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N&G NEWS

Nursery & Garden Industry NSW & ACT

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2022 Events

CALENDAR



February

Thursday 3 | Board Meeting
Tuesday 8 | Dubbo Trade Day
Wednesday 16 | Sydney Trade Day

March

Monday 7 | Board Meeting at Northern Rivers
Tuesday 8 | Northern Rivers Trade Day
Tuesday 8 | Dubbo Trade Day
Wednesday 16 | Sydney Trade Day

April

Tuesday 12 | Dubbo Trade Day
Wednesday 20 | Sydney Trade Day

May

Tuesday 10 | Dubbo Trade Day
Wednesday 18 | Sydney Trade Day
Thursday 26 | Board Meeting
Thursday 26 | Pioneers' Lunch

June

Tuesday 14 | Dubbo Trade Day
Wednesday 15 | Sydney Trade Day

July

Tuesday 12 | Dubbo Trade Day
Wednesday 20 | Sydney Trade Day

August

Tuesday 9 | Dubbo Trade Day
Wednesday 17 | Sydney Trade Day
Monday 29 | Board Meeting at Port Macquarie
Tuesday 30 | Port Macquarie Trade Day

September

Tuesday 13 | Northern Rivers Trade Day
Tuesday 13 | Dubbo Trade Day
Wednesday 21 | Sydney Trade Day

October

Tuesday 11 | Dubbo Trade Day
Wednesday 12 | Board Meeting
Wednesday 19 | Sydney Trade Day

November

Tuesday 8 | Dubbo Trade Day
Wednesday 16 | Sydney Trade Day

December

Friday 2 | Industry Awards & Gala Dinner
Wednesday 7 | Dubbo Trade Day
Thursday 8 | Board Meeting
Wednesday 14 | Sydney Trade Day

2022 Training

CALENDAR



February

Thursday 10 | Provide First Aid | Kenthurst

Thursday 24 | ChemcertAQF111 | Kenthurst

March

Tuesday 22 | ChemcertAQF111 | Kenthurst

Thursday 24 | Employment Fundamentals
| Kenthurst

Thursday 31 | Employment Fundamentals
Webinar

April

Wednesday 6 | ChemcertAQF111 | Alstonville

Thursday 7 | Provide First Aid | Central Coast

May

Thursday 12 | ChemcertAQF111 | Kenthurst

June

Thursday 9 | ChemcertAQF111 | Central Coast

Thursday 23 | Provide First Aid | Kenthurst

August

Wednesday 10 | ChemcertAQF111 | Kenthurst

September

Thursday 23 | Provide First Aid | Kenthurst

November

Thursday 10 | Provide First Aid | Kenthurst

Tuesday 24 | Provide First Aid | Alstonville

Thursday 24 | ChemcertAQF111 | Kenthurst





President's Report

by Malcolm Calder, President, NGINA

I am so proud of the Associations' accomplishments last year amid some formidable challenges. I know the heart that we have for you, our members, and for our industry and this is what we carry into 2022. I have coined this year as the 'Year of Opportunity'. All things considered, this year will be strong for us as we continue to grow and sell. The opportunities we have this year are numerous and include refining business operations, finding new customers, adjusting to the new normal in our current COVID environment, increasing the visibility of our businesses, capitalising on the increased public support and awareness of our industry and more.

Some of the challenges we faced last year are following us into 2022. No doubt the supply chain issues are still there. From a supplier point of view, we see machine production times improving but freight and delivery times still extended. Planning and project management expertise has become vitally important. 2022 will be a year of growth but also working wisdom, as we implement ways to streamline our B2B processes. The opportunity we have as a supplier is to become a stronger 'solution-offering and delivering' member of the horticultural family here in Australia.

Through my many conversations with key industry stakeholders nationally, the common view is that Q1, will be approached with relative caution and the approach to Q2, will be determined by the isolation rules and economic indicators at that time. There is also optimism and determination to build businesses this year. Labour, water, weather and raw material supply, are high on the list of concerns. Price increases in raw materials and internal/external freight etc will need to be passed down and this will involve many, sometimes difficult conversations with customers.

Talking with JB Were, who manage and advise on our member's fund portfolio, the general direction of the economy this year is strong, notwithstanding upward pressure on interest rates (possibly later in the year) and, given a possible ordinary global fiscal result, Australia remains strong. All this reflects an opportunity to build our industry at a steady pace this year. NGINA has the mandate to support you and work with you providing a growing range of member benefits

which include events, trade day, support, advice, passion and commitment. The Board has met and confirmed key KPI's and outcomes within the Strategic Plan for 2022 and you will see these goals achieved progressively throughout the year.

We also see opportunities in the emerging global trends in greenlife propagation and growing methods. An example is the continued expansion of protected cropping cultivation with the goal to deliver mature product to market 'without' field growing. Climate event trends are driving this and we will see more innovation in this area this year. With this, is a need to utilise water flow more efficiently through vertical farming etc. We are in a very interesting time of change in this area. This in turn will increase productivity and consistency of plantlife into the marketplace.

In this first N&G News for the year, I have intended to encourage you in three areas. The NGINA has strength in its delivery of services to you, the economic climate is set for a steadily successful year and, there are opportunities for each business to explore, research and implement.

We are perfectly positioned to launch into 2022. We have a wonderful team at NGINA and a terrific board. At the final Board meeting of the year, I was re-elected as President (at the completion of my two year term). I am incredibly honoured to be able to continue to serve our members. At that meeting the Board also appointed Robert Love for a one year term taking our Board to a total of 8 Directors. Robert, who has previously served as the NGINA Treasurer accepted the appointment to assist NGINA to fulfill our Strategic Plan objectives. As a qualified accountant Robert will continue to sit on our investment committee and audit and risk committee and to act as Treasurer. Newly elected directors Mike Mehigan and John Walsh have taken the portfolio responsibilities of membership services (trade day) and training/professional development respectively.

I look forward to working with our Board to achieve an even more successful industry association in 2022.

Thanks to you, our valued Members for your support and input to us and for going on this journey with us in 2022.



CEO's Report

by Anita Campbell, CEO, NGINA

The end of last year was meant to herald the arrival of our "hot vaxxed summer". Despite concerns over a slow start, vaccination rates were high, marathon lockdowns had ended, and international border closures had finally started to lift.

However, after years of mostly keeping the virus under control, by the start of the second week of January, Australia had surpassed 100,000 new cases a day. People were queuing for hours at testing stations questioning how badly they really wanted to go to QLD for holidays and RAT tests replaced toilet paper as the hottest commodity to get your hands on.

Today, as we slide into Autumn we are well out of holiday mode and back into the swing of day-to-day life. As case numbers come down, hopefully we will see a gradual progression of fewer workplace shortages, more people able to leave their homes because they're not isolating and more people trusting going out to restaurants.

It's certainly full steam ahead for everyone at NGINA. We sent out our membership renewals at the end of last year and I'm pleased to report that retention is just about 100%. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to you for your continued membership. Without your loyalty and support, we would not be able to continuously provide our members with valuable benefits and actively develop our industry. Put simply, you make what we do possible.

I would like to confirm that Ozbreed have returned as one of our Diamond Partners. NGINA has developed a very comprehensive partnership package with tangible benefits for our partners. Sponsorship is not just about increasing revenue, but must be consistent with our mission and vision, while adding value to association membership. I am proud that we have such strong alliances with so many industry leaders. In return we make sure that we provide them with opportunities to improve awareness and visibility and to network with potential and existing clients.

I would like to thank all our Partners for their ongoing support:

Diamond Partners; Garden City Plastics and Ozbreed

Gold Partner; Oasis Horticulture

Silver Partners; C-Mac, Powerplants, Transplant Systems and Tytags and

Bronze Partners; Octopus Consulting Group, Sidekicker and Vegepod

At NGINA headquarters we will be working hard to implement the NGINA Strategic Plan 2020 – 2023, which sets out a very ambitious plan to facilitate our members' success in growing their businesses in a profitable, efficient,

NGINA Partners

Thank you to NGINA partners for their continued support.

Diamond		Gold	Silver	Bronze	
					
					
					

responsible and environmentally safe manner through 4 main pillars: **Membership Services; Professional Development; Advocacy; and Association Sustainability.**

