

Investing in Innovation: A Year of Growth for the Australian Passionfruit Industry



By Brett Fifield, CEO at Hort Innovation

As we reflect on the past 12 months, it's clear that the Australian passionfruit industry continues to evolve through strategic investment in research, development, and marketing. At Hort Innovation, we are proud to manage the passionfruit R&D and marketing levies on behalf of growers, ensuring that every dollar is directed toward building a stronger, more resilient industry.

One of the cornerstone projects over the past year has been the Passionfruit Industry Communications Program, delivered by Passionfruit Australia Inc. Now in its final year, this three-year initiative has played a vital role in connecting growers, those across the supply chain, and other stakeholders with timely and relevant information.

Through regional field days, such as the well-attended event in Beenham Valley last August, and the bi-monthly *Passiflora* eNewsletters and annual *The Passion Vine* publication, the program has fostered knowledge-sharing and collaboration. It has also created the opportunity for co-collaboration with other industries, such as Custard Apples, to create the Hort Innovation sponsored, Taste of the Tropics conference, which has further amplified the project's reach, creating synergies with other tropical fruit industries.

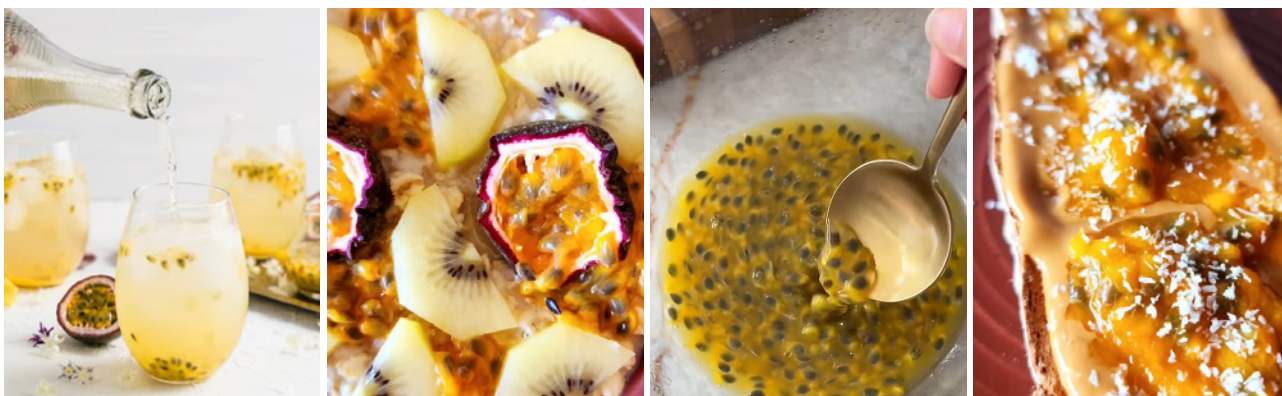
Looking ahead, the tender for the next iteration of this program has been opened and signals our commitment to continuous improvement in industry communications. Ensuring growers remain informed and connected is essential to navigating the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.



Field visit of a progeny trial by scientists from the University of Queensland, Murdoch University and Queensland Department of Primary Industries in 2024
Photo credit: Dr Mo Alam



Attendees at the Hort Innovation sponsored 'Taste of the Tropics' held in February 2025
Photo credit: Passionfruit Australia



Passionfruit recipes and ideas promoted through social media *Photo credit: Instagram*

On the R&D front, the National Passionfruit Breeding and Evaluation Program, led by Dr Mobashwer Alam at the University of Queensland, has made significant strides. The establishment of two germplasm repository sites and the planting of 786 new progeny across four locations mark a major step forward in securing the genetic diversity needed for future passionfruit breeding success. With another 1,000 progenies in development, the program is well-positioned to deliver new varieties that meet the evolving needs of growers and consumers alike.

Importantly, this work is not happening in isolation. The breeding program is closely aligned with a Hort Innovation Frontiers-funded project, led by Professor Rajeev Varshney at Murdoch University. This collaboration is harnessing advanced genomics to accelerate breeding outcomes. Through co-investment from research partners Murdoch University, The University of Queensland, The Department of Primary Industries QLD, Griffith University and The University of Western Australia, this program will assist to accelerate the benefit of the levy-funded passionfruit breeding program, enabling Dr Alam and his team to more efficiently identify and select progeny with the traits most valued by the industry—whether that’s improved yield, disease resistance, or fruit quality.

This integration of cutting-edge science with practical, industry-led feedback—facilitated through field days, industry publications, and a dedicated project reference group—ensures that the breeding program remains grounded in real-world grower needs while pushing the boundaries of what’s possible.

Meanwhile, on the marketing front, a fresh campaign launched in May is helping to drive consumer awareness and demand during winter. Funded by the Passionfruit Marketing Levy, the campaign taps into consumer insights which revealed while sales are growing year-on-year, 24% of Australians have never purchased a passionfruit. Yet those who do are passionate advocates, describing the fruit as “delicious,” “unique,” and “exotic.”

To bridge this gap, the marketing campaign is leveraging social media, branded advertising, and influencer partnerships to inspire new ways to enjoy passionfruit—particularly as a flavour-packed snack. By showcasing the fruit’s versatility and vibrancy, we aim to convert curiosity into purchase and passion into loyalty.

The past year has demonstrated the power of strategic investment and collaboration. From breeding breakthroughs to marketing momentum, the Australian passionfruit industry is laying the groundwork for a bright and sustainable future. At Hort Innovation, we remain committed to working hand-in-hand with growers and partners to ensure that passionfruit continues to thrive—on the vine, in the market, and in the hearts of consumers.

If any growers have questions about the work happening at Hort Innovation, please contact our Passionfruit Industry Service Manager, Gemma Burger:

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Hort Innovation **PASSIONFRUIT FUND**