

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

DENNIS CHANT

Dear Readers,

*It is an interesting exercise to compose a report which is not superseded before it is printed during national emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic that is currently upon us. In my first two reports reference was made to the need to enhance the resilience of our businesses in the face of our recent experiences with drought, fires and then flooding. The presence of Coronavirus in Australia coincided with the publication of the last edition of **The Passion Vine** so it earned only a brief mention. No doubt there will be further significant developments by the time this report is published, and our resilience again tested.*

All our readers have no doubt been affected in some way under the national response to the outbreak. Most commentators predict that, post recovery, there will be quite noticeable changes to the way our economy and society operate. For our growers, we can build on the new consumer awareness of the importance of the national food supply chain and how well Australian primary industries responded to a major spike in demand for quality, fresh, local produce.

Whilst the gradual removal of restrictions varies from state to state, the forecast increase in activity in the food service industry should see the demand for passionfruit be sustained. Fortunately, our national response to this crisis was timely and well-funded. Hopefully, this means our economy and demand for our product will stabilise relatively quickly.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Secretariat in keeping you informed of developments associated with the pandemic (and other contemporary challenges such as the worrying spread of the Fall Armyworm). Jane has represented our interests at the weekly horticulture industry briefings organised by Growcom, the Queensland Department of Agriculture communications group meetings, the Hort Council and many other forums. Relevant information from those briefings has been passed on to members.

It is disappointing that Regional Field Days and other industry events have had to be postponed or cancelled but, hopefully, we can get good participation at our

Annual General Meeting and Field Day to be held in Murwillumbah on Saturday 17th October.



We will be joined by Dr Jenny Ekman who has authored our Best Practice Guide to Postharvest treatment of passionfruit and for anyone who has heard Jenny speak she is very engaging and easy to understand – don't miss her talk about postharvest management.

Jane Richter will also be presenting the new grading tools that are being developed for all growers to use and would welcome everyone's feedback before the final versions go into production. Plus there are two farm walks in the afternoon before we all sit down for a beer and a nice dinner at the Golf Club on Saturday night. I hope to see as many growers there as possible as this looks like our only chance to get together this year.

Your Committee has continued to hold regular meetings during the last few months and all members have developed new skills in navigating through video-conferencing tools such as Zoom. The Committee, in consultation with Hort Innovation, has facilitated the provision of up-to-date crop information to guide the timing of our consumer marketing program to coincide with an anticipated increase in supply. In addition to these marketing initiatives, the Committee and Secretariat continues to liaise with Hort Innovation during the tender process for our plant breeding program. This is our most important project and a number of growers are actively involved in current trials.

The last twelve months have been testing times for most of our growers and recovery a difficult process. Under the circumstances, it is rewarding to see new members joining our ranks. July is the renewal time for our Association membership, and it is more important than ever that growers and industry stakeholders continue to support the Association as paid up members. In the last twelve months, we have continued to provide value to our members over and above the levy that all commercial growers pay through initiatives such as the Noel Day Scholarship Programme, our online grower forum and our supplier giveaways.

Thank you for your continued support of Passionfruit Australia and I look forward to catching up at our events when travel and other restrictions are eased further or, hopefully, removed altogether.

Best Regards,
Dennis Chant