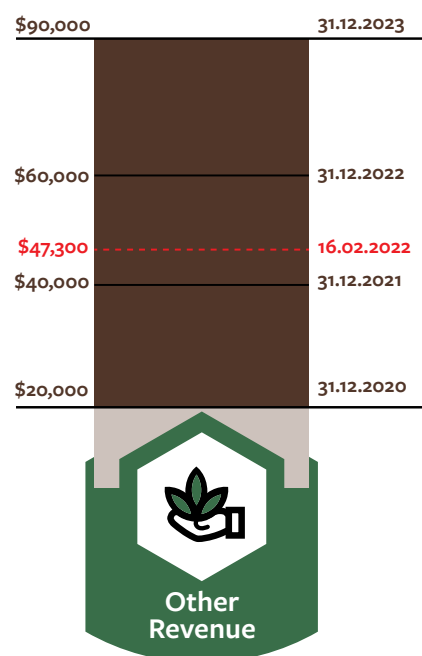
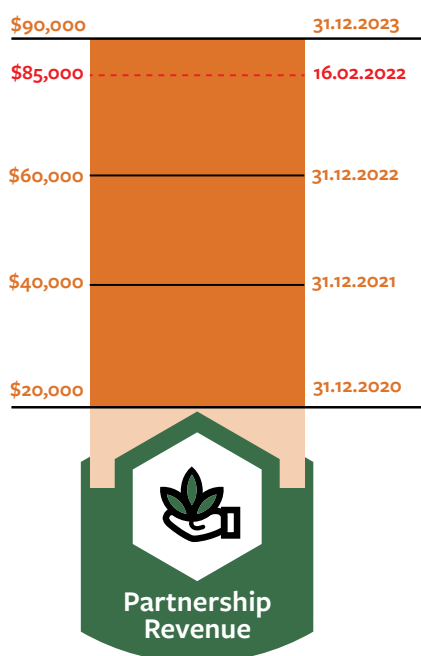
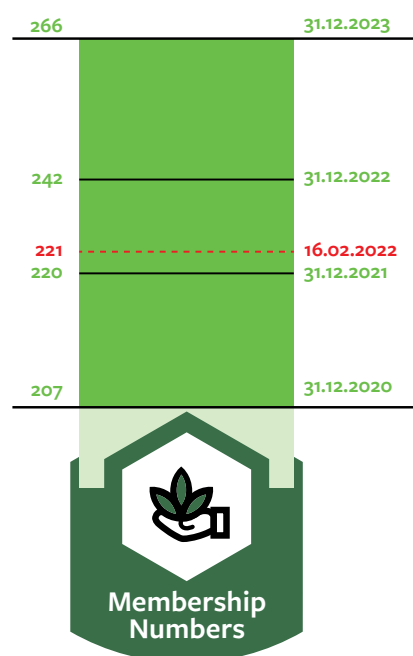
We have been busy planning some great activities for the first part of this year. We have a terrific event planned at The Botanical Gardens at Mount Annan, some excellent training courses on biosecurity, waterworks, HR fundamentals and of course first aid and ChemCert.

Our 'On-Line Member Forums' resumed in February. Held on the fourth Wednesday of each month the on-line member forum is an invaluable way to connect with all our members on a regular basis. The forum provides an industry update, association information, as well as a guest speaker presenting on a different hot topic each month. Please let me know if you have a burning issue you would like us to cover.

We will look to move our Trade Day into a new building at the Hawkesbury Showground and most excitingly will celebrate 50 years of Trade Day in August. The planning for a fabulous birthday party is already underway!

Following the hugely successful NextGen event at Bonnyrigg Garden Centre in February, our NextGen Committee will start planning our next event, we have a Trade Day in the Northern Rivers coming up in March and we urge everyone to start thinking about nominating for the Industry Awards which will be presented at the end of the year.

I am expecting another huge year for NGINA and look forward to catching up with you all at one of our many events this year.



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BTSM's Report

Creating a Risk Register, Industry Policy and Meeting with Members

by Chris O'Connor, Business & Technical Support Manager, NGINA

As I write this report, COVID 19 remains with us. The influx of new cases surging across NSW and ACT continues to present ongoing challenges to our industry and community. Suffice to say that this recent surge has curtailed some of my initial travel plans to meet with members, but we persevere, adapt, and overcome.

TRADE DAYS

Over the past period I have had opportunity to attend the NGINA Trade Days and I encourage those of you who do



NGINA Trade Day

not attend to participate where you can. The ability for the industry to regularly meet, network, facilitate trade and to gain insights from your colleagues, customers, and mates is so invaluable, and ensures that we do not become isolated with our own businesses.

If I haven't yet had the opportunity to meet you, and you are at Trade Day, please introduce yourself as I'd be keen to learn more about your business and better understand how I can assist you.

RISK REGISTER

As part of my role, I am in the process of developing an industry risk register. The risk register will serve as a tool to record the risks which industry perceives, prioritise the importance of those risks, and the possible actions we can take to mitigate the impacts of those risks. Identifying and recording our risks is vital as it allows us to monitor what is happening with the risk, such as the likelihood or potential impact of the risk increasing or decreasing, and act accordingly. Risk also takes place within a dynamic ever-changing environment, and a risk register prompts us to monitor and review risks as they evolve, consider new risks as they develop, and to be proactive about managing and responding to these risks.

“ Identifying and recording risk is vital as it allows us to monitor what is happening ... and act accordingly. ”

The process of assessing the industry risks also assists in prioritizing risk. For NGINA this is important as we can rank, and respond appropriately to the risks, making best use of the finite resources of NGINA and the industry broadly.

We can also use this process to identify risks which overlap with government, other industries, and the community, to collaborate and seek collective solutions beneficial to all.

Given the focus on risk, we have included a feature article in this edition of N&G News on Risk Management.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Leading on from risk is another area which I am assisting with, namely the development of industry policy.

“For NGINA, Policy is an invaluable tool which aids us in distilling multiple views on an issue into a considered, unified, and defensible position, which articulates why a particular issue is important to us ... [then] advocate to affect positive change.”

The issues addressed through industry policy are complex in nature, and generally affect a broad cross section of our industry, as well as the interactions we have with government,

the community, and the environment more broadly. Often these issues present a degree of risk to the industry, hence the need for ongoing review of industry risk.

Some key policy areas which I will be reviewing for the industry will likely include key topics across water, biosecurity, climate change, sustainability, education, and training.

PLANT SURE

Continuing with the theme of risk, I have recently met with Aimee Freimanis who is leading the Plant Sure project along with Hillary Cherry from the NSW Department of Planning Industry & Environment. Invasive plants represent an area of ongoing risk for the industry and present a social license issue which certainly needs our attention.

The weed risk assessment tool developed by Macquarie University under the auspices of this project will certainly add to our own capability of assessing the invasive weed risk potential of planting material produced by our industry, and assist producers, specifiers, and customers in developing informed plant selections.

Contact Chris O'Connor on **0481 172 217**
or email chris.oconnor@ngina.com.au.



Invasive Cassia weed

Judging Awards is Challenging, but Rewarding

by Karen Smith, Editor, Hort Journal Australia



Small and compact, everything in its place with a great range

Running a business comes with a variety of challenges as many of us know. Having worked in a retail garden centre myself I know it is particularly demanding work. When I was asked to judge the retail garden centre awards for NGINA recently I thought to myself, oh that will be nice I haven't been in lockdown like everyone else and who doesn't love going to garden centres? I had judged them in the past and it was an enjoyable experience. With my checklist in hand off I went on my journey to see what is going down in the retail sector!

The criteria for judging are broad and detailed. Obviously, some businesses are located on fantastic sites that has room for parking, level, and set amongst a beautiful backdrop of trees and can take in the borrowed view of neighbouring properties. This sets the scene for the perfect street appeal. However, many are not so fortunate and have to work with what they have and let me say they do a fabulous job.

SO WHAT DO WE LOOK FOR WHEN WE ARE JUDGING? Here is a bit of a snapshot.

Does the centre have street appeal? Is there parking facilities and access for wheelchairs and prams? Is the centre well landscaped and in a good state of repair? Are the pathways clean and well drained? Are public amenities available and are they clean? Is there seating available? If there is a café, does it compliment the style of the centre and is the centre inviting, clean and easy to move through?

Then we look at **staff and customer service** – one of the criteria was name badges, not every centre had these. One centre that did had their names embroidered on the shirts as they said badges can be a nuisance, they fall off or catch on things. I like the embroidered name tag as I tend to forget people's names easily and like to refer to people by name, this makes it easy and everyone feels comfortable. We look at how staff interact with customers and assess their level of knowledge. Don't forget mystery shoppers also contribute to



A great range of plants supplemented with a range of cement pots and ornaments made by Greenbourn

the judging and they are pretty fierce in this area, especially when it comes to acknowledgement on arrival at the nursery. The difference between being the judge and the mystery shopper is that the centre staff don't know who the mystery shopper is and at times their experience is quite different.

Signage, pricing and labelling. We all know it is annoying if you pick an item up and there is no price on it. Most centres were all over this as well as some centres have a chart that demonstrates the costs on pot size etc with items such as punnets. Some nurseries have exceptional signage and I urge those that don't to make that a focus. Having sections clearly signposted is great but having signage that has relevant information about the plants is invaluable, especially in your busy times. As you would be aware many people ask the same questions about plants so it makes sense to have that information visible. It saves you time and the customers' as well. The last thing you want is a customer walking away empty handed because your staff are too busy to answer their queries. I know that in the busy times you barely get time to use the bathroom or have a bite to eat, this is one small way of taking the pressure off everyone. One nursery had images of their trees when they are in flower and showing how big they will be at maturity and how to plant them. This is gold!

Merchandising is another area that can build solid sales. If merchandising is not a skillset that you or any of your staff have perhaps think about getting some training in this area. Customers will often impulse buy when stock is well displayed and partnered with other items, not everyone can visualise or think outside the square so demonstrating how this can be achieved is helpful.

Product range, not all nurseries stock the same things but having the basics such as seeds and seedlings is essential. It's often the customer that pops into the centre to buy a couple of punnets or a few packets of seeds that ends up walking past a well merchandised display and will buy the plant, the pot, the potting mix and the fertiliser because they have just the spot at home for it.

Indoor plants having been high on the list of many consumers and were well represented. In fact one centre's indoor area equalled that of their outdoor area and also included non-perishable items and homewares to cross merchandise. Range and plant health is also a criteria. Having pots, bagged products and garden decor in easily accessible places, clear priced, clean and tidy makes good marketing sense.

“ How do you compare a business that offers opportunities to people with disabilities to a business that build their entire business on repurposed material or has the best merchandising on the planet, the best signage or truly rare plants? ”

Not everyone has the space or capacity to supply bulk **soils and media**, however teaming up with a supplier to assist your customers is a good strategic alliance for you and the supplier.

