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## Planting the seeds for a secure future

Fostering the young agricultural workers of the future has become a priority for Peracto.

This year, the Company recruited three new graduates from across the country to undertake a 12-month Development Program.

Ian Macleod, Managing Director, said it marked a significant milestone for Peracto and re-enforced one of the Company's main objectives: "...to foster the next generation of scientists in Australia".

Mr Macleod said that, in recent years, enrolments in Australia's agricultural courses had declined.

"There are not enough agricultural graduates to service the industry's needs into the future and the numbers are scary," he said.

Enrolments in agricultural courses across the nation have been falling by 30% in



(From left) Peracto's new Graduate Officers Alison Grimm, Jason Burnie and Belinda Ingram.

recent years, and are continuing to drop.

The lack of skilled agricultural graduates has been fuelled by the exodus of workers to the financially attractive mining

industries.

Last year's Australian Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology

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Peracto's site at Werribee in Victoria.

## Victoria offers first-rate site

To show Peracto's firm investment in the future of Australia's rural industries, the Company has taken over the operations of a key research site at Werribee, south-west of Melbourne, in the heart of Victoria's vegetable country.

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# The best of the best - crop researchers forum



*Peracto's Technical Manager, Mike Hanlon showing his 'hand at fishing'.*



*Peracto's Quality Assurance Manager, Jane Floyed celebrating the Company's attendance at the trade show.*

In February, some of the best of the best in crop research converged on the United States city of Seattle in Washington State to attend the 2008 National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants (NAICC) Meeting.

Over the next few editions of *Peracto News*, some of the key speakers notes will be reviewed. At the meeting, in attendance from the Peracto team were, Managing Director, Ian Macleod, Quality Assurance Manager, Jane Floyed and Technical Manager, Mike Hanlon.

## The Background

The NAICC, founded in 1978, is the national society of agricultural professionals who provide research and advisory services to clients for a fee. The 500 plus members work from bases in 40 states and several foreign countries (including Australia), and have expertise in the production of most crops grown around the world.

Independent crop consultants provide a full range of services to growers in integrated crop and farm management programs, working directly with farmers on a daily basis, advising them in areas such as watershed management, integrated pest management, animal waste management, global information systems technology and research trials.

The primary mission of these professionals is implementing scientific and technological advances to enhance environmental sustainability and profitability on clients' farms.

Services provided by contract researchers are as diverse as the talented professionals who call themselves by that term, but

generally include field trials to test the efficacy of agricultural products, residue studies, and environmental fate tests performed to support applications to the Environmental Protection Agency for pesticide registration permits.

The facilities owned and operated by these highly skilled scientists are located in various regions, and their expertise with varied crops in diverse locations affords access by the marketers of crop inputs to a great depth of knowledge and experience.

Highlights of the meeting included insightful presentations covering a wide array of GMOs and topics such as email and litigation, QA scenarios, eco-labels and emerging technologies.

"Designing Drought Trials," "Creating Success and Opportunity in Your Business," "Excellence through Stewardship," "IPM in Pearadise" — even a "Research for Hire" YouTube presentation - mark just a few of the many presentations given throughout the week.

Ethanol and America's ability to produce food, fibre and fuel were hot topics - in fact, this year's keynote address centred on the former. Ron Lamberty, VicePresident/Market Development Director of the American Coalition for Ethanol, delivered "Fuel Up with Ethanol," a review of ethanol production and anticipated growth in coming years.

As a member of the NAICC, Peracto was in attendance and had constructed an informative trade display for other delegates to review. ■

# Research site to offer ‘state-of-the-art’ services



(From left) Peracto’s Managing Director, Ian Macleod and Victorian Vegetable Growers Association President, Luis Gazzola.

The Peracto team and guest.

The Peracto team with some of the guests.

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Peracto’s Managing Director Ian Macleod, says the Werribee site gives the Company a “leading edge” and an opportunity to expand on its existing research operations across the country. Peracto is Australia’s leading and fastest growing independent agricultural and horticultural research company striving to provide a complete package of services that aid various industries and companies in developing, registering and marketing products in the most cost effective and efficient manner. Peracto has been located at Werribee for almost two years but recently took over the entire site from Eureka AgResearch. The Werribee site will become a pivotal point for cost-effective research with a controlled environment unit. The unit will conduct bio-efficacy trials for herbicides, fungicides, insecticides and fertilisers in a controlled environment. Mr Macleod said, “...the unit had 15 years of proven testing experience with facilities that included a polyhouse, track sprayers, controlled environment rooms and a rainfall simulator”.

