



Nation's industry has a bright future



Woolworths CEO Grant O'Brien outlines his beliefs behind the future of Australia's agricultural industry.

The potential of provenance and an enviable safe and clean reputation are two key factors driving Australia's promising agricultural future according to Woolworths Limited CEO, Grant O'Brien.

At the helm of a company that boasts Australia's national supermarket, home to "Australia's Fresh Food People", Mr O'Brien said the country's agricultural industry has a very bright future.

He said several factors underpinned his belief including strong growth in Australia's export markets and our proximity to Asia.

However, it is the clean and safe food reputation Australia has earned which has gone a long way towards meeting and exceeding market demands.

"I've seen first hand how products have leveraged off that," he said.

Although this success is met with certain challenges.

Mr O'Brien said stronger working relationships and better alignment between key government agencies would create even bigger advantages for the industry.

He also said producers enjoy strong national marketing, where if not coordinated correctly can lead to oversupply in certain markets.

The attention paid to commodity-based markets and high-value markets and the relationship which exists between the two has also been closely followed.

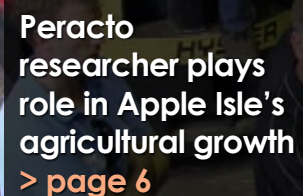
Mr O'Brien said while commodity-based markets have always been the norm; there was an increase to cater for both.

"There have been lots of positives and really good examples of niche products which have carved out a name for themselves, such as Solanato snacking tomatoes," he said.


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Editorial...

Ian Macleod
 Managing Director

At Peracto, we are truly passionate and resolute in our determination to encourage and support the next crop of research scientists.

I have spoken before of the urgent need within the agricultural industry to provide solutions to the dwindling numbers that are signing up for ag careers.

We all feel it. That is why we started our own internal Graduate Development Program, which has grown to support all of our offices throughout Australia and New Zealand.

The program aims to help staff members new to the industry, and the company, better connect and support one another through a number of events and activities conducted throughout the year-long course.

This year Peracto has also stepped out further in partnering with industry to offer a helping hand to young agricultural enthusiasts and their tertiary studies.

We recently partnered with Ag Institute Australia by helping to bring all six state finalists to Devonport, Tasmania for their annual Awards Ceremony.

The awards acknowledge the efforts of the nation's top young student researchers, judging them on a presentation of their agricultural degree research projects.




Ian Macleod with Adam Langworthy (winner - Ag Institute Australia Awards)

A young Tasmanian university graduate, Adam Langworthy (University of Tasmania), picked up the top award, followed closely by Melissa Coventry (University of Adelaide), with third place going to Lachlan Robertson (University of Queensland).

Each participant in the awards ceremony must be praised for their exemplary efforts in their projects. They were truly in a class of their own.

What is also important to acknowledge is Ag Institute Australia conducting these awards. The event not only congratulates our brightest and best minds at work, but showcases the importance and vital role the industry plays in our society.

For more information on this year's winners visit http://www.aginstitute.com.au/national_student_award 



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The finalists in the 2013 Ag Institute Australia Awards

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In some way driving this consumer support for niche products is the importance of provenance in people's lives.

The cultural phenomenon of 'paddock-to-plate', experienced not only in Australia but internationally too, has prompted consumers to scrutinise a product's place of origin.

"As a society we just can't get enough of it," Mr O'Brien said.

He also pointed out that Australia was in prime position to meet this demand.

"In Australia, 97% of fresh food is grown here," he said.

"We have direct access to this market and not many other countries have that, especially on that scale."

In a bid to support the industry and increase awareness, the company has recently launched the initiative, Meet the Grower.

Customers can now scan the QR code on popular packaged fruit and vegetables to find out more about the farmer who grew the product.

Mr O'Brien said the program is being rolled out across Australia and is aimed at providing another avenue where consumers can connect the product to Australian farmers.

The company is aiming to have 100 products involved in the program by this Christmas.

Mr O'Brien is also more than aware of the enormous challenge which faces virtually every part of the agricultural industry, from growers to food scientists.

Attracting and retaining future staff.

A cause he is quite passionate about, Mr O'Brien said there appears to be a belief that farming may not be a viable career option for many.