Safety is another criterion. Trip hazards such as hoses laying around and warning signage that indicates trip hazards,



Welby Garden Centre has a great connection with their community and a pop-up café



Exceptional signage at Heritage Nursery

chemical use, uneven surfaces, steps and holes is essential.

Finally, we look at their **point of difference**, what makes them unique, what systems do they use and how do they fit into their community and know their customers. This is the area that really had me scratching my head and had me thinking really hard about the businesses that I visited because everyone had their own point of difference. From a judge's perspective it can be like comparing apples with oranges, both delicious but different in their uniqueness.

Every business ticked the boxes and their unique qualities

were all exceptional and all felt truly enthusiastic and committed to that uniqueness. It's normal for businesses to evolve over time and continue to build. I knew judging wasn't going to be an easy job, even though I had done this in the past. But how do you compare a business that offers opportunities to people with disabilities to a business that build their entire business on repurposed material or has the best merchandising on the planet, the best signage or truly rare plants? Comparisons become quite difficult and all you can do is celebrate their differences and hope that they continue to do what they are doing and continually evolve.



Walk through the indoor potted area to the café at Burbank

How a Small Country Nursery Won a Big Award

The Story of "Burnetts on Barney"

by Elizabeth Burnett owner, "Burnetts on Barney"

(2021 NGINA Retail Nursery of the Year Winner, trading category)

In a small, family owned and operated plant nursery there are so many decisions made every day, some planned and considered, others on the hop. Some are inconsequential in their outcome, some momentous. Making the decision to enter our Kiama Garden Centre, Burnetts On Barney, in something so potentially intimidating and revealing as the 2021 NGINA Retail Nursery of the Year awards for NSW and ACT took some consideration, great courage and just a little bit of jumping off the cliff.

How could a small regional garden centre on the NSW south coast possibly compete with the big guns from Sydney or Canberra? What did we have that might distinguish us in a good way from other amazing nurseries? Hell, I'm not even a horticulturist so I wasn't even confident I was fit to lead our team into such a competitive pit. In the end we decided to enter simply for the learning opportunity, to open ourselves up to a series of judges' eyes so that we could learn from their experience, benefit from any constructive advice they might offer and also to challenge ourselves to lift a little, tidy up a bit for a deadline. Making the submission was itself an opportunity to reflect on the journey we were on, the small milestones we had made and the plans we had for the future. It was a chance to tell a little of our story which to-date had been kept pretty much to our locals.

“ How could a small regional garden centre on the NSW south coast possibly compete with the big guns from Sydney or Canberra? ”

It was a compliment to our team that we even felt we had come far enough to test ourselves. Burnetts had only been an NGINA member for a short while and therefore had benefited from just the one visit from our NGINA rep, few suppliers came this way to see where their stock ended up and most of our industry support had come from the Independent Garden Centres Association. In the end, life and the busyness of a plant nursery operating during a Covid spring got in the way of any extras we might have thought about doing to polish up prior to the visit of either a mystery shopper or the judge. We didn't find out the mystery shopper had been until they'd gone and Karen Smith

arrived three hours early, after only a few days' notice, in the midst of a 100mm rain day. We were soaked, the nursery was flooded, grey and miserable. It wasn't looking like being our finest hour. In fact it was three hours and our judge Karen, the very esteemed editor of Hort Journal Australia with an armful-long industry background who had been all over NSW and had come fresh from the ACT judging some of the best benchmark nurseries, seemed to overlook our bedraggled state and happily trudged into every damp corner and took time to understand our philosophy and goals as much as judging our drowned physical presence. It was so wet that there wasn't a customer in sight yet she seemed able to interpret for herself the experience our team have been trying to create for visitors and she was captivated by our commitment to quirky sustainability in our layout and buildings. She loved our free-ranging chooks, our demonstration worm farm and bee hives, our passion for community events and support of initiatives like Crop and Swap. She took an interest in our team and liked our cake. More importantly, she offered positive feedback, suggestions, ideas and pointers for areas we could develop. Some were no-brainer things we already had in mind but just hadn't got around to, simple obvious things like nametags for all staff, better signage that helps 'entertain' customers when staff are serving others. Some were good ideas we hadn't yet been able to budget for. Some were industry insight gems that will change our buying habits and business direction infinitely. She was encouraging and insightful, personable and far from intimidating. Her job may have been to determine a winner but her objective was clearly to lift individuals and businesses within the nursery industry and to help them fly higher, with or without a winner's gong. Even if we never saw her again, nor attended the any awards night, we considered the whole experience an absolute win at that point.

However, after the judging was over and the winners announced we received an truly extensive report on our performance, our marks and comments on criteria judged by both the mystery shopper and non-mystery shopper. That document alone was worth gold. It offered our team an independent review of our business and service delivery. It's funny how much street cred your team will give an outsider's views and how much better they hear their messages. We have used that document as our manifesto for 2022.



A moment of surprise & elation shared between Elizabeth and Susan



The team at Burnetts including feathered friend



A moment in the spotlight



Winners - "2021 Retail Nursery of the Year" (trading category)

And winning the Retail Nursery of the Year in the trade category for the whole of NSW and ACT? Well, that was a mind-blowing, unforgettable moment, a genuinely unexpected surprise that felt like winning best pet at the school show in kindergarten. One of those rare rushes of joy that a weary adult small business owner rarely receives. A photographer certainly captured the moment when Susan Finn, who started the nursery with me eight years ago, and I heard the announcement. They're perhaps not the most flattering of photos but they certainly show the raw emotion, surprise, elation and even disbelief on our faces. If ever there was a winner not expecting to win that was us. We'd thought winning the Illawarra Business Award for Sustainable Excellence in 2020 was a buzz but this gong was in a whole other world of excellence. Of course, an event as prestigious as the NGINA annual awards is a big deal in itself, a vast room full of suppliers, wholesalers, industry stalwarts and retailers both big and small. For finalists and winners alike, the night is an opportunity to network and share the journey with so many, a chance to perhaps put a name to a face in a room where others have known each other for seemingly generations. Certainly it was a celebration. Afterwards there were chocolates from customers, flowers from suppliers, champagne from supporters. We haven't yet come off the

high of that night and only now that the new year is settling are we starting to see how this accolade will be harnessed by our team. Such recognition gives staff pride, a sense of achievement, a reinforcement that their efforts have been acknowledged. It's a great motivator for individuals as much as the business. We've enjoyed some favourable local media coverage and there's more to come, all of which will help grow our profile and introduce new customers who may grow to become loyal clients. While shy of blowing our own trumpet we recognise this is a rare moment to allow an independent award to shine a light on our business and that we must not miss this moment. We must proudly display the winner's logo for the year that it is ours. Of course, our appetite is whet now and we are spurred on to improve, to fix those bits that cost us marks, to do more of what our customers and the judges applauded, to measure ourselves against others doing great things in the industry, to find inspiration in visits to other nurseries and to share with them our space if they choose to visit us. We're looking forward to seeing them competing alongside us next year, perhaps as finalists, perhaps winners. We feel like we're now part of something bigger than just our little garden oasis and that this is just the start of our next leg in the journey to become the best we possibly can as an NGINA retail nursery.

Economic Outlook Update

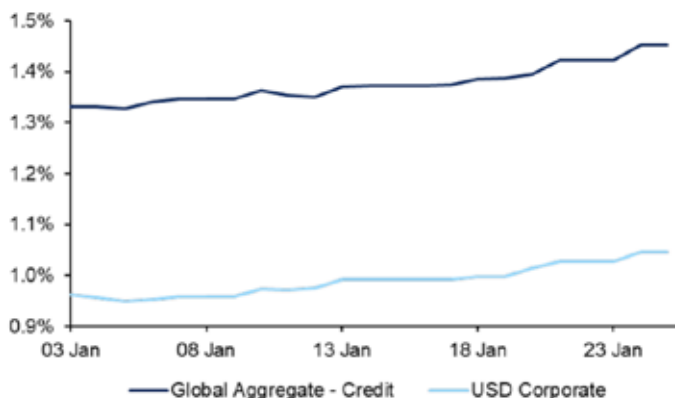
The market update and economic outlook below has been provided by our investment advisors at JBWere, Fiona Archer and Michael Miller. It is an extract from January 25 written by JBWere's Chief Investment Officer Sally Auld, with additional data and forecasts from the NAB Economics Team. JBWere is 100% owned by NAB.

A lot has happened in equity markets so far this year.

However, it is not all bad news, in our view. There are a number of reasons that suggest equity markets should start to find some support.

- **First**, US equity markets have had a decent sell-off, and bearish sentiment has intensified. This should give some confidence that better price action is not far away.
- **Second**, despite minor US GDP growth downgrades for 1Q22 (Omicron related), the 2022 calendar year consensus forecast for US GDP growth has not changed. This should give investors some confidence that the earnings outlook can remain supportive for stocks.
- **Third**, we don't believe that long end yields are on the cusp of a material sell-off. Thus the "damage" from a repricing of long end yields on longer duration stocks is likely largely complete for now.
- **Finally**, it is also interesting to see how credit indices have performed of late; for the Global Credit and US Corporate bond indices, spreads (to sovereign bonds) have only widened by a small amount (see Chart 3). This should give investors some confidence that recent price action in US equities has not been driven by a rethink of economic fundamentals.

Chart 3: Credit spreads haven't moved very far this year, suggesting that credit markets are not pricing in a deterioration of economic fundamentals; spread to treasury bond yield



Source: Bloomberg, JBWere. Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance.

