Hort Innovation media release

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Horticulture industry unites to firm up sustainability approach

Key decision-makers from the horticulture, technology, transport and retail sectors gathered in Sydney recently to discuss the levers that need to be pulled for the horticulture industry to be more sustainable right now and into the future.

Following on from the release of the Australian-Grown Sustainability Framework last year, the Rural Research and Development Corporation, Hort Innovation teamed up with the International Fresh Produce Association to host am inaugural Horticulture Sustainability Summit to help inform annual reporting against a range of measures.

Hort Innovation General Manager of Stakeholder Experience Dr Anthony Kachenko said the Summit marked a shift in industry priorities.

“The Australian horticulture industry is seeing sustainability as a tangible, achievable and necessary part of their businesses,” he said. “10 years ago, sustainability – from environmental management and waste minimisation to workforce development – did not get the same consideration it does today.”

There is a historic shift happening in the industry, Hort Innovation Chief Executive Matt Brand said at the Summit.

“Times are rapidly changing,” he said. “This rise in sustainable business practices is driven by a growing collective conscience that is felt by not only growers but also the consumers they serve and those that invest in their businesses.”

Best-practice approaches already being applied by industry businesses were discussed at the Summit, along with what is working, what is not and how that can be harnessed to create annual sustainability reporting for the industry as a whole.

With more than 50 industry representatives in the room at the Grounds of Alexandria, many participants shared their sustainability journeys, including a panel featuring Warwick Hope from Woolworths, Dean Parsons from sustainable pallet and container provider CHEP and Shane Quinn from Queensland vegetable growing company Mulgowrie.

After the panel, a host of participants stood up to offer their experiences with sustainable practices including New South Wales nursery grower Sonja Cameron.

"Our philosophy is we have no right to pollute the land where we operate our business as we are merely caretakers for future generations," she said when talking about the values of her operation and commitment to environmentally conscious approaches over the years.

International Fresh Produce Association ANZ chief executive Darren Keating said while IFPA, and others including major companies, may have sustainability policies in place, it is important to get everyone in the horticulture industry on the same page and share learnings wherever possible.

“When it comes to protecting the stewardship of our land, our people and our local and global reputations, there should be no competition between business’, just a collective agreement that we are all doing whatever we can to move in a positive direction.”

The information gathered at the Summit will help form part of the Australian-grown Horticulture Sustainability Report, an inaugural reporting document that provides baseline data aligned with the focus areas within The Sustainability Framework. Key focus areas include Nourish and Nurture, People and Enterprise, Planet and Resources and Less Waste, which consider the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals and Hort Innovation’s Hort Frontiers strategic investment funding arm. The report is expected to be complete in October.



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