"This is really not the case," he said.

"In reality farmers are extremely innovative and use state-of-the-art methods and practices."


Like many businesses concerned with the low retention rates, including Peracto, Woolworths runs an agricultural business scholarship program.

This initiative works directly with industry and young people involved in agriculture to offer first-hand

experiences to connect them to their customer, and provide them with paddock-to-plate overviews.

Participants gain an intimate understanding of Australia's food chain, from farm gate to retail outlet.

"In my view there really needs to be a big change in perception," Mr O'Brien said.

"This is a significant challenge for me." 



Woolworths Limited CEO Grant O'Brien with Ian Macleod



Company continues to expand office locations



In more than three decades, Peracto has worked alongside industry and growers in helping to provide a range of independent research, development, scientific and technical services.

The company employs over 50 staff across a growing number of offices throughout Australia and New Zealand, and continues to build its international client base.

Tasmania

Peracto began in Devonport on the north west coast of Tasmania, which is where the company's head office is located. From here, technical and research services extend across the state with staff members also based in Launceston and Hobart. Tasmania provides ready access to a huge range of crops dominated by poppies, vegetables, temperate fruits and grapes. Work is also conducted on cereals, pasture, forestry and pyrethrum. The varied soils and climatic conditions provide

opportunities to work on many agronomic issues in a small area. The company's successful Graduate Development Program is managed from Tasmania.

Victoria

Peracto's Melbourne office is managed by Tom Loveless and builds on the company's historical presence in other parts of Victoria. The team's work encompasses a variety of horticultural crops in the region with the area's climate and variety of soil type ideal for vegetable production including leafy vegetables and brassicas. The famous Yarra Valley has offered an opportunity to pursue viticulture work, along with the extensive broadacre operations around Geelong and further west.

North Queensland

Chris Monsour manages the North Queensland office, which is situated in Bowen. The team's work is carried out along the Queensland coast, between Mackay and Townsville. Trials are conducted in a range of crops including vegetables, melons, sugarcane and tree

crops. The use of their on-site research farm allows for efficacy and GLP residue trials to be conducted efficiently and to the highest standards. The team is also able to grow crops, such as cotton, which are not grown commercially in the Bowen region.

South East Queensland

The company's opportunity to grow in Queensland continues with the Bundaberg-based operations complimenting the Bowen office. The Bundaberg site has a 12 month production cycle due to an abundant water supply, stable climate and available land and serves to cater the growing need for on-the-ground technical and research capabilities. The office, and its surrounds, is situated amongst some of Australia's largest and most diverse crops including vegetable, grapes, citrus and stone fruit. The office covers a 250km radius with citrus and table grape work in Central Burnett in the north, and trials in Biggenden in the south and vegetable and sugar cane trials around Bundaberg and Childers.



Peracto also recently opened an office in Toowoomba, which serves the Darling Downs and Lockyer Valley areas which are home to summer and winter crops in broadacre and horticultural farming systems.

Western Australia

The Western Australian team's work covers all winter rainfall broadacre crops, fruit and vegetables, turf and public health pest control, under the management of Mark Sumner. A unique aspect to their work is the WA landscape itself, which allows the team to work on many pests and diseases under trying weather conditions. This enables them to test products under the worst scenarios, such as powdery mildew in grapevines and seed borne smut diseases in wheat and barley.

South Australia

South Australia is one of the country's key regions for cereal and other broadacre cropping work. Richard Porter and his team have significant expertise in running large trial sites to investigate performance of these crops under numerous trial variables. South Australia also boasts world renowned wine regions. The team also conducts work on a range of other crops including fruit and vegetables.

New Zealand

Peracto has three offices in New Zealand - Pukekohe (head office), Hawke's Bay and Canterbury. New Zealand manager Paul Munro operates the research station in Pukekohe where a number of vegetable, fruit, maize and cereal trials can be conducted. There is a range of crops grown in the surrounding areas with Peracto staff also travelling further afield to

accommodate specialist regions. The Hawke's Bay office includes a leased pip fruit orchard and other cropping land focussed on vegetable trials. The area is home to a very prominent wine region along with a range of other fruits, vegetables and associated crops. Canterbury provides easy access to New Zealand's main cereal and broadacre regions, along with significant pip fruit and grape growing areas. 🌿





Peracto researcher plays role in Apple Isle's agricultural growth

Launceston Office Manager Dennis Patten has witnessed first hand Tasmania's growth and prosperity in the agricultural landscape.

