



# Food & Fibre Gippsland Inc.

annual report 2022



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WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE TRADITIONAL OWNERS OF THE LAND THAT WE MEET ON.  
WE PAY RESPECT TO THEIR ELDERS PAST, PRESENT AND EMERGING, AND EXTEND THAT RESPECT TO ALL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE.



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# sustainability

## Foreword:

**Minister for Water**  
**Minister for Regional Development**  
**Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy**  
**Minister for Equality**



# The Hon. Harriet Shing MP

The Victorian Government is dedicated to growing prosperous and thriving regional communities. Our commitment is evidenced in the Gippsland Regional Economic Development Strategy and the Gippsland Regional Plan - two documents which drive joined-up thinking and set the foundations for strategic growth and future opportunities for the food and fibre sector.

The Gippsland region is well known for its production of world-leading, high quality produce, its commitment to safe, contemporary, and innovative practices, and its ambitious approach to sustainability and the circular economy.

Food & Fibre Gippsland are vital industry partners in fulfilling our ambitious plans for the sector. The achievements have been made possible through the efforts of a dedicated team, a strategic and supportive Board and a deep understanding of the value of partnerships.

Their work in recent years has focused on supporting development and growth in key sectors such as seaweed, hemp fibre, insect proteins, advanced vegetable processing and developing the Gippsland Trusted Provenance branding.

Positive industry and sector relationships are key to Gippsland keeping pace with climate change adaptation, evolving consumer tastes and sensitivity to the origin of products. To meet future needs, the industry must also adjust to increasing automation and artificial intelligence, expectations of faster freight delivery, sustainable packaging and supply chain resilience.

Food & Fibre Gippsland has demonstrated its significant contribution to this effort.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the Gippsland region.

## Foreword:

**Minister for Training and Skills**  
**Minister for Higher Education**  
**Minister for Agriculture**



# The Hon. Gayle Tierney MP

Victoria's world-class agriculture sector accounts for a quarter of Australia's agricultural production and leads the nation in food and fibre exports. Gippsland's farmers and food producers are key contributors to this success and vital to Victoria's ability to deliver premium food and fibre produce that is sought-after regionally, nationally and around the world.

The Victorian Government is committed to working with industry, communities, and trading partners to ensure that our agriculture sector continues to grow. Our Agriculture Strategy, 'Strong, Innovative, Sustainable: A new strategy for agriculture in Victoria', provides a vision for Victorian agriculture in a world of change and identifies clear areas of focus and investment by government out to 2030.

The Food and Fibre Gippsland Strategy complements this State-wide vision by prioritising programs on the circular economy, sustainable emerging commodities, sovereign capability and

advanced manufacturing to support the region.

The Victorian Government understands the importance of organisations like Food & Fibre Gippsland in providing leadership and supporting farmers through the delivery of programs to build the sector's strength. This includes focusing on sustainability and modernisation, emergency preparedness and growth to increase the value and output of production and exports.

Through the Agriculture Climate Change Sector Pledge, we are investing in practical measures to support the sector to respond to climate change and position Victoria as a leader in low-emissions agriculture.

Congratulations on a fantastic year, I look forward to our continued collaboration to ensure the ongoing success of Victoria's food and fibre sector in the Gippsland region.

# Welcome from the Chair

A lot happens in a year! I'm not going to tell you the story of COVID – we all know the impacts on our lives, our work, and our communities. Suffice to say, the work of F&FG was also affected.

Food & Fibre Gippsland's task is to work to make our sector better, stronger, more efficient, more environmentally aware (think circular economy), and more profitable.

This year, we redeveloped our website and membership database to enable better connections between us all and we build on our strengths as a Cluster – we want to see all businesses thrive and prosper – as our CEO is wont to say – “A rising tide floats all boats”.

We will continue to source funding for projects, as that is the way to ensure we continue to be relevant and successful; after all, we do not receive money from government for our day-to-day operations. You will see many projects listed elsewhere in this report – projects that make our industry better.

Looking at our website [www.foodandfibregippsland.com.au](http://www.foodandfibregippsland.com.au), we see there are close to 6500 farming families in Gippsland who contribute to about 250 small communities. There are just under 15,000 people employed in the ‘food and fibre value-chain’ in Gippsland, which is 14.2% of the

Gippsland working population!

Food & Fibre Gippsland continues to be a project-centric organisation – we choose what we do carefully and mindfully – asking the question, “Does this benefit food and fibre in Gippsland?”



We have many people and organisations we wish to acknowledge, to thank for their support, skills, and time that they have contributed to Food & Fibre Gippsland Inc. - our members and partners, our funders, media representatives, and all those who collaborate in our work – thank you!

Our organisation exists because of the work of our staff and contractors. I want to offer my personal thanks to the team that enables us to do what we do: Our CEO Nicola Pero, Ben Gebert, Tova Wilshansky and Jody O'Brien (good luck in your new endeavours), Barb Radley and Phoebe Hicks (welcome aboard to you both), Bonnie Dawson, Julian Hill, Elena Nauta, Luke Townsend (welcome Luke, as our newest graduate student), Amanda Gould, Stacey Borg, Brodie Anderson, Ben Macdonald, Kellie Lewis, and Amber Potocnik.

