legitimise flood plan harvesting so as to allow the Darling River system to contribute to the delivery of South Australia's water requirements during peak of season. Delivery flows from the Murray River storages will only partially meet requirements of irrigators.



# Water

## **NORTHERN ADELAIDE PLAINS**

- A clear intervention is needed in the Northern Adelaide Irrigation Scheme to make the cost of water economical for growers so that the 22 GL of water resources can be put to use in providing 6,000 jobs for the region. Current high costs (three times existing water prices in the Northern Adelaide Plains region with significant up-front costs) have prevented use and uptake of this resource for 4 years and currently there is very low uptake.
- Implementation of flood mitigation strategies to protect the Northern Adelaide Plains from future flood events which build on the initial \$9 million already provided, but consider further spends in cleaning the river and lifting the Bruce-Eastik dam.
- Manage Northern Adelaide Plains groundwater levels and associated groundwater allocations to avoid detrimental impacts.

## **ADELAIDE HILLS**

- Address Adelaide and Mt Lofty Water Ranges water allocation issues, including conjunctive water use, licence conditions, trade ability of water rights and “new use” – with the aim of a “fit for purpose” management system.
- Develop more efficient mechanisms for submitting water meter readings.





# Workforce

Horticulture provides a high level of permanent and seasonal employment across regional South Australia. Much of the work in horticulture is highly labour intensive with labour a significant component of input costs. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the heavy reliance of the industry on migrant workers both for permanent and casual/seasonal positions. The current industry position is one of crisis where many enterprises are reducing production due to an almost total lack of labour, both skilled and seasonal.

## ONGOING ISSUES

- Ongoing and serious shortages of permanent labour at all skill levels covering managerial, technical, scientific, machine operation, cold store operation, logistics, irrigation etc.
- Serious shortages of casual and harvest labour including semi-skilled operatives.
- Existing mechanisms for sourcing international workers inoperative, other than limited Pacific Labour seasonal workers.
- Poorly developed school based pathways into the industry.
- Virtually no pre-employment programs to assist sourcing of domestic labour market applicants.
- Very limited formal course offerings in Production Horticulture, Protected Cropping, Irrigation, Cold Chain Management and Ag Science both at a VET and Higher Education level.
- Haphazard upskilling arrangements often based on availability rather than skill.
- Extremely limited occupational recognition with a large number of occupations not listed on ANZSCO.
- Options for meeting labour and skill requirements are now very limited due to longer term impacts of the pandemic and increasing ageing of the workforce.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continued investment in programs such as the South Australian Government's \$5 million labour workforce program which will facilitate places and quarantine for international workers under the Seasonal Worker Program and development of a travel bubble with the Pacific Islands.
- Progression of the Commonwealth Government's initiative to source Primary Industry labour from a network of Asian countries based on demand areas of the industry in South Australia.
- Improved engagement of the secondary education sector through the development of Horticulture (or Food Production) Pathways. Investigate the establishment of regional school based Horticulture Centres which can service a number of High Schools and provide practical industry experiences for students.



# Workforce

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide support for a horticulture industry workforce planning and development coordination role that focuses on:
  - Identifying workforce needs across all horticultural industry sectors and regions and working with Peak Industry bodies, harvest labour services, job placement agencies, RDA's and other government agencies to facilitate coordination of services to best meet industry's needs.
  - Better strategies to attract and retain skilled workers to match labour supply and demand.
  - Identifying training and skills needs and working with government and RTOs to ensure flexible, accessible training is provided to meet the needs.
- Ensure priority occupations in the horticulture industry such as Production Horticulturalist and Skilled Horticultural Worker are on the South Australian State Nomination List to attract larger numbers of international students to relocate to South Australia and study and work in horticulture.
- Establish training programs that maximise on-site/on-farm training opportunities and minimise associated costs to this form of training.
- Establish government subsidised cadetships or graduate programs to increase skilled workers on-farms, with a particular focus on adoption of technology and innovation.