Firstly, how did you get interested in a career in agriculture?

I've always had an interest in agriculture, where on beginning my career I spent 18 years in the Plant Pathology Division at the Newtown Research Laboratory in

Tasmania. From there I then managed the Horticultural Research Centre at UTAS in Hobart. I moved to Devonport in 1994 to work for Serve-Ag which at that time was expanding their research section (later to become Peracto), and I have been based at Peracto's Launceston office for the past seven years.

What main areas of research/field work are you involved in?

My research interests surround plant pathology and entomology with some recent work with herbicides. Wine grapes and apples are my main focus and Launceston is ideally situated for these crops, but our field work covers the whole state with an increasing variety of work in vegetables and cereals.


How is Launceston (if not Tasmania) defined in terms of agricultural landscape?

We have a temperate climate here in Tasmania which is ideal for apples, cherries, berry fruits, poppies, cereals and a variety of vegetables. The cool climate also caters for an expansive wine growing area in the Tamar Valley, situated north of Launceston. It is one of the largest wine regions in Tasmania. The size of the state also means we are in close proximity to most crops and Launceston is situated between the agricultural areas in the south and north west.

How long has the Launceston office been operating? Who works with you? What territory do you cover?

I have been at the Launceston office for seven years and I am joined by Kate Allen (formerly of the Devonport office) who works part-time at the moment. A large majority of our work covers the north, central and north west of the state but we also travel south during the fruit season.

Where are the areas for expansion in regards to business growth?

There continues to be huge growth in poppies, especially in recent years with 30,000 ha grown last season, producing more than 50% of the world's opiates. We have the potential to increase in the number of disease screening trials in cereals and other crops as our cool wet springs consistently provide good disease pressure and reliable results for our clients. 





Biotech crops: A new era in farming?

Australia's farming sector should look to embrace its new "renaissance" in crop biotechnology according to a leading industry group.

Matthew Cossey, Chief Executive Officer of CropLife Australia, was keynote speaker at the annual Peracto conference held earlier this year.

He highlighted Australia's need to embrace new biotechnologies in farming; a branch of science which secures the sustainability and productivity of Australia's ag sector.

Mr Cossey pointed out that if Australia's economy is to remain robust, and not rely solely on boom industries such as mining, the nation must broaden its horizons.

"This is a significant innovation to genuinely put modern agriculture on a long-term sustainable basis," he said.

"It delivers enormous opportunity to the Australian farm sector."

CropLife is the peak industry organisation representing the agricultural chemical and biotechnology (plant science) sector in Australia.

They are firm believers in crop biotechnology paving the way for the industry's future success.

"The path to acceptance of agricultural biotechnology is one of the key issues that is vital to prosperity and sustainability of Australian agriculture," Mr Cossey said.

"However, it is obscured by significant challenges specifically in a regulatory and political environment that threatens important innovation from being made available to farmers."

Beyond Australia, the world has already embraced these new technologies.

A record 17.3 million farmers, in 28 countries, planted 170.3 million hectares in 2012, a sustained increase of 6% over 2011.

What transpires from this growth are the global environmental and economic benefits.

For example, in 2011, the reduction of emitted greenhouse gases due to the cultivation of biotech crops was equal to removing 10.2 million cars (that is 80% of the cars registered in Australia from the road for one year).

Mr Cossey argued that while most of the nation was embracing this potential, some states were hesitant to change.

The whole state of Tasmania is designated GM free; a position Mr Cossey finds untenable.

He points to Australia's burgeoning success in GM cotton and canola, where



GM cotton has reduced insecticide use by 80% and GM canola gives greater yields than non-GM herbicide tolerate canola (National Variety Trials data).

"Regulation of GM hinders Australian agriculture; farmers should not be denied access to biotechnology," he said.

"No state should be left behind as we move into a new future of farming." 