“What may take months to trial in the field could take just a couple of weeks using the unit,” he said. “The facilities enable us to closely simulate field conditions for a wide range of issues related to the use of agrochemicals. This is particularly valuable in the early development of new chemical actives or better formulations,” he said. Mr Macleod said the Company expected more broadacre cropping field work to take place at Werribee. “This industry is creeping further south where the southern farming areas are experiencing drier and milder winter conditions that are more suited to the production of cereal, oilseed and legume crops,” he said. “While many of our trials are conducted on farms we also have access to land surrounding the Werribee site where we can conduct trials in-situ cutting costs and time.” The site was officially opened on Tuesday February 12 by the Victorian Vegetable Growers Association President, Luis Gazzola. ■



## Werribee’s new manager

Meet Dr Melissa Ann Palviainen (pictured above), Peracto’s new Regional Manager based at Werribee. The well qualified and passionate scientist is “...looking forward to working closely with the Industry to make a difference”. Dr Palviainen comes to Peracto following her role as a Research Scientist for Victoria’s Department of Primary Industries AgriBio-sciences Centre. Her work involved applying genetic modification biotechnology to increase seed yield in wheat and canola. Prior to this, Dr Palviainen completed her PhD at LaTrobe University that included studies on the genetic modification of lettuce to increase post-harvest shelf life. In coming to Peracto, Dr Palviainen said her main goals were “...to satisfy my inquisitive mind in plant sciences, share knowledge and learn whilst on the job.” “In 12 months I want to have gained wider client confidence and begin to be the preferred contract research provider in Victoria - particularly for controlled environment trials,” she said. ■

# Planting the seeds for a secure future

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(AIAST) conference at Adelaide in South Australia heard agricultural education was suffering because the farm sector had a poor national image.

The University of Melbourne's Faculty of Land and Food Resources Dean, Professor Rick Roush, also didn't pull any punches when he said universities had to "get their act together" to reverse the decline.

He said: "...it was important to lift the image of agricultural courses in schools, in both the country and the city, in a bid to recruit the best and brightest students."

## The Graduates

"The large attraction of being associated with Peracto's Graduate Program was the supportive learning environment and the experience of the staff."

That's according to Devonport-based Belinda Ingram who began the Graduate Program in February.

Belinda completed a Bachelor of Rural Science with Honours at the University of New England in New South Wales last year and says Peracto's vast work had "opened her eyes to the world of crop science".

"Just the mere variety of crops that we work with here has shown me the possibilities offered in crop research after coming from a broad acre cereal growing area at Dubbo in NSW," she said.

"The constant need for up-to-date research as new management tools are developed and new farming techniques are perfected has also been made really apparent."

Mr Macleod said Belinda's response to Peracto's vast work portfolio was encouraging for the Company's program. He said their aim was to "seek out" highly

motivated individuals looking to develop a career path in agriculture.

Belinda enthusiastically explains that her current work portfolio includes seedling trials in a glasshouse looking at the management of phytophthora and pythium which cause "damping-off" in lettuce, capsicum and broccoli seedlings.

Peracto's other graduates are Jason Burnie who is based at Bowen in Queensland and Alison Grimm who is at Peracto's Brisbane office.

Alison believes her Peracto position offers her a more "practical" approach to agricultural research.

Her work, alongside colleagues Mike Hanlon and Paul Florissen, includes trials looking at two-spotted mites in ornamentals as well as pineapple, brassica and turf trials.

In 12-months, Alison hopes to be working for Peracto in a more independent position.

"And in five years I hope that my role and responsibilities within the Company have increased. I also hope to have travelled a bit more," she said.

"The large attraction of being associated with Peracto's Graduate Program was the supportive learning environment and the experience of the staff."



Mr Macleod said the positions required the graduates to demonstrate initiative and common sense in adapting to a range of situations, with the ability to pay close attention to detail.

"Responsibilities include planning and management of research projects, maintaining client contact and business development. As well as the preparation of timely scientific reports for the research, development and promotional needs of our clients and the ability to work with others," he said.

Mr Macleod stressed the importance of allowing the graduates to realise their 'true' potential and to foster the skills that will enable them to remain in the agricultural industry.

"I don't think we will see an increase in young agricultural graduates until we make students realise the vast work opportunities that lie ahead in all sectors of the industry," he said.

"This could be fostered if companies, such as Peracto, work closer with Universities and TAFEs to encourage a more "practical" or "real world" approach to future employment opportunities." ■



Brisbane's Peracto team outside the new office.

## New Qld headquarters

During April, Peracto's Brisbane team moved into their new office at Unit 7, 1 Steel Street, Capalaba. Capalaba is in the former Redlands Shire, which was once the salad bowl for Brisbane and still has some farms and nurseries.

Peracto's Technical Manager, Mike Hanlon said the location allowed staff direct access to the Gateway Arterial which led to various research sites.

Mr Hanlon said the location also

allowed easier access to Redlands Research Station which is owned by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (QDPIF).

"Hopefully this could lead to a more cooperative working relationship with the QDPIF," he said.

Other office staff located at the site are Project Officer, Paul Florissen and new Graduate Research Officer, Alison Grimm. ■