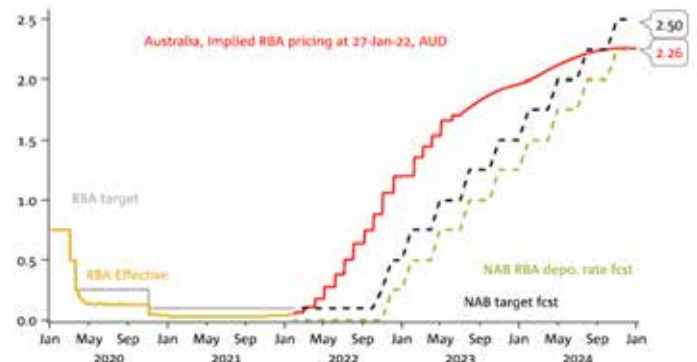
In summary, there are some valid reasons as to why equities have suffered a decent repricing of late. We have

observed in the past that when a shock (policy, macro or geo-political) hits expensive and heavily positioned markets, repricing towards less expensive levels is likely. In our view, this template probably explains much of the recent price action. At the very least, price action so far this year serves to highlight that the investment environment in 2022 will be more difficult to navigate than that in 2021, not least because policy settings are becoming less accommodative.

Importantly, we don't think recent price action portends the beginning of a bear market, and there is still scope for growth assets to continue to out-perform defensive assets. But we remain strongly of the view that investors should continue to prioritize biasing exposures towards quality at an asset class level. This repositioning should favour securities that have strong balance sheets, protected margins, sound revenue growth and less cyclicity in their exposure.

The NAB Economics Team now see the first RBA rate hike occurring in November, with follow up hikes in December 2022 and February 2023. A likely move of 15bps followed by 25bp hikes at each of the next two meetings will take the target cash rate to 0.75% by February 2023, while the actual cash rate will trade between 50-75bps.

Cash Rate Forecasts



Source: National Australia Bank, Macrobond

- The economy has continued to surprise to the upside, with the labour market now 6-12 months ahead of our prior forecasts – and significantly ahead of the RBA's – alongside two consecutive inflation surprises.
- From here NAB see underlying inflation tracking at least in the upper half of the target band with the possibility it will be above the band in Q1 and Q2. As a result, there is the risk the RBA hikes earlier and NAB think every meeting should be considered 'live' from August 2022.
- For the RBA's timing, a pickup in wage growth will remain an important factor. While it will be difficult to have assessed the breadth and passthrough of wage growth completely by November, the RBA will have two additional reads on the WPI.



Supply Chain Resilience and Business Pressures

by Anita Campbell, CEO, NGINA

To contain the spread of COVID-19, governments across the world have restricted individual and commercial activities to varying degrees. These measures, along with some very large shifts in patterns of demand, have strained global supply chains. Australia has not been immune to these effects with our local supply chains being stretched as well.

Broadly speaking, there have been two phases of supply chain issues during the pandemic. In the early stages of the pandemic, production issues due to activity restrictions were most prevalent, first in China and subsequently in other countries. Then, transportation issues emerged alongside continuing production constraints.

With regards to the experience of Australian firms, the majority note that supply chain issues have not materially affected their ability to operate. However, they universally declare that supply chain issues are definitely having a negative impact on costs.

In the nursery and garden industry the issue is compounded. Inputs are also being deleteriously impacted by the effects of drought and bushfires in 2019-20 and by significant labour shortages.

There is a direct relationship between the price of our inputs and the price of our products. At every turn, growers are facing increased and difficult challenges across the entire supply chain as we witness a cost increase to all our inputs.

The rising cost of agriculture inputs is not a new phenomenon, and not just Australia centric. An 'Index of Prices Paid by Growers' study, orchestrated by Texas A&M economist Charlie Hall, determined the overall cost of producing nursery and greenhouse crops is about 29.6% higher in 2019 than it was in 2007, with labour experiencing the largest uptick at 41.6% (nurserymag.com/article/the-cost-of-doing-business/).

For ourselves, the bushfires and Covid have brought a whole swathe of additional challenges compounding the impacts of production input cost increases. The price of plastics, including irrigation materials, growing media, crop protectants, fertilisers, stakes, labels, water treatments, freight, electricity, water and fuel are all up.

Bruce Beesley of Go Grow says, "Whilst freight and supply chains in general are, and have been, an issue, the NSW bushfires of two years ago, have had an impact on the price of pine bark. Fortunately, we have been able to source

excellent new substrates based on overseas research which are proving to give great results and lessen our dependence on pine bark. It seems freight cost, will continue to have an impact on pricing for some time yet”.

John Walsh from ICL Specialty Fertilizers says, “Base fertiliser costs (the materials used in our fertilisers) have roughly doubled over the past 2 years, influenced by increasing demand and restrictions on production, due to energy shortages and geopolitical issues. Labour and shipping costs continue to put pressure on a tight situation. ICL has increased production over the past 2 years and has been able to meet most of the demand despite the challenges”.

David Jakobs, CEO of Oasis Horticulture says that “Over the last 9 months we have seen fuel levies go from 10% to up as high as 17%”.

Everywhere you look, materials are in short supply and input prices are increasing.

While some inputs may have only risen between 5 and 10% over the past two years the cost and availability of labour are under tremendous pressure. Compared to many industries, a greater proportion of the costs of producing greenlife comes from labour expenses. Labour can often amount to 30-40% of production costs and in some cases be as high as 70%.

According to Penny Lee of Sidekicker, “There are a multitude of factors taking workers out of the workforce. Firstly, we still have immigration challenges. There were nearly 600,000 less temporary visa holders in Australia in December 2022 compared to the same period in 2019, as migrants returned to their native countries following the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of the international borders. At least 150,000 of these were temporary workers and students. Australia’s population, consequently, has shrunk for the first time since WWI.”

The latest surge in Omicron Covid-19 cases, has meant that hundreds of businesses in NSW and ACT are being forced to close after so many of their workers – and their close contacts - are in isolation.

Today, in Australia, with the labour pressures on top of the higher cost of most input materials, most commentators agree that you can expect nursery production costs to increase by a further 20-30% in the coming years.

Whatever price increases have taken place this past spring will not offset these higher costs. Reducing overheads, further price rises and automation might be the answer for some nurseries.

Rather than relying on expensive labour, automation and labour-saving equipment will reduce your labour costs by reducing repetitive tasks and increase your production capabilities, resulting in a greater profit and faster growth

for your business. Utilising technology to mix container substrates or managing irrigation are easily automated tasks that will save nurseries money.

At the very least, businesses should focus on mapping their current production processes and begin preparing and planning for automation improvements. They may also consider educating themselves on lean production methods and review their production processes to remove waste.

“Automation has always been an attractive investment, but the current global situation has certainly drawn more attention to the sector. Investing in automation reduces the impact of unpredictable labour costs and staff shortages; it’s a long-term solution providing highly accurate, reliable, and consistent outcomes. With greater demands for automated systems, companies can afford to invest more in R&D - generating more advanced entry-level technologies and an even better return on investment. It’s an exciting time to be involved in A&L.”

Merijn Kuiper, Automation & Labour-Saving Division Manager, Powerplants Australia

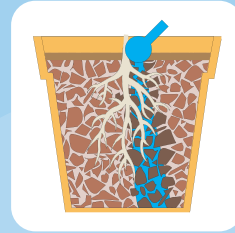
If you do have to raise your prices all businesses should fully understand their own production costs. There are ways to reduce your costs such as transitioning to products which have less losses for instance, grow quicker (increasing stock turns) or which require less input e.g. formative pruning.

If you do decide to raise your prices it can often be a tricky conversation to have with your loyal clients. Samantha Birkwood, Owner of Bamboo World and NGINA Director has put together a few things you can say that might help.

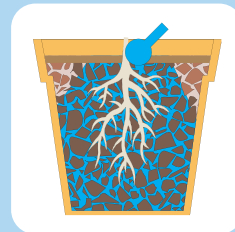
- It has been a challenging few years for all businesses
- Everything related to supply chain has increased
- Australian suppliers have been hit hard – international supply chain increases have had a knock-on effect
- All inputs have increased in price, including transportation and freight, fertilisers, growing media, fuel, raw materials for building, plastics and pots
- Reduction in the availability of staff – especially in the casual / holiday worker, has driven up the cost of labour.

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The Need for Wetting Agents All Year Round

by Elliott Akintola, Agronomist and Category Manager – Plant Health and protection

It is a common misconception that only in periods or areas where moisture is limited, the need to conserve water through use of wetting agents is more important. In fact, there are some school of thoughts that wetting agents are necessary only for some substrates and not others. It is high time we addressed these questions and provided some clarity on the use of wetting agents in nursery production systems.

To truly appreciate and understand the benefits of wetting agents, we must first understand the dynamic characteristics of substrates used in nursery production systems. In most nurseries, the growing media comprises of organic materials such as composted pine bark, peat, or coir as sole constituents or in various combinations. When these organic materials containing waxes, alkanes and fatty acids dry out, a large number of nonpolar sites on the surface of the media particles are formed causing a reduction in substrate wettability (Abagandura, Park & Bridges Jr 2021; Zheng et al. 2016). Water repellence is used to describe the condition that causes a substrate or growing media to resist wetting due to the accumulation of water repellent and hydrophobic coatings on the media particle surfaces. Some of the direct consequences of repellence includes the inability to wet and retain water, increased runoff and preferential flow, reduced access to water for plants, reduced irrigation efficiency, increased requirement for water and other inputs.