# Business Sustainability

Support for sustainable profitability of horticultural businesses is an overarching priority for horticulture in South Australia. This can be achieved through maximising opportunities to improve grower returns and identifying opportunities to reduce costs.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Fast track investment in on-farm efficiencies, including the adoption of AgTech, for improved productivity and growth through mechanisms such as grants and low interest loans.
- Provide market intelligence to inform industry export focus areas.
- Continue to facilitate and coordinate opportunities and shared knowledge for consolidated and efficient international freight mechanisms beyond the life of the International Freight Assistance Mechanism.
- Support the development and diversification of new markets and capacity of businesses to tap into trade related activities both virtually and in-market when international travel recommences.
- Advocate for market access priorities with the Federal Government that align with South Australia's horticultural market access priorities.
- Review land tax and stamp duty exemptions to ensure that they are available to all business that grow, process and market horticulture produce – including packing facilities, nursery structures and wholesale markets – and any transactions related to horticultural production, processing and marketing, particularly in situations where transactions are within family businesses.
- Ensure access to South Australian public lands for managed hives of European Honey Bees to support the pollination services provided to pollination dependent industries.
- Advocate for a federal parliamentary enquiry into insurance costs, particularly regarding associated fire risk with EPS cool room panels. Many horticultural businesses are facing very large increases in insurance premiums and in some instances unable to secure insurance.
- Minimise regulatory fees and charges, particularly those relating to trade, including export and audit fees.
- Ensure timely processing of government services and critical decision making that impacts on industry.





# Supporting Policies

Along with the key priorities identified above to fast-track growth, the following policy areas also provide opportunities to underpin the horticulture industry into the future.

## **PLANNING REGULATIONS & POLICY**

- Work with industry to refine elements of the new Planning and Design Code to better suit the requirements of a modern and progressive horticulture industry.
- Develop appropriate regulation and compliance activities for all roadside markets, including pop-up markets.

## **AGRITOURISM & VALUE ADDING**

- Implement a program to support horticultural enterprises to diversify into agri-tourism and value-adding activities, including:
  - Capacity building of tourism, customer service, marketing and promotional skills
  - Business planning for successful agri-tourism and value-adding
  - Continued provision of the Tourism Industry Development Fund
- Agritourism is an emerging and high opportunity market for horticulture, which is predominantly located in close proximity to larger population centres and premium tourism destinations. However, it is also in its infancy and requires support to nurture growth.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

- Provide much better reward for set-aside areas on private property to cover management costs such as weed and pest control and fence maintenance as well as opportunity costs.
- Keep NRM levies to a minimum for primary producers and ensure that there is adequate investment in soil and land management, animal and plant control, innovation and technology and on-farm capital investments for NRM outcomes.

## **HEALTH BENEFITS OF FRESH PRODUCE**

- Provide resourcing towards an industry/SA Health partnership to deliver on the Eat Well Be Active Strategy (and subsequent policy and/or strategy) and the supply and promotion of fresh, local produce and healthy eating through supporting existing industry-led campaigns.
- Work with industry to promote healthy eating with SA grown fruit, vegetables and nuts in schools.
- Provide mechanisms to support procurement of SA grown fresh produce into government agencies, educational and aged care sites, workplaces, sporting and cultural facilities, correctional facilities and Aboriginal communities.



# Supporting Policies

## **NATURAL DISASTER AND CRISIS RESPONSE, RECOVERY & RESILIENCE**

- Work with the horticulture industry to review lessons learnt from events of recent years, including hailstorms, floods, food tampering, COVID-19 and bushfires to ensure that industry-specific needs are built into future response and recovery frameworks.
- Develop a preparedness and resilience program that:
  - ensures horticulture industry groups are sufficiently resourced and have the appropriate skills and capacity to support disaster response and recovery activities.
  - supports industry groups to work with grower communities to build disaster preparedness and resilience.

## **RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT & EXTENSION**

- Reverse the current trend of reduction in resources – people, funds and facilities – that is reducing the R,D & E capacity and service to horticulture in SA, and hence its capacity to innovate and support sustained growth.
- Review any future amendments to the National R,D&E framework for Horticulture in partnership with the horticulture industry prior to any sign-off by government.
- Horticulture research activities to focus holistically on industry needs and priorities to help support long-term cycles, and not just focus on current growth trends.

*Early and genuine engagement between government and industry on policy and business matters will allow us to develop and maintain real and sustainable partnerships that support the growth of horticulture in South Australia.*

*The Horticulture Coalition of SA is committed to work with the government of the day to achieve the full potential of the South Australian horticultural sector.*











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