



MEDIA RELEASE

INTERNATIONAL SPINACH CONFERENCE POSTPONED

TUESDAY MARCH 17, 2020 – For immediate release

The fast-moving developments of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has forced the postponement of the Tenth International Spinach Conference until a more suitable date can be found.

The Conference was scheduled to be held in Lakes Entrance, East Gippsland in the first week of May as part of the East Gippsland Vegetable Innovation Days (EGVID) 2020 program.

The EGVID Organising Committee, headed up by Andrew Bulmer and Stuart Grigg, held lengthy discussions with all stakeholders over the weekend and again yesterday about the implications of the rapidly changing environment and government restrictions around travel and events.

With a State of Emergency now declared in Victoria until midnight April 13, there was no alternative but to postpone the International Spinach Conference.

“With the international travel restrictions now in place, as well as the social distance and self-isolation policies required to be implemented, we have, with great regret, chosen to postpone the International Spinach Conference until a more suitable date can be determined” said Mr Bulmer.

The Committee had briefly considered venturing into hosting the conference online but felt that there would be too much content and context missed.

“With no human interaction, and delegates only seeing photos on a screen rather than touching and feeling crops in the field, we just felt that it would have minimal impact” he said.

“Our audio visual plans might perhaps have enabled some of the conference to run as planned and allowed non attendees to participate online, however, running the entire conference remotely would have been a considerable challenge and detracted from so many of the learnings and interactions” said Mr Grigg.

There are a few options already being considered that still involve bringing the high-profile conference event to Australia – as this year was to be the first time in its history that it ventured in the Southern Hemisphere.

“We’ve discussed some potential ideas which include rescheduling the conference to be a stand-alone event later in the year or running it in conjunction with another Australian horticultural event in 2021” said Mr Bulmer.

The International Spinach Conference was to play a role in the East Gippsland region’s recovery from the devastating impacts of a summer dominated by bushfires.

It had attracted significant financial support from industry partner Horticulture Innovation Australia, along investment from gold sponsors One Harvest and Enza Zaden along with supporting sponsors Vilmorin-Mikado, South Pacific Seeds, Terranova Seeds, Omnia, BASF Vegetable Seeds (Nunhem's), Rijk Zwaan, Primo Moratis Fresh, Bejo and Sustainable Farming Solutions.

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The Organising Committee has continued to receive support from the sponsor group to explore all avenues to still hold the conference in Australia.

“Our sponsor family has been very understanding of the situation and if possible, we would love to still be able to bring it to Gippsland to help our local economy recover from what has been an incredibly challenging start to the year – so we will keep working through the options as the situation evolves in the coming weeks and months “he concluded.

The East Gippsland Vegetable Innovation Days are scheduled for the 7th & 8th May and work continues daily in the event field sites at Lindenow in East Gippsland. The Committee is working on how they can and will revise the event to comply with directives and meet expectations around the current circumstances.

The current directive from Victoria’s Chief Health Officer indicates that a person who owns, controls or operates premises in the State of Victoria must not allow a mass gathering* of over 500 people to occur on the premises between noon on 16 March 2020 and midnight on 13 April 2020.

“Due to the “in-field growing trial” nature of the event, EGVID is not the sort of event that you can just postpone and hold at another time - it is still a number of weeks away, so at this stage, we are making plans around how we will modify the East Gippsland Vegetable Innovation Days as we continue to monitor the advice of authorities and keep everyone informed via our Facebook page and on Twitter (@EGVID2020)” Mr Grigg said.

“A lot can and no doubt will happen over the coming weeks and months. All our actions and decisions will certainly be made to comply with the Victorian Government and Australian Health authority directives, with the health and safety of the East Gippsland residents and visitors at the forefront “Mr Grigg concluded.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT JODY O’BRIEN ON 0416 222 899

***A mass gathering is any gathering of five hundred (500) or more persons in a single undivided space at the same time, whether in an indoor or outdoor space – source – premier.vic.gov.au**

ATTACHED GRAPHIC – International Spinach Conference postponed

ATTACHED PICS - Recent pics of EGVID site