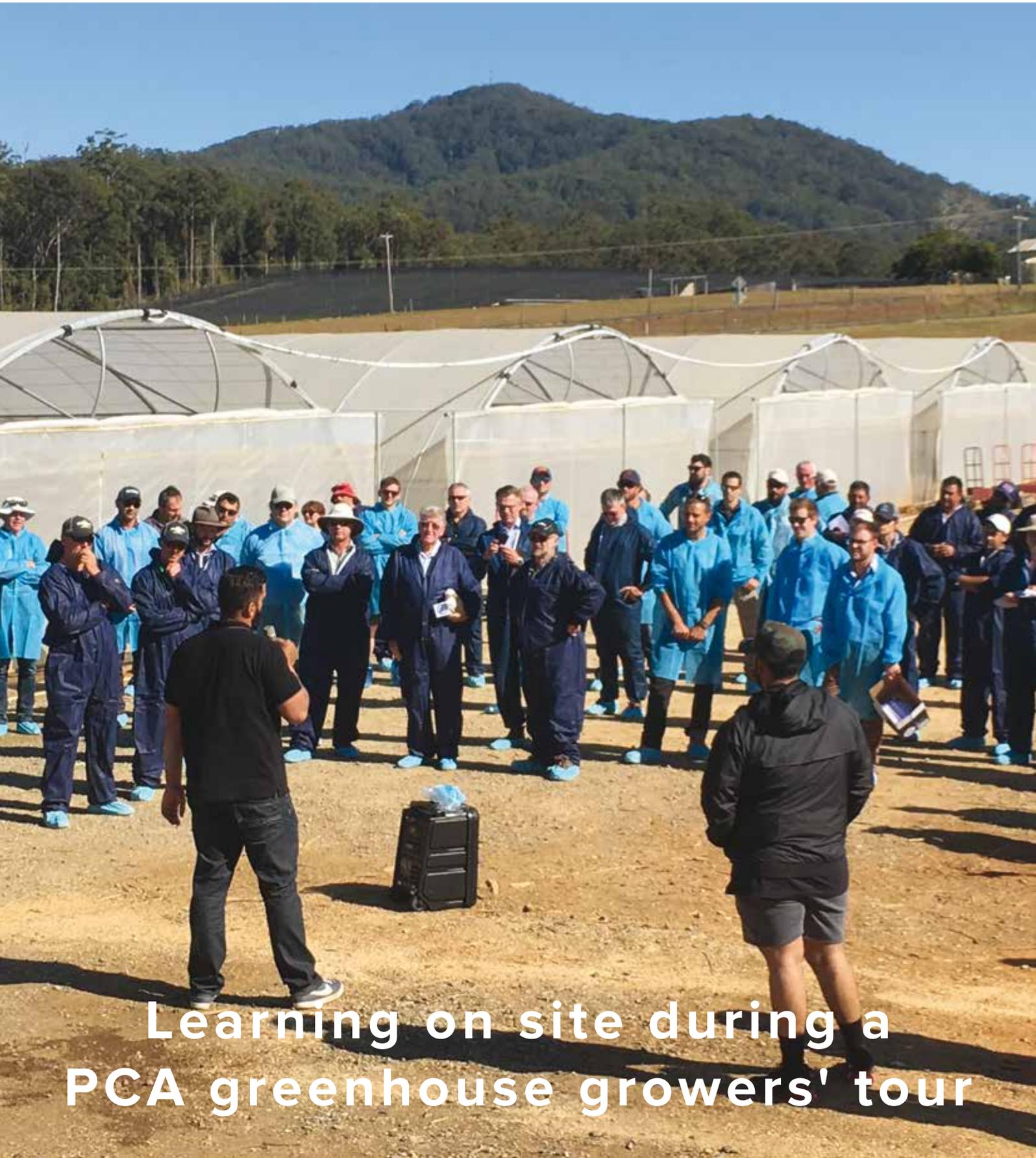




SOILLESS

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FRONT COVER

PCA's Greenhouse Tour of Woolgoolga started with a visit to Paul and Karmjit Singh's cucumber farm at Bucca, on the NSW Mid-north Coast.

Full story page 4



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PCA has gone back to grass roots, reconnecting growers, getting them networking and sharing knowledge and ideas, providing platforms for learning and training to up-skill and re-energise members.

The allied trade are supporting the PCA on their crusade by providing sponsorship to get events off the ground and make things happen.

We organised a regional greenhouse tour showcasing farms in Woolgoolga, Mid-north Coast of NSW. Woolgoolga is a short one hour flight north of Sydney.