Therefore, wetting agents which are a class of surfactants are a management technology for reducing, and possibly avoiding development of, water repellence and associated preferential flow. They work by reducing the surface tension between two materials hence modifying the flow dynamics of irrigation water and improving wettability (Moore et al. 2010). Today, there are both liquid and granular formulations of wetting agents approved for use in nursery production systems. Common examples include Hydraflo 2 and Hydraflo L from ICL, Moisture aid from Yates, and the Earthcare



Image showing water channelling through the media (without wetting agents) and not wetting evenly. Photo credit: Dr Sam Stacey & Robert Megier ICL Specialty fertilizers.

wetting agents from Seasol. Furthermore, a specialized wetting agent manufactured by ICL specialty fertilizers called H₂COCO is available to improve the wettability of new and reused coir. These products are available at your nearest Garden City Plastics (GCP) offices nationwide.

The periods of dry weather are traditionally when many growers sense the need of including wetting agents in their growing media or top-dressing pots with wetting agents. However, recent studies in the turf industry and nursery production systems have identified that there's much to gain in including wetting agents in wet periods as well. For instance, in turf, researchers discovered that the use of wetting agents in winter months improved

drainage, removed surface water, eliminated localised dry spots, reduced plant stress, improved spring green up and mitigated against winter injury related to crown tissue desiccation (DeBoer et al. 2020; Martin 2019). These enabled lawns maximize irrigation and fertilizer inputs and open for longer duration in the year. In the containerised production systems, water repellence is more severe in older stock which is detectable by visible dry spots existing all year round in the media and slower rate of infiltration. Ensuring that wetting agents are present in the media reduces the need for hand watering on dry spots, improves the efficiency of water use, prevents waterlogging, or encourages free draining of waterlogged media, thereby creating an ideal balance of air and water that results in healthier and higher quality plants. Wetting agents also encourages deeper, stronger roots since moisture and nutrients are uniformly available in the container. Moreover, some wetting agents have helped in inhibiting the growth of moss, algae and soil borne pathogens which are a common occurrence in winter months (ICL).

The benefits of wetting agents cannot be over emphasized, yet it remains one of the most neglected components of an effective growing substrate. Besides the benefits of improving irrigation efficiency through increasing water supply to plant roots thereby reducing plant stress, we estimate that wetting agents would help to improve plants' ability to absorb available nutrients from the growing media. For instance, if 20% of the media are dry spots, and 6g/L of controlled release fertilizer has been incorporated into the media, it is estimated that the plant will only have access to 4.8g/L of the fertilizer because plants cannot absorb nutrients from dry media. Moreover, the availability of moisture within media helps to eliminate temperature extremes from the root zones.

In conclusion, wetting agents are essential throughout the production schedule. The granular formulations of wetting agents e.g., Hydraflo 2, and Moisture aid provides growers with the option to easily topdress older stock or incorporate into the media prior to potting up. The liquid formulations provide the flexibility of applying wetting agents by spraying onto the media surface, applying as a drench, or injecting it through the irrigation lines. For lushier and healthier plants, give wetting agents a go.



Melaleuca 'Claret Top' Plant growth responses to Hydraflo 2 wetting agent in media (a) without wetting agents, (b) with wetting agents. Photo credit: Robert Megier & Dr Sam Stacey ICL Specialty fertilizers

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Managing Employee Performance and Conduct

Learn how to manage performance and conduct in your company, from delivering performance reviews to handling a breach in company policy.



Employee performance management is essential to any productive workplace, but managing performance and conduct can sometimes be a challenging task.

Between conducting an employee performance review to managing any issues in behaviour, there are plenty of aspects organisations need to consider in order to build and manage a high performing team.

From establishing a company policy for employees to managing staff, here are some tips to help your organisation better manage employee performance and conduct.

WHAT IS EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT?

Performance management can generally be divided into two parts:

- Employee performance includes promotions, demotions, the management of any personal issues or challenges, and a regular employee performance evaluation or review.
- Employee conduct refers to an employer's rights and the enforcement of these rights when it comes to company policy for employees, dishonesty, criminal breaches, or any other legal breaches that might affect the organisation.

MANAGING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AND CONDUCT

As an employer, you'll need to handle any issues in employee performance that may arise, as well as any breaches in conduct.

Because of this, it's beneficial to have policies or guidelines in place, such as a code of conduct for employees, to ensure everyone on your team understands their rights and obligations. It can also be useful to create procedures to handle breaches in conduct or problems concerning



performance, and HR responses to these issues.

When building company policies or managing performance and conduct, employers should aim to:

- Correct and improve an employee's standard of conduct when it's appropriate or if there has been a breach. This can include any breaches to your company's code of conduct, as well as any actions an employee may have done that could damage your organisation's reputation or legal obligations.
- Provide employees with the opportunity to correct any issues in conduct. You might choose to provide them with a warning or work with them on a plan to change or manage behaviour. Bear in mind this might not apply if there have been any serious breaches in conduct that end in dismissal.
- Treat all employees fairly, equally and consistently. Employees should feel supported in the workplace and be presented with equal opportunities regardless of gender, race, or other personal performances. Your employees should also not feel discriminated against at work, whether by other employees or by managers.

Review each situation on an individual basis based on the specific circumstances. Every employee is different, and as an employer, it's important to handle any situation or breaches in conduct individually with your staff.

In addition to managing staff, keep in mind that as an employer, you will also need to deal with any disputes or

conflicts that may arise between individual employees, or between employees and managers. Employees may also face personal issues or challenges that can affect their work, and managers and HR teams should keep this in mind when managing conduct and performance.

Lastly, it's a good idea to consult your local state or territory laws around employee conduct and performance, and seek legal advice if you are facing any challenges with specific performance or conduct issues.

WHAT IS A CODE OF CONDUCT?

A Code of Conduct sets out and describes the minimum standards of behaviour and conduct expected from employees and contractors in their dealings with customers, clients, co-workers, management and the general public.

Non-compliance with the code of conduct may lead to disciplinary action from the employer.

In the absence of a code of conduct policy, dismissing an employee because of 'unacceptable behaviour' leaves the employer open to a successful claim for unfair dismissal because the employee could argue he or she was unaware the employer considered such behaviour as inappropriate.

As with any successful claim for unfair dismissal, the employer could be ordered by the Fair Work Commission to reinstate the employee to their previous position, or pay up to 6 months' ordinary remuneration to the affected employee.

WHERE CAN I GET A CODE OF CONDUCT?

Through our partnership with Business Australia, NGINA members can now purchase legally compliant documents for their businesses from NGINA at a significantly subsidised rate. The library contains over 200 policies, contracts, forms, checklists and general correspondence, which are all written and maintained by the Workplace Relations team at Australian Business Lawyers and Advisors (ABLA).

The Code of Conduct Policy Template can be used by all Australian employers and is available to NGINA members for only \$72.50.

To browse our library of policies, contracts, forms, checklists and general correspondence and make a purchase, simply log in to the Member Centre of our website and select HR Services.

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Risk Management

by Chris O'Connor, Business & Technical Support Manager, NGINA

The World Economic Forum (WEF) recently released its 2022 Global Risk Report, the 17th in a series of annual reports over the last two decades. In this report the WEF cited and ranked a range of risks that the global community was facing, and this leads us to an important question – What is risk and how do we manage it?

Risk is an issue which involves every part of our lives, both working and personal. Risk can be found from the individual through to global scales. Although we use the term often, risk can be hard to define. The International Standards Organisation has published a useful description of risk; “*Risk is the effect of uncertainty on objectives*”. In this definition an objective can have many different aspects (financial, environmental, health) and be applicable across a range of different levels e.g., industry, business, project or product. Risk is most often expressed as a function of consequence of an event and the likelihood of that occurring. It's also

important to remember that while often when we discuss risk, we think about loss, however it's not the whole picture. In fact risk can be equally applied to something positive happening, and that's something we want to capitalise on. A broad example from WEF 2022 Global Risk Report, cites that of the Top 10 Global Risks anticipated over the next 10 years, five are related to environmental impacts. The nursery industry is in a prime position to help address such risks.

It's always better to take a proactive approach to risk, as choosing a reactive approach, or simply failing to act, is more costly, disruptive, and may result in opportunity loss, significant reputational damage, and harm business continuity. Taking a proactive approach to risk is known as *risk management*. Risk management activity helps to promote and protect value.

The process of risk management involves two distinct stages. Firstly assessing the risk, and secondly treating the risk.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The first stage in a risk assessment is to identify and list all the various sources of risk, their causes and potential impacts. It is important to consider all risk at this point, otherwise they may be left out of the assessment process, so using people with appropriate knowledge is essential. Context is also important to consider in this step as risk sources can come from both internal and external sources and the context helps to set the scope and criteria for risk.

The second stage in the process is to analyse the risks identified and build a deeper understanding of these risks. Consideration needs to be given to the factors which affect the consequences and likelihoods of the risks, as well as any existing control methods and assumptions made. The analysis can be qualitative, quantitative or a combination of the two depending upon the data or information available. Sometimes we won't have access to statistics or there may simply not be any statistical information to model an area of risk, and this is where qualitative elements to describe and frame the risk are useful.

The final stage in the risk assessment is to evaluate the risks by comparing the levels of risks identified and analysed to each other and our own set of risk criteria and tolerances. Based upon this, we can prioritize which risks need to be addressed.

Throughout the risk assessment process, it is important to consult and communicate with all key stakeholders to ensure that the risk has been thoroughly examined and that everyone understands why the actions taken in managing the risk are required.

RISK MATRIX

As risk is a function of two components namely 1) the consequence of something happening and 2) the likelihood of something happening, an easy way to prioritize the weight of each risk is to use the function of these two values. This can be as simple as ranking consequence and likelihood out of five and multiplying them, the higher the number the greater the priority. However, another method is to use a risk matrix. These can be found easily online and can be weighted to give more importance to risks with extreme consequences for example.

