

# SOILLESS AUSTRALIA

Protected Cropping Australia Industry Trade Magazine



# SOILLESS CALENDAR

Dates for your diary for Australia and beyond.

## APRIL

29-OCT 7 Expo 2019 Beijing  
Beijing, China: [horti-expo2019.org](http://horti-expo2019.org)

## MAY

29-JUNE 1 IPPS Conference 2019: joint Australia-New Zealand conference  
Twin Waters Resort, Sunshine Coast, Queensland;  
[ipps.org](http://ipps.org)

## JUNE

11-13 GreenTech 2019  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands; [greentech.nl](http://greentech.nl)  
15-20 GreenSys 2019 International Symposium on Advanced Technologies and Management for Innovative Greenhouse Angers, France; [greensys2019.org](http://greensys2019.org)  
17-20 IX International Symposium on Irrigation of Horticultural Crops  
Matera, Italy; [irrigationmatera2019.com](http://irrigationmatera2019.com)  
24-26 Hort Connections 2019  
Melbourne, Victoria; [hortconnections.com.au](http://hortconnections.com.au)  
24-28 III International Symposium on Growing Media, Composting and Substrate Analysis  
Milan, Italy; [susgro2019.com](http://susgro2019.com)

## JULY

7-10 Costa PCA Conference 2019, 'Seduction by Technology – Knowledge Exchange for Greenhouse Growers'  
Gold Coast, Queensland; [pca2019.com](http://pca2019.com); bookings and enquiries [conference@aomevents.com](mailto:conference@aomevents.com) or (08) 8125 2200 (see details page 7 this issue)

## AUGUST

23-24 2019 UIC Medicinal Cannabis Symposium  
Tweed Heads, New South Wales;  
[unitedincompassion.com.au](http://unitedincompassion.com.au)

## SEPTEMBER

5-8 Asia Fruit Logistica  
Hong Kong, China; [asiafruitlogistica.com](http://asiafruitlogistica.com)

## OCTOBER

9-10 Canadian Greenhouse Conference  
Niagra Falls, Ontario, Canada;  
[canadiangreenhouseconference.com](http://canadiangreenhouseconference.com)  
17-19 PMA Fresh Summit Convention and Expo  
Anaheim, California, USA;  
[pma.com/events/freshsummit](http://pma.com/events/freshsummit)

*Soilless Australia*

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welcome



*Better communications are called for when adverse events occur such as the recent strawberry sabotage that saw Australian strawberries pulled from supermarket shelves here and in New Zealand. See the latest from the FSANZ on page 16. Photo Adobe Photo Stock.*

In this autumn issue of *Soilless Australia* we have packed in a lot of news, information and research to keep you up-to-date with what's happening in the world of protected cropping here and further afield. And, there's a lot happening.

In our extended news section (turn to page 16) we have coverage of new developments in research and science and also revisit the strawberry-tampering affair, which was devastating for strawberry growers but also carries a warning for all food producers.

More than six months after the discovery of a sewing needle in a strawberry, and following an arrest of a disgruntled worker, an independent report has called for unified communication. A report commissioned in the wake of the tampering was delivered in mid February by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). Among seven recommendations is a focus on communication with the call for a central agency to be established to ensure national coordination of messaging and information. This is vital says the report when the tampering affects different businesses in different locations. See all the FSANZ's recommendations on page 16.

On a happier note we take you along on the recent farm tour for Protective Cropping Australia members. The farm tour showcased a range of businesses across the north of Tasmania growing cut flowers, tomatoes and other vegetables and berries. All those we met opened their businesses to members and answered lots of questions. That report starts on page 11.

It was a great two-day tour. Don't miss out on future PCA and associated events. As PCA Chair Nicky Mann notes in her column on page 6: "We work hard to deliver events like these to encourage you to set aside the time to work on your business rather than in it and to spend time learning and sharing your experience and knowledge."

To see what's coming up, including Hort Connections 2019 in Melbourne and the Costa PCA Conference on the Gold Coast, see the calendar (left), which has moved to this page from its previous spot at the back of the magazine then turn to page 7 for a full rundown on the conference and for a registration form.

If you are like me and often read magazines from the back page forward, you will already have heard from the PCA's newly appointed Executive Officer, Jan Davis. Jan is a forthright spokesperson for horticulture and presents a strong argument in her column on page 38 urging growers to value what they do and what they produce. "We want people to buy Australian, but we are not very good at giving them reasons to do just that," writes Jan and then she gives seven very compelling reasons why we need to be very proud and loud about just how good we are.

**Jennifer Stackhouse, Editor**

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# Keeping you up to date

In this news roundup we reveal industry recommendations after the strawberry-tampering affair, get the latest snap shot of the agricultural industry from Rabobank, an industry response to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into the Regulation of Australian Agriculture and discover how to apply for a Churchill Fellowship.

## Strawberry tampering report calls for unified voice in times of trouble

More than six months after the discovery of a sewing needle in a strawberry, an independent report has called for unified communication.

That sewing needle was found in a strawberry punnet in a supermarket in Queensland on September 9. The devastating impact on the industry began after a photo of the strawberry and needle was posted on social media. With millions lost in sales and tonnes of fruit dumped, the scare even saw Australian strawberries pulled from shelves in New Zealand.

