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Classroom to Career session facilitator Professor Jim Pratley from Charles Sturt University.

## Classroom to career: Encouraging more people into horticulture

The Annual Vegetable Industry Seminar (AVIS) at Hort Connections 2021 featured a panel discussion around horticultural education in the classroom, and how the knowledge gained could pave the way for a career in the sector. The AVIS was held on Wednesday 9 June at the Brisbane Convention Centre and attracted around 100 growers. Jil Hogan reports.

The *Sustaining Australia: Food and Grocery Manufacturing 2030* report by the Australian Food and Grocery Council found Australia's food and grocery sector could double by 2030. But the horticulture industry continues to face labour shortages. Therefore, it begs the questions: Where are all the future horticulture workers coming from, and how can we educate children about the sector?

### Into the classroom

Education heavily starts in the classroom, and so too can learning about horticulture. Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia (PIEFA) is a not-for-profit organisation that collaborates with government, industry and education organisations to develop and promote teaching materials around agriculture and horticulture.

"The important messages about how wonderful our industries might be need to be crafted in such a way that we get the right message into the classroom, and that teachers don't have to work hard," PIEFA Chief Executive Officer Luciano Mesiti told the audience.

"We know from the research that we've done that 80 per cent of teachers go to Google and type in 'how to grow vegetables' and end up at a website in the United States, and they use a lot of that information in their classroom. So, we've got to move towards more targeted

resourcing that is towards the Australian conditions and Australian experience."

PIEFA has developed two main digital resources, with content for every school year level. Prime Zone encompasses almost 700 teaching resources for teachers about food and fibre, including Prime Zone Academy, which is an eLearning portal with courses relevant to primary industries. Farmer Time is a virtual farm tour that allows teachers and students to connect with producers and ask questions and see what a career in food or fibre could look like.

"We know horticulture as an industry has come such a long way and it's vitally important we get those messages into the classroom," Mr Mesiti said.

### From graduate to the workforce

To help bridge the gap between school and career, PIEFA has launched Career Harvest, a website for prospective students to discover career options, scholarships, and opportunities in horticulture.

Also helping to try and direct more people into the industry is agribusiness recruitment company Rimfire Resources. Since 2004, it has facilitated graduate program GradLink to spark more interest in horticulture.

Rimfire Resources engages host businesses and helps find them an appropriate graduate, who is engaged for a 10-week internship. The program can then also help fund the business to engage

the grad in an ongoing position. Gemma Burger from Rimfire Resources said the vast majority of graduate participants hadn't previously considered horticulture as a career.

"[The program also gives] businesses an opportunity to take away some of that fear, and some of that risk [of] taking on someone who maybe doesn't have any industry experience," Ms Burger said.

A success story is Jack Tate. Jack is a graduate sales agronomist who completed the GradLink program and now works for Imtrade CropScience. He grew up in Melbourne and was studying podiatry at university, before switching to agricultural science and joining the grad program.

"I didn't really learn a great deal about horticulture at university. My first experience was when I was given the chance to move up to the Northern Rivers for a week and undertake a job trial with a macadamia agronomist. From there, I developed a bit of a passion," Jack said.

#### Find out more R&D

Presentations from the 2021 Annual Vegetable Industry Seminar are available to watch at [hortconnections.com.au/speaker-sessions-2021](https://hortconnections.com.au/speaker-sessions-2021).

2021 Annual Vegetable Industry Seminar is a strategic levy investment under the Hort Innovation Vegetable Fund.

This project has been funded by Hort Innovation using the vegetable research and development levy and contributions from the Australian Government.

Project Number: VG20000