TREATING RISK

After completing a risk assessment, the next step is to treat the risks by selecting and implementing options designed to mitigate or modify the risk. The options, although they may vary in detail, broadly fall into the following categories:

1. Avoid the risk
2. Take a risk in order to actively chase an opportunity
3. Remove the source of the risk

4. Change the likelihood of the risk occurring
5. Change the consequences of a risk occurring
6. Share the risk with others
7. Retain the risk by conscious decision

An example for the nursery industry is growing a particular plant type, which may present a risk as it's a host to a particular disease. You could decide not to grow it at all and avoid the risk altogether. Alternatively, you may decide to increase how much of this crop you grow, anticipating and capitalising on potential shortages in the marketplace. Not importing any external material on site may remove the source of the risk, or you could decide to be more vigilant in water treatment methods to reduce the likelihood of infestation. You might diversify your crops to limit the consequences of an overall financial loss if the crop failed. Subcontracting out the crop to another grower to grow for you shares the risk and limits your exposure. Or finally you may well decide to grow the crop anyway, aware of the risk it presents.

The risk treatments listed do not need to be done in isolation, they can be done in combination with one another, often producing better risk management outcomes. It is also important that after implementing any risk treatment option you monitor and review both the risk itself and the performance of the treatment.

Managing risk is not an exact science, as we are dealing with significant amounts of uncertainty, however by taking a considered approach and actively reviewing, monitoring and treating our risks we stand to achieve outcomes which protect and deliver us more value.

LEARN MORE

There are many resources you can use to learn more about risk and its management including the International Standards on Risk Management which are part of the ISO 31000 group of standards. The ISO 31000:2018 standard can be purchased at the Standards Australia website store. standards.org.au/ and is a benchmark for managing risk globally.

The World Economic Forum releases regular global risk reports and the most recent (2022) is available from weforum.org/reports/global-risks-report-2022. The report highlights some of the challenges facing our global community and is worth reading.

Within a nursery setting there are a range of tools available to help manage risk including the industry best management practice program **NIASA**, Environmental management program **EcoHort** and the on-farm Biosecurity management program **BioSecure HACCP**. Each of these programs is well suited to managing an aspect of production risk.



NextGen

A NextGenner Portrait in Words — Melanie Sadleir, Alpine Nurseries

WHERE DO YOU CURRENTLY WORK?

I work at Alpine Nurseries. Currently, I work across both our Dural and Arcadia sites.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU WORKED THERE?

1 year.

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE?

My role here is very diverse. Officially, I am the Small Plants Maintenance Supervisor. Unofficially, I am also the Garden Maintenance Supervisor, Weed Spraying Coordinator, as well as one of our Biosecurity and First Aid Officers. I'm also currently learning our irrigation systems, so I will eventually be one of our irrigation officers as well.

DESCRIBE WHAT A TYPICAL DAY AT WORK WOULD LOOK LIKE FOR YOU.

If there's one thing I've learnt over the last year, it's that there is no such thing as a 'typical day' in my job. Tasks vary from season to season and day to day. A typical day in January might look something like this...

Greet my team in the morning and give them a quick rundown of what we're doing that day. All go their separate ways to either weed/spray/drench. This month I'm starting my irrigation training, so I would go do that. After smoko, I'll usually split the team and get a couple of people each on different tasks for the rest of the day ranging from staking, top tying, pruning, chuck outs, blocking up, and/or potting prep, depending on what is happening that day and the rest of the week. While my team are busy with those tasks I will float between them and make sure they're all okay. If I have new staff, I'll spend some time with them training. I'll also attend any meetings I may have on that day, follow up on sales maintenance requests, complete any outstanding paperwork, and fix any small irrigation issues that come up. I also try and take some time to plan the next day or two as well.

At the end of the day, I always try and catch my team members before they head off and thank them for their work that day. Before I go home I double check all the gates in our sections are closed and all our paperwork is up to date, and plan for the following day(s).

WHAT ARE YOUR CAREER GOALS?

This is a difficult question. I'm honestly not sure at this point in time. I don't really have any aspirations of promotion to higher management or anything like that as I have plans for my own business and am conscious of spreading myself too thin. I am very interested in certain areas of the horticulture industry in general, namely education and teaching as well as recycling and waste management. I have an intense love of Australian native plants. Eventually I would like to be a specialist in Australian natives. My dream would be to one day do a TED talk and earn myself an OAM for my contributions to industry whatever they may be.

WHAT DO YOU FIND REWARDING ABOUT YOUR JOB?

Everything! I really enjoy and get immense satisfaction out of



"There is no such thing as a typical day in my job" remarks Melanie



On the job at Alpine Nursery

all facets of my job.

DID YOU STUDY, OR ARE YOU CURRENTLY STUDYING, HORTICULTURE?

Yes, I studied a Certificate III in Horticulture at Ryde TAFE in 2020.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO WORK IN THE NURSERY AND GARDEN INDUSTRY?

I love being outdoors. Rain, hail or shine (well maybe not so much hail!), as long as I'm outside I'm happy. I have tried other areas of the industry before but found my preference lies in production horticulture.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE/DISLIKE MOST ABOUT WORKING IN THIS INDUSTRY?

What I like: The people. The opportunity to talk about and be surrounded by plants all day.

The opportunities I'm constantly presented with to learn more and expand my own knowledge base. I love the shift that is starting to happen in both the agricultural and horticultural industries towards a more regenerative, restorative and nurturing approach. It's also great to see so many more women coming into the industry. I can't say for certain, but I think that this increased female presence in our industry is really helping influence and drive this more nurturing and regenerative approach.

What I dislike: How 'non-green' our industry really is. I was honestly surprised when I first started just how much waste there is. Plastic is such a big part of our industry, it is in nearly everything we use. Pots, clips, packaging etc. There is so

much potential for change and improvement here. In saying that, it is great to see this starting to happen with companies like GCP stepping up to start tackling these issues.

IF YOU HAD ONE PIECE OF ADVICE TO SOMEONE THINKING ABOUT A CAREER IN HORTICULTURE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Don't think about it, just do it! You're never going to know it's for you (or not) if you never give it a go.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PLANT/TREE/SHRUB AND WHY?

Gosh this is a hard question! Haha It's almost akin to asking who your favourite child is (not that I have children). I have a particular fondness for Australian native plants. If I had to pick one it would be *Actinotus forsythii*, the Pink Flannel Flower. Firstly, it's pink. Secondly, I love its rarity and the fact that it needs such specific conditions in order to germinate and flower.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO IN YOUR SPARE TIME?

I love hiking, backpacking, exploring new places, pottering in my garden and spending time with my friends and family.

TELL US A FUN FACT ABOUT YOURSELF?

I'm in the process of setting up my own Wildflower Farm business where I will be growing Australian native flowers and foliage for the cut flower industry. I anticipate entering the market 2023 (all going according to plan).



A love of the outdoors led Melanie to pursue a career in horticulture



Ask an Expert

The Ask an Expert column is a chance for the NGINA community to ask any of your burning questions and we'll find an expert in the field to answer it for you.

Your question can be sent to info@ngina.com.au and will be passed on to the NGINA Training & Development Committee who will source the answer!

► QUESTION:

“What’s the point of boot dips? Do they work?”

► ANSWER:

**NGINA Business and Technical Support Manager
Chris O'Connor responds:**

Short answer, they're an excellent tool in reducing the contamination risk of your nursery by a broad range of pathogens and weeds, and yes, they do work.

Although most of our staff and visitors onsite do the right thing, some may simply not be aware of the risk they pose by wearing muddy or dusty boots worn at other farms or nurseries, the bush or their own property. A properly constructed and maintained boot dip can reduce the risk posed by plant pathogens and weed seeds via footwear through disinfestation before entry. Another benefit of a boot dip is that it helps to bring biosecurity to the forefront of people's minds, both staff and visitors.

For our own industry, pathogens such as *Phytophthora* pose a risk and once introduced on site can be challenging to manage. Other soil and water borne diseases also pose a risk including Tropical Race 4 Panama disease which affects bananas, and *Phylloxera* which affects grape vines. These pathogens should also be considered, especially if your nursery is operating in a production area for these commodities or you are supplying stock into these industries.

Boot dips are used regularly across horticulture, cropping and the animal-based sectors. The links below detail some of these, along with some useful ideas when developing your own boot dips.

- farmbiosecurity.com.au/biosecurity-basics-make-your-own-footbath/
- abgc.org.au/panama-tropical-race-4/
- vinehealth.com.au/2021/09/footwear-and-small-hand-tool-disinfestation-protocol/
- invasives.org.au/how-to-help/keep-gear-clean-wild/

A range of disinfectants are suggested including, chlorines, bleaches, alcohols, and Quaternary ammonium compounds. Each has their own advantages and disadvantages including cost, efficacy and longevity so you should investigate appropriate options for your situation.

Another option to a dedicated foot bath is to provide a spray bottle with a disinfectant such as 70% methylated spirits. This is ideal for remote sites or for those whose role involves visiting multiple sites.

It is important to remember that boot dips are not a standalone tool, they should be used as part of a systems-based approach to managing pest and disease. The Australian Plant Production Standard (incl. NIASA, EcoHort & BioSecure HACCP) is a well-tested and proven system for managing pest and diseases on farm and can be referred to for more guidance.



