



Johann Joubert hosting AUSVEG Reverse Trade Mission participants from Japan in February 2019. Image courtesy of the Tasmanian Fruit & Vegetable Export Facilitation Group.

## Assisting vegetable growers to achieve their export goals

*Export Facilitators* (VG16085) is a strategic levy investment under the Hort Innovation Vegetable Fund, and is designed to increase Australian vegetable exports by supporting growers to capitalise on commercial business opportunities. In this article, export facilitators share the stories of two growing operations that have benefited from the project and vegetable industry export resources.

### Case study 1: Tassie Pride Glasshouse – Lillico, Tasmania

Dr Johann Joubert is the CEO of Tassie Pride Glasshouse. In this case study, Johann explains the business and how the Export Facilitators project assisted it in export market preparations in 2019.

Out of adversity – following identification of a fruit fly outbreak nearby to Johann's capsicum hothouses in 2018 – came opportunity as domestic supply chains were reviewed, and counter measures were strategised to reduce or remove market weaknesses.

Tassie Pride needed to ensure that it was able to supply markets that would accept its capsicums without compromising quality or speed to market. Once the fruit-fly suspension zone control area was lifted in early 2019, Johann engaged with Tasmanian Vegetable Export Facilitator Ian Locke to identify export opportunities and potential markets.

### International connections

As a first step to better understanding

the interaction with overseas buyers, a visit to Tassie Pride was arranged during the AUSVEG Reverse Trade Mission from Japan in February 2019. Due to quarantine restrictions, Tasmania is the only state in Australia permitted to supply capsicums, eggplants and cucumbers to Japan.

Following discussions in Tasmania, the Export Facilitator gathered further on-location market information and held discussions with importers at FOOD EX Japan in March 2019.

As Tassie Pride gathered further information, a database of knowledge was built. It studied supply chains to international destination, reviewed packing and packaging options and investigated product quality specifications

"Researching markets and your ability to supply them competitively is not an overnight project. You have to consider all options and adapt them to your business," Johann says.

The next step in the export journey was to attend the 2019 Asia Fruit Logistica with AUSVEG and other vegetable levy-payers. Held every year in Hong Kong in September, AUSVEG provides emerging vegetable levy-paying exporters with the opportunity to build their international market knowledge and network with their Australian and international peers.

"This was a tremendous opportunity for Tassie Pride. The AUSVEG export team was fantastic and ensured that I had great touchpoints at every stage," Johann says.

While the initial focus has been on Hong Kong and Singapore, the important high-level strategy has been to bolt exporting onto its existing Australian business. Its current focus is Australia but as production increases, new markets will have to be developed. Tassie Pride is building a new hothouse facility, and combined with modifications to their Lillico base,

production will be from August to June.

"We will always support our key Australian customers because, in many ways, they are our partners – and have been for over a quarter of a century," Johann says.

After talking through options and initial export planning, two members of Tassie Pride's management staff are set to attend an AUSVEG export readiness workshop later this year.

Throughout the export journey, Tassie Pride has sought support from the resources provided by the Export Facilitator project in Tasmania. No one company works in isolation, and assistance from AUSVEG, Hort Innovation and other exporters has been important and rewarding.

"Progress has been cautious. It has been great to have the support of Ian Locke, who provides the network and links to build our own capabilities and engage with the retailers in south-east Asia," Johann says.

### COVID-19 impact

Since January 2020, Tassie Pride has had to put export development on hold due to COVID-19. Developing new export markets requires speedy, direct and capacity for small shipments by air in the early months of development.

"Singapore and Hong Kong were significantly impacted in February and March and following closure of the Australian border, airfreight came to a standstill; particularly for small volumes of highly perishable vegetables, such as our capsicums," Johann says.

Other target markets such as Japan experienced a strong drop-off in demand for food service, and it will be sometime before relationships can be rebuilt with →



WA vegetable growers at the FOODEX Trade Show Japan in March 2019 (L-R) Jim Trandos (WA Corn Growers), Richard Hunt (Sumich), Patrick Fox (Fox Farms) and Pennie Patane (Patane Produce).



Bins of Chinese cabbage loaded in a refrigerated container for export.



Chinese cabbage (wombok) packed for export. Images courtesy of vegetablesWA.

importers. FOODEX 2020 was cancelled and at the time of writing, there is still doubt as to whether Asia Fruit Logistica will be held this year in Singapore.

In Tasmania, the Export Facilitators project has continued to maintain contact with fresh vegetable producers through multi-digital communication channels and newsletters. As Tasmanian restrictions are eased, it will become easier to meet with growers and identify barriers to export post-COVID, as well as determine pathways to the new/next normal export markets. While some issues are still nebulous and unknown, we will continue to work towards the other side.

### Case study 2: Fox Farms – Scott River, Western Australia

When tomato-potato psyllid was found in Western Australia in February 2017, Fox Farms had \$250,000 of potatoes prepared for export. With the risk of reduced export opportunities for potatoes from WA, Fox Farms made the decision to diversify its business and start growing vegetables for export.

The Fox family has been farming in southern WA for three generations and has strong connections in Singapore, so it started exploring export opportunities for vegetables.

Patrick and Shannon Fox and their three daughters are from Scott River, 300 kilometres south of Perth. The abundant water, and mild climate, makes it a great place to grow potatoes and vegetables year-round. The main crops grown are Chinese cabbage (wombok), broccoli, celery and potatoes. Patrick and Shannon have another farm – including a packing facility – in Yarloop, where they grow potatoes and pumpkin. Fox Farms works with several other growers in different regions of WA who grow vegetable lines outside their production window, so that they can supply export customers year-round.

“Export gives us the potential to grow and expand our business beyond the local WA market. We can produce large volumes of vegetables very well, such as Chinese cabbage, so it would be easy to flood the local WA market,” Patrick explains.

“Our export customers can sell large volumes in Singapore and offer us a consistent price for the whole year. While the price isn’t as high as the domestic price at times, it also doesn’t drop as low and allows us to budget and operate at an efficient scale.

“With export, we’re not planting and