

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

DENNIS CHANT



Dear Readers,

As this report is being prepared our Northern New South Wales location is experiencing a prolonged period of consistently wet weather. This makes normal farm housekeeping activities a challenge and increases the ever-present risk of disease. It also gives cause to reflect on the drought conditions experienced a year ago and, more importantly, some of the conditions currently being experienced by our grower members in other regions. The Bundaberg region is experiencing serious water deficiencies whilst in North Queensland cyclonic conditions have had serious consequences for some farming operations.

As horticulturalists, these are challenges we face and overcome on a regular basis. COVID-19 has been a different type of challenge, one generally experienced once in a lifetime. The pandemic has been with us for a year and our industry has proven resilient in the face of lockdowns and other regulatory settings. Some of the impacts of these restrictions have been more difficult to address, particularly sourcing labour and shortages of some farm inputs.

We have all no doubt learned lessons over the last 12 months that can make our operations more sustainable. The easing of restrictions on movement and gatherings has allowed the PAI Management Committee to plan ahead with more confidence and in this edition of The Passion Vine dates have been listed for member meetings in Northern NSW, South Queensland and North Queensland.

The planned gatherings in each of the main growing regions will provide an ideal opportunity for growers and our industry partners to get together to share experiences and learnings and enjoy a relaxing social event. Restrictions over the past year have curtailed your association's functions programmed for the 2020 year. Your committee is very much aware of how our members value face-to-face gatherings and look forward to meeting with you at these events.

In the next few months decisions will be made on how growers' levy funds will be allocated over the next three to five years. The Passionfruit Strategic Investment Plan-2017-2021 (SIP), developed and managed by Hort Innovation, is the foundation for decision making in levy investments. Your levies fund R&D, marketing, biosecurity and residue testing programs (50% allocated to R&D and 50% to marketing). The SIP is due for renewal in June this year. Hort Innovation will be consulting with industry over the next few months to prepare a new five-year SIP.

It is important that growers' views are obtained in the formulation of the next iteration of the levy investment plan. As the passionfruit production trend is stable the value of levies collected is also forecast to be consistent over the period of the new plan. Currently the major share of the R&D funds is allocated to the plant breeding program, so it is important that the remaining funds are allocated to projects that are important to growers.

A number of growers have left the industry over the last twelve months whilst others are planning to expand. Your views on priority research projects to be included in the 2022-2026 SIP are important to the industry's long-term sustainability. Significant issues continue to challenge our growers with flow-on impacts to our agents and customers. One is the variability and unpredictability of supply. The recent unseasonal shortage of supply is not only frustrating for us, as growers, but also for our selling agents, their customers, and the end consumer. As this report is written, this shortage is being replaced by significantly increased supplies from many growers. Developing more consistent supply and quality improvements were identified as priorities in the current plan. Disease management is also an ongoing priority. The Committee has been advised of the growing impact of *Fusarium solani* on crops from Northern NSW to Far North Queensland. SEE PAGE 12 for an article on this troublesome disease. It is important that we and Hort Innovation get as broad a perspective as possible on what levy payers regard as R&D priorities.

The other important funding allocation is to the Communications Project. The current project terminates in September. It is now under the management of PAI and it funds this magazine and our other important communication channels including the website and field days. Your Committee is very appreciative of the high standards Jane has set in implementing the current program and is committed to ensuring that we continue to get value for money in delivery of the program during the next project period. As always, please do not hesitate to contact Sacha at your secretariate with any feedback or any queries.

I trust you find this edition of your magazine as interesting and informative as ever and look forward to catching up with you at one of our regional meetings.

All the best,
Dennis Chant