This image shows the differences in microorganism load that can be grown from clean vs dirty boots. Image source – farmbiosecurity.com.au

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Ask an Expert Follow Up

In the summer edition of the *N&G News*, we initiated an 'Ask an Expert' feature. Steve Rixon, Head Teacher of Horticulture at TAFE Richmond answered a question from NGINA Apprentice of the Year, Phillip Clark from Andreasen's Green on the importance of NPK ratios.

Following on from that article Steve explains that the use of Controlled Release Fertilisers (CRF's) and Water-Soluble Fertilisers (WSF's) are an essential part of modern day nursery production. As a grower there are many different products and formulations to choose from. It's a complex subject and demands that growers know their products and how they perform in the field. Growers are using different analysis products, such as Low P and High K formulations to achieve their desired results.

Using seven different fertilisers (CRF & WSF) Trientini, Fernanda & Fisher, Paul. (2020) clearly demonstrated the importance of using trials to determine the selection of products and application rates. In this case, a combination of CRF's and WSF's gave excellent results in a hydroponic system growing basil.

You will find that leading experts, technicians and practitioners may differ in what products they use and how they use them, however what they will agree on, is the importance of running trials for a range of crop types before large scale implementation.

K. Handreck & N.Black (2002, pp479-480) encourage trials in nurseries to determine if a treatment improves plant growth rates under field conditions. G.C. Cresswell & R.G.Weir (1997, pp.7-15) also emphasise the importance of setting up trials as a direct method of confirming or measuring crop performance. They also promote the use of diagnostic tools such as plant tissue analysis, media and water analysis.

Andreasen's Green and many other growers run scientific trials to fine tune fertiliser practices. I encourage growers to work with fertiliser suppliers that can assist in using the right longevity, analysis, and rate to ensure the best outcomes for the crops that you grow.

Varying longevities was once seen as beneficial. While some first generation of Controlled Release Fertilisers may have



benefited from this practice, growers using a reputable quality 2nd, 3rd and 5th Generation fertiliser would find that this practice would lead to the need for costly topdressing in the second half of the crop cycle.

As with so many topics, the answer to a question such as Phillip's can be extremely complex, and the benefit of training to become a horticulturist and conducting your own scientific trials to find the ideal controlled release fertiliser to suit your crop will bring about the best answers.

Remember to utilise the networks available through your association (NGINA) and access quality information directly from your suppliers.

References

Cresswell.G.C &Weir.R.G 1997, *Plant nutrient disorders 5: Ornamental plants and shrubs*, Inkata Press, Melbourne, Victoria.

Handreck.K & Black.N 2002, *Growing media for ornamental plants and turf*, 3rd edn, University of New South Wales Press Ltd, Sydney, NSW.

Trientini.F & Fisher.P 2020 'Hydroponic Fertilizer Supply for Basil Using Controlled-release Fertilizer', *HortScience*, vol 55 (10), pp.1683-1691, viewed 13 February, 2022 <(PDF) Hydroponic Fertilizer Supply for Basil Using Controlled-release Fertilizer (researchgate.net)>.



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Welcome to Our New Members



Business owners: Ricky Atayde (Chief Operating Officer) & Ramon Atayde (Managing Director)

Business name: ARC Ento Tech

Address: 972 Wisemans Ferry Road Somersby, NSW 2250

Business phone: + 61 400 606 881

Business email: admin@arcentotechltd.com.au

Website: arcentotechltd.com.au

Located in Somersby, ARC Ento Tech is an innovative business and new member of NGINA. We recently spoke with Chief Operating Officer Ricky Atayde to find out more about this amazing business and to gain more of an insight into their operations and products.

Ricky has prior experience with the industry, working previously for Scotts Australia (now Evergreen Garden Care), and for several years in sales with Seasol. Ricky also has a background in aquaculture, producing prawns and fish commercially. But it was Ricky's interest in insects, which led him to develop an innovative business which is seeking to solve some major problems of the world.

Initially Ricky identified an opportunity to supply insects to the pet industry as feed for pet reptiles and birds. Over time Ricky diversified and expanded his range to include varieties of snails, crickets, meal worms and cockroaches. However, it was during his time in the Philippines, that Ricky identified an issue which challenged him to do more.

"I saw a documentary of people eating from bins outside of a restaurant and this really affected me, and I wanted to do something about it. Whilst doing work with aquaponics I came across the use of insects to feed fish stock and I started experimenting with this. This work led me to the potential of black soldier flies or BSF."

Black Soldier Flies (*Hermetia illucens*), are quite different in appearance to normal house flies or blow flies, in fact they look more like a wasp and importantly, they are not a pest to humans.

"I saw a documentary of people eating from bins outside of a restaurant and this really affected me, and I wanted to do something about it. Whilst doing work with aquaponics I came across the use of insects to feed fish stock and I started experimenting with this. This work led me to the potential of black soldier flies or BSF."

As an insect species, they are voracious eaters of anything organic. They excel in processing organic waste, and unlike earthworms, they will also consume meat and at a much faster rate. Two key by-products come out this consumption process; more BSF maggots, which are excellent protein sources for feeding poultry or fish; and frass which is an exceptional organic fertiliser and potential growing media amendment.

Ricky has successfully demonstrated proof of concept, through a large-scale trial in the Philippines, converting





Nutrient rich fertiliser, a by-product of the black soldier fly production method

180 tonnes of mixed city waste over the course of a month into fertiliser, with only residual plastics remaining. How to use the plastic by-products so there is zero waste? It was here that Ricky's brother Ramon, was able to draw on his background as a mining engineer, to provide an innovative solution. By developing the plastic waste into what they have termed a "Refuse Derived Reductant" (RDR), the brothers were able to create a high-grade coal alternative, which is environmentally sustainable and commercially viable. This can be substituted for high-grade coal in applications such as, steel manufacturing and metals smelting and offers a more consistent quality, as compared to coal, which can display a high degree of variability.

At this stage, Ricky and Ramon are developing processes for automation of the BSF production method and are looking to engage with local councils to process landfill sites and municipal waste. ARC Ento Tech are also engaging with the leading researchers, to refine their production techniques and to explore further value adds, to their sustainable waste recovery endeavours. Educating and promoting the use of frass as a fertiliser and amendment is one of the key reasons ARC Ento joined NGINA.

WHY USE FRASS IN FERTILISER?

Ricky explains; Insects shed chitin, which in simple terms, is a polymer which supports their exoskeleton. When a plant detects frass in the soil, they believe they are surrounded by

insects and respond by preparing for an attack that never arrives. This defence reaction, accelerates plant growth.

Arc Ento Tech is unique in its purpose. Arc Ento Tech's philosophy is underpinned by the aspirational goal, to create world change by winning the war on waste.

Learn more about this fascinating enterprise on their website arcentotechltd.com.au



Ricky and his son at Sydney Trade Day

Welcome to Our New Members



Business owners: Lawrence Ranson

Business name: Spruced Christmas Trees and Nursery

Address: 1964 Abercrombie Road, Black Springs, NSW, 2787 & 15 Macabees road, Yetholme, NSW, 2795

Business phone: 0434 998 609

Business email: spruced.trees@gmail.com

Nursery size (acres): 5 acres nursery, 50 acres plantations

Number of staff: 4

Website: spruced.net.au

Facebook: /spruced.net.au

Instagram: @spruced_xmas_trees

WHEN, WHERE AND HOW DID YOU START IN THE INDUSTRY?

I started in Germany and Denmark studying forestry and did my thesis experiments on a Christmas tree farm in North Germany.

I was inspired by the impressive trees they grew, as well industry adoption of innovative farming methods and equipment.

HOW DID YOU GET YOUR IDEA OR CONCEPT FOR THE BUSINESS?

I've always loved growing things, especially unique collectables and challenging plants. Living in Europe for three years, I noticed they had a huge range of conifers, I had never seen grown in Australia before. The quality and choice of the European Christmas tree market are far superior to ours. I must admit, the challenge of overcoming the Australian climate and disproving the naysayers has become a bit of an obsession for me.

WHAT'S YOUR BACKGROUND, E.G., EDUCATION, WORK EXPERIENCE, ETC?

My first job was as a landscaping labourer in the Illawarra. I went on to study Forestry and biology in Germany, as well as gaining experience in research labs, both in Australia and



Lawrence with leading-hand, Hugo

Europe. On my return to Australia, I focused on the practical side of things, working as a silviculturalist (establishing forests) for four and a half years with Forestry NSW.

WHAT WAS YOUR MISSION AT THE OUTSET?

To work out the nuances of growing a greater diversity of Christmas trees and conifers in Australia. We have been missing out on some really spectacular varieties.

WHAT DREW YOU TO THE INDUSTRY?

I have been gardening for as long as I can remember. I loved learning from family, who also have a passion for gardening. As a teenager, I busied myself converting the suburban lawn to sprawling crops and was lucky to experiment with growing conifers on my grandparent's farm. My passion for growing conifers also gave me a great excuse and the motivation to fulfil a long-standing dream of mine, setting up the cool climate farm.

PROVIDE A BIT OF BUSINESS BACKGROUND.

Spruced is growing a variety of conifers specialising in Christmas trees and timber species from around the world. We have steadily expanded plantations aimed at wholesale markets on a range of sites across NSW and two small nurseries growing most of our own stock from seeds and cuttings. We produce and/or collect our own seed both within Australia and overseas and are also working on new cultivars. We now supply many Christmas tree farms in Australia with their seed and seedlings and help new growers get their farms up and running as well.

WHAT ROLE(S) DO YOU CURRENTLY UNDERTAKE IN THE BUSINESS?