The overwhelming positive feedback was encapsulated by Alistair McLean from Powerplants, **"This was one of the best PCA events I have attended"**. And Cameron Steer from Stoller said, **"I met several local people for the first time on this PCA tour, even though I have been coming to this region for several years"**.

A total of eighty PCA members from all over Australia came together on the day. They represented diverse sectors including herbs, flowers, berries, tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, Asian veg, capsicums, eggplants and allied trade.

The itinerary included visiting four greenhouse businesses in one day.

Ace Ohlsson and **Elders** sponsored one of the two buses, bringing growers from the Greater Sydney region to attend.

The tour started with a visit to **Paul and Karmjit Singh** at Bucca, who are highly revered for their growing skills amongst the industry. They were reportedly still picking cucumbers long after others' had stopped harvesting and achieving \$70 a box!

Their medium tech polypropylene greenhouses are managed from a **Priva** computer controller which regulates the climate and fertigates full spectrum nutrients through drip irrigation into bags of sawdust.

In the adjacent field they are preparing to plant raspberries and are always looking at innovations to grow better crops.

Odin Franssen and **Alistair McLean** from **Powerplants Australia** kindly sponsored the farm visit and together with the farm owners, explained how they managed to achieve their premium product.

PCA Director Marcus Van Heijst, from **Priva**, explained how their climate controller provided **"Solutions for a Better Crop"**.

Nearby we then went to **Palwinder 'Sunny' Singh's** low to medium tech cucumber farm, also growing in drip fed sawdust bags. Owner Sunny along with the site visit sponsor **AIS Greenworks' Kynan Smyth** gave an informal, colloquial talk on **"Upgrading for More Control"**.

Everyone enjoyed the access to walk through somebody else's tank room and bounce ideas off the talented mix of growers in the group, IPM consultants, crop specialists, greenhouse manufacturers, government horticulture extension officers and four PCA Board Directors.



Photos L- R: PCA Members Ray Diack, Marcel Olivotto and Marcus van Heijst inspect the blueberries at Costa's Big Farm, along with other local berry growers who each became PCA members to join the tour: Jas Benning, Damien Clothier and Bob Benning.

We then went to the CEX Club at Woolgoolga for a hot lunch and short presentations by;

- **Marcel Olivotto** from **Osborn Consulting** on the **"Greenhouse Construction Code"**.
- **Melinda Simpson** from **NSW DPI** on **"Blueberry Industry Update"**.
- **Martin Vadakekuttu** from **Eco Mix** on **"Cocopeat Growing Media"**.
- **Ion Staunton** from **Pestech** on pyrethrum based natural insect control.
- **Cameron Steer** from **Stoller** on nutrient availability and delivery.

- **Saskia Blanch** from **PCA** on the **Costa PCA Conference 2019 'Seduction by Technology - Knowledge Exchange for Greenhouse Growers'** at The Star, Gold Coast, Queensland July 7 - 10 2019
- **Matt Plunkett** from the **Local Land Service (LLS)** and the **PCA Board** on the **"NSW VegNET project"**

After lunch everyone was keen to go to the **Costa Berry 'Big Farm'** at Corrindi, 40 km north of Coffs Harbour. Over more than 360 hectares, they grow blueberries, raspberries and blackberries which are picked and packed on site.

Continued next page 



Right: The tour began at Paul and Karmjit Singh's cucumber farm at Bucca, followed by neighbouring Palwinder 'Sunny' Singh's cucumber farm (left).



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The Costa Berry 'Big Farm' is a major employer and economic presence on the Mid North Coast region. In the peak harvest season, they have close to 2,000 employees on site.

An increasing proportion of Costa's berries are grown under protective tunnels and in substrate to mitigate the risk from weather and climate impacts and to improve yield. Netting is also used to protect the blueberry crop.

Maurizio Rocchetti, is the pest and disease manager for Costa's 'Big Farm' and he gave an insightful talk in front of their raspberry and blueberry tunnels, backed up by Romina Rader, from the University of New England (UNE) who spoke about their combined trials on "Berry Pollination with Stingless Bees".

(See page 14 for more details on the lessons learnt from the UNE and Costa pollination trials).

The fourth and final visit for the day was at **Manjit Tiwana's** medium tech cucumber farm, near Woolgoolga.

Manjit and site visit sponsor **Brian Clark**, of **Redpath Greenhouses** explained the benefits of "Protecting your Crop" and managing your hygiene for optimum results.



Above: Palwinder 'Sunny' Singh's new crop of cucumbers is drip fed nutrient which is automated by an AIS Greenworks computer controller.

Continued next page →



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