Over the following weeks more than 230 incidents were reported in strawberries and other fruit including apples, mangoes and bananas. Most were shown to be hoaxes.

During the crisis the Federal Government increased the maximum sentence for food tampering to 15 years (up from 10 years). Extensive police investigations led to the arrest and charge of a disgruntled employee from the strawberry farm that supplied the first tampered fruit. Court proceedings are still underway. Although no subsequent arrests have been made, fruit tampering appears to have stopped.

A report commissioned in the wake of the tampering was delivered in mid February by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). Among the seven recommendations is a focus on communication with the call for a central agency to be established to ensure national coordination of messaging and information. This is vital when the tampering affects different businesses in different locations. FSANZ is also keen to ensure there is good communication between industry and the police.

"Essentially we are recommending that all jurisdictions across the country review all of their protocols to make sure they've got, in particular, those links with police in place," said FSANZ CEO Mark Booth in an interview with ABC Rural. "We're recommending that we take a good look at traceability issues and there's probably a need for more investment in terms of research in traceability and the use of IT systems in traceability."

Mark Booth also said there's a need to look at national protocols: "There are national protocols agreed for when an incident happens, but there's a bit of a grey area when there is criminal activity involved."

The report also raised questions about the practicalities of measures such as tamper-proof packaging that could reduce strawberry shelf life, and considered whether it was worth the cost and effort to install metal detectors when other contaminants could be used and there was still the issue of tampering once fruit left farms.

The newly formed Berry Australia group should give this sector of the industry a better voice. The group will represent growers of blueberries, blackberries, strawberries and raspberries and is headed up by Rachel Mackenzie previously with Growcom. She has commented, following the tampering, that it will take years for growers to recoup their losses and some may never recover. Some strawberry growers have already left the industry she said.



Mark Booth, CEO, FSANZ



Fresh strawberries were the centre of a crisis in food security in Australia after a photo of a needle in a strawberry in a supermarket was posted on social media.

### Seven recommendations at a glance

- All jurisdictions should review their food incident response protocols - in particular ensuring that formal linkages between regulators, health departments and police are in place for incidents involving intentional contamination.
- When a food-tampering incident occurs across jurisdictions, a central agency should be engaged to ensure national coordination of messaging and information associated with the incident.
- Police should be included in national food incident debriefs when intentional food tampering is involved.
- Triggers for activation and management of intentional contamination of food under the National Food Incident Response Protocol (NFIRP) should be reviewed by the food regulatory system.
- A representative body for the horticulture industry is required to support crisis preparedness and response in the sector.
- Traceability measures within the horticulture sector need to be strengthened. Government and industry should work together to map the current state of play and identify options and tools for enhancing traceability.
- Work on traceability should include collaboration with research bodies and other stakeholders to evaluate technical and innovative solutions to improve quality assurance throughout the supply chain.

# New products and technology

In this round up of what's new and happening we've have an update on chemical disposal costs, hear about a new source of phosphorus in Victoria's Werribee South growing area, meet a grower who is using Yara fertilisers and look back on 25 years of Powerplants with Carl Van Loon.

## Levy increased to assure sustainability of drumMUSTER program



*The levy on the sale of chemicals will increase in July.*

The drumMUSTER and ChemClear programs have been successful stewardship programs in Australia for AgVet chemical containers and chemicals. For the past 20 years these programs have been funded through a levy of four cents per litre or kilogram on the sale of eligible AgVet chemical however the costs of collection and stewardship have continued to increase.

As a result, there will be an increase in the levy on eligible AgVet chemical from four cents per litre or kilogram to six cents. This is the first increase in the levy since inception in 1998 and will come into effect on 1 July, 2019.

The increase will ensure a sustainable future in recycling and allow collection to continue at the 800 plus collection sites that have been established across Australia.

For an interactive map of drumMUSTER collection sites see [drummuster.org.au](http://drummuster.org.au)  
To register any unwanted chemicals visit [chemclear.org.au](http://chemclear.org.au)  
or phone 1800 008 182.



## Firing up phosphate production

The CSIRO has developed a smelting process to produce soluble phosphate for fertiliser from low value ores, eliminating hazardous waste and making production more economically and environmentally sustainable.

Phosphate is a key ingredient in fertilisers and essential for plant health and growth. The \$73 billion global phosphate market continues to grow as demand for fertiliser increases to meet food production needs.

Team leader, Dr Keith Barnard, said the CSIRO-developed PyroPhos process offers a simpler, safer and more efficient alternative to conventional phosphate production processes.

"The PyroPhos smelting process uses high temperature to extract phosphate from ores, producing prized phosphate feedstock and a glassy gravel that can be used in road base construction and Portland cement," he said. "A major benefit of the process is that it can be used on lower grade ores giving phosphate miners and processors the opportunity to increase their productivity in an environmentally sustainable way."

The PyroPhos process is exclusively licenced to PyroPhos, a subsidiary of Process Capital who believe it has the ability to make a major impact. PyroPhos technology has emerged out of decades of research from CSIRO's award-winning Siros melt innovation and pyrometallurgical expertise.