I am still a bit of an all-rounder as I can't bring myself to sit in the office for an extended period of time! Our small team does it all and the jobs seem to vary every day. Where I can, I handle phone calls and wholesale enquiries myself and closely



Bringing a greater diversity of conifers to the Australian Christmas tree market



Sydney airport Christmas Tree Display 2020

tend the seedling production and propagation side of the business.

WHAT SERVICE(S) OR PRODUCT(S) DO YOU OFFER/MANUFACTURE?

We have started releasing new varieties of fresh-cut Christmas trees after a long wait (for them to grow) and produce seedlings and potted plants for gardeners, farmers and foresters alike.

WHAT ARE YOUR COMPANY'S GOALS?

To spruce up the Australian Christmas! We hope to establish our new varieties in the market and add some diversity to the very limited selection currently available in Australia. Our aim is to supply our trees nationally and help other farmers set up their businesses around Australia.

DO YOU WORK LOCALLY, NATIONALLY, INTERNATIONALLY?

At the moment, we're pretty occupied with the East Coast of Australia and Sydney in particular. As things grow we are aiming to make more regular appearances around Australia too.

WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE YOUR CURRENT LOCATION?

Climate and soil. For conifers, it's all about these factors. I spent a lot of time roaming the highlands of east coast Australia and just got pulled towards the cold tops of the Great Dividing Range. It's a lot like northern Europe up here – sometimes a bit too cold! It has been known to snow on Christmas day in this region.

WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU'VE FACED?

Establishing and developing the business. Both in terms of physical production, overcoming drought, floods and

adapting industry practices to an Australian context but also developing a niche business strategy.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THESE CHALLENGES?

The challenges associated with growing conifers in Australia are also part of the fun, selecting a diverse range of varieties with interesting attributes such as colour, aroma, different needle forms and textures suited to the Christmas tree market.

TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE YOUR SUCCESS?

Time and patience! Growing some of the varieties, is not something for the faint-hearted.

IF YOU HAD ONE PIECE OF ADVICE TO SOMEONE JUST STARTING OUT, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

I think it's the advice I would have given my past self, but it is also something that keeps me motivated as the business develops and grows,

Break the rules and the gardening myths. Plants have incredible ways of adapting.

Be creative and innovative. Play around with different and unique varieties.

Create your own opportunity, get out there and have a go, ask questions, gather information

Have fun! Running a business can be hard work, but it's also rewarding, so you may as well enjoy it.

TELL US A FUN FACT ABOUT YOU AND/OR YOUR BUSINESS, ANYTHING AT ALL.

The Spruced team have two 4-legged members – Our dogs, Hugo and Wally! They love helping in the Nursery and will play pinecone fetch for hours.

Welcome to Our New Members



Business owners: Nicholas Lowe, Alissa Campbell, Adam Evens

Business name: Guru Corporation Pty Ltd
– Trading as Tytags

Address: Suite 2, Unit 2/872 Pacific Highway Lisarow NSW 2250

Business phone: 1300 852 646

Business email: cs@gurucorp.com.au

Number of staff: 27

Website: tytags.com.au



Home to Tytags, Guru Corporation's, purpose-built facility at Lisarow

WHEN, WHERE AND HOW DID YOU START IN THE INDUSTRY?

I started in 1992, when I was employed in sales in a large print business in West Gosford.

HOW DID YOU GET YOUR IDEA OR CONCEPT FOR THE BUSINESS?

After spending 10 years working for a print business, I thought there was scope to deliver a much higher range of printed products and services. After raising some of these ideas with my employer who showed little interest, I took the plunge and went into business for myself.

WHAT WAS YOUR MISSION AT THE OUTSET?

Our mission was to "break the wheel" and deliver modern, creative, and cost-effective plant tag and label solutions. As a state-of-the-art tag and label manufacturer, we come to the table with fresh eyes and a desire for positive change.

WHAT DREW YOU TO THE INDUSTRY?

The print industry is one of the largest industries in the world and is constantly being challenged to advance through software and hardware advancements. Just about every industry needs labels and printed products, so there are always plenty of opportunities on the table for those who want it.

COMPANY EVOLUTION

My business partner and I started Guru Labels in 2001, while each working from separate home offices. In the early days,

we ran the business as print brokers, outsourcing all jobs to trusted trade printers locally on the NSW Central Coast. Fast forward 21 years and we have grown substantially, to be one of Australia's premium suppliers and manufacturers of printed self-adhesive labels and tags, servicing a broad range of industries including horticulture. We employ 27 dedicated professionals and operate from a state-of-the-art, custom designed premises, located at Lisarow on the NSW Central Coast. Our incredible team, print and ship no less than 150 separate print jobs Australia wide every day. In 2019, Guru Labels (Now Guru Corporation Pty Ltd), acquired Tytags, a business specialising in the supply of custom-made plant tags and labels for more than 40 years. We are proud to continue the pioneering work that Charles and Leonie Sweeney (original owners of Tytags) started, and we look forward to improving and implementing new and exciting label and tag solutions.

WHAT ROLE(S) DO YOU CURRENTLY UNDERTAKE IN THE BUSINESS?

My role in the business is to work closely with the new products and marketing teams, to ensure our wide range of products and services are more easily available for all. We love developing new products and finding more efficient ways to manufacture and deliver finished goods for less.

WHAT SERVICE(S) OR PRODUCT(S) DO YOU OFFER/MANUFACTURE?

We manufacture the widest range of self-adhesive labels and plant tags to suit either roll-to-roll thermal transfer printing, as well as A4 sheets to run through your OKI laser printer. Most recently we have released our range of custom printed plant and hang tags, which customers have been eagerly taken up.

WHAT ARE YOUR COMPANY'S GOALS?

We believe that we are positioned, to revolutionise the plant

and tag market for the horticultural industry. We aim to deliver improved service, reduced lead-times and ongoing cost savings, compared to suppliers already in this space.

DO YOU WORK LOCALLY, NATIONALLY, INTERNATIONALLY?

We manufacture and ship nationally every day, including fulfilling occasional international orders.

WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE YOUR CURRENT LOCATION?

This existing location was custom built from great bones. It was a shell of a facility that showed great potential including plenty of electricity which a business like ours needs. The new facility was designed to be 4 times larger than the existing facility and we have already filled this space only two years after moving in.

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS?

As manufacturers, rather than resellers, we have the capability, to fully investigate our customer's needs and facilitate that need, from the ground up. It is extremely satisfying, when you re-invent the wheel, becoming a market leader and not just another replicator.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CUSTOMERS?

Our horticultural customers range from small growers through to multi-site retailers. Customers may print as few as '1' to '1 million' labels or tags. They often need express turnarounds to capture their plants most saleable window.

WHY DO YOUR CUSTOMERS SELECT YOU OVER YOUR COMPETITORS?

Our customers tell us they love the personalised service and speedy response times we are able to provide. Many of our products and services are quite unique, however in areas where we compete against competitors our customers enjoy flexible print options and lower costs.

WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU'VE FACED?

Keeping up with the ever-changing print and finishing equipment in our space has been, and continues to be, an exciting challenge for a business like ours. We love printing and manufacturing with the latest equipment, and it continues to deliver what our competitors cannot.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THESE CHALLENGES?

Investing in and utilising state-of-the art equipment, allows you to rethink products and the way they should be manufactured. It helps you make changes quickly to meet the market's needs and expectations.

Where do you see your business in the next year? In the next five years? The next ten years? Tytags customers can expect ongoing development of new products including the ever-growing plant pot- tag market over 2022. We believe the next 5 – 10 years will be exciting times as we continue to invest in the equipment and services needed to underpin the little things, we do 'right' every day. We believe plant tags and



Tytags staff



Continual investment in the latest equipment gives Tytags a competitive advantage



Pictorial plant tag rolls printing

labels have been overpriced with a lack of competition to stimulate improved service and drive costs down. We look forward to being a force for change in the industry over this period.

WHAT'S YOUR PHILOSOPHY OR SAYING THAT MOTIVATES YOU IN YOUR WORKPLACE?

"Every customer is important, and every order is welcome."

With a large number of customers and volume of orders, living up to this can sometimes be challenging but as OUR customer, we guarantee you the same exceptional level of service and attention-to-detail, regardless of your order being valued at \$50 or \$50,000.

WHAT DO YOU FIND REWARDING ABOUT YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE NURSERY AND GARDEN INDUSTRY?

Driving industry reform, for the supply of plant tags and labels.

TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE YOUR SUCCESS?

Good old fashion customer service and thinking about creative ways to deliver it.

DOES YOUR COMPANY HELP THE COMMUNITY WHERE IT IS LOCATED?

We have worked with local primary schools to supply plants to improve their school grounds and local communities. Outside of that, we run a 'mufti-day' once a month, we raise money from the team and then match it from the business, in support of local charities.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE/DISLIKE THE MOST ABOUT WORKING IN THE HORTICULTURE INDUSTRY?

I like the industries desire and appetite for improvements and change.

IF YOU HAD ONE PIECE OF ADVICE TO SOMEONE JUST STARTING OUT, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Know your market.

TELL US A FUN FACT ABOUT YOU AND/OR YOUR BUSINESS, ANYTHING AT ALL.

It's funny how you can become institutionalised about things. Our business has a wonderful espresso coffee machine that no-one seems to use. But when the coffee van turns up at 8.55 am, you can bet 90% of the team are outside getting a coffee!

Nursery & Garden Industry
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Do you get our emails?

We regularly communicate with our members via email. If you feel you could be missing out on any of our emails please contact the office on **(02) 9679 1472** or email **info@ngina.com.au** so we can look into it for you.



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