Welcome also to two new program consultants, Janet Robertson and Peter Mogridge; and thanks to David Grimmond for all his work on our export development.





My thanks to Board Members - Katrina Wallis (Deputy Chair), Kylie Holmes (Treasurer), Andrew Bulmer, Stephen Angus, Brian Davey, Sallie Jones, Michael Grogan, and Simon Johnson - you've all contributed your skills and time to the work of the board.



And thank you to our Observers for your attendance, input and support over this past year, being Sara Rhodes-Ward from Regional Development Victoria - Gippsland; Chris Buckingham from Latrobe Valley Authority; Bruce Weston from Agriculture Victoria; Grant Radford as the previous CEO of TAFE Gippsland; and Leigh Kennedy from Federation University.



Sadly, this year several of our Board members are standing down, some after many years' involvement. Thank you to Stephen Angus, and to Sallie Jones who was a founding member of F&FG Inc. After more than 10 years' outstanding service to F&FG and its precursor East Gippsland Food Cluster, Andrew Bulmer is stepping down from the board. Andrew will be missed by us all. Thanks Andrew.

Sincerely,

Barry Rogers  
Chair





Food  
& Fibre  
Gippsland  
is for purpose -  
your success and  
prosperity is what  
drives us every  
day.



Food & Fibre  
Gippsland

# Gippsland Smart Specialisation (GS3)

**F**&FG's successful partnership with the Latrobe Valley Authority (LVA) continued throughout 2022, with a range of new opportunities being explored as part of the Gippsland Smart Specialisation Strategy (GS3).

For new readers, the GS3 is a regional development initiative that focuses on collaboratively advancing new industry opportunities, with the potential to drive long-term, sustainable economic and social advantage for the Gippsland region. Utilised widely throughout Europe, the methodology has been adopted by Smart Specialisation as a component of new regional development programs and is a stage gate for EU member-nation funding.

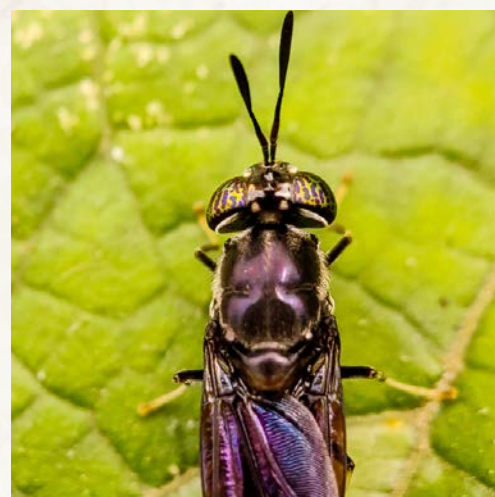
In practice, Smart Specialisation brings together individuals and businesses across the industry, government, community, and education and research sectors to collaboratively build an evidence base for the establishment of new, innovative regional opportunities.

Having diversity of experience, representation, focus, and influence allows for robust assessment of new opportunities, and ensures all voices have an opportunity to advocate for their wants and needs.

Within the food and fibre stream of the GS3, three key themes have increasingly influenced the opportunities under development across the 2022 period.

- The circular economy
- Sustainable emerging commodities
- Sovereign capability and advanced manufacturing (see page 12)

**The concept of a circular economy** is one in which there are continual efforts to reduce environmental impacts of production and consumption through



minimising waste; designing out waste from systems; reusing; recycling; repairing; repurposing; and generally aiming to ensure that the lifecycle of a product does not end with it becoming waste.

A truly circular economy also provides new economic opportunities and fosters innovation, delivering improved social, community, environmental and economic outcomes. The core tenets of the circular economy are built into each of the food and fibre stream GS3 opportunities; however, some are particularly focused on driving circular economy outcomes for the region.

These are the Circular Economy Trading Platform and the Organic Waste Mapping projects.

The Circular Economy Trading Platform project originally focussed on building a tech-enabled platform for producers to trade surplus stock. Reflecting on one of the more powerful aspects of the circular economy - designing waste out of the system - the project team and stakeholders set about looking for opportunities to mitigate waste at its source. This train of thought led to discussions with Empauer, a leading global software developer and sustainability consultancy. Empauer has developed software products in conjunction with RMIT and the Fight Food Waste Cooperative Research



Centre (CRC), that allow businesses to comprehensively assess their supply and production processes, and identify the true cost of waste to their business.

F&FG has secured a world-first regional license of these products, Direct and Ecodex, which will allow us to run assessments with member organisations to identify and mitigate waste at its source. These products are used by global leaders, such as Nestlé, for their sustainability modelling.

With staff undertaking training in the closing months of 2022, this capability will be rolled out in 2023 and marks a very exciting chapter within our organisation.

Across the food and fibre value chain, waste – or the non-consumed fraction – is an issue that plagues everyone, from the producer through to the consumer (along with the environment!).

Whilst the Empauer tools aim to mitigate waste at its source, waste streams will still exist elsewhere. To effectively utilise these streams, one must know where the waste is; its seasonality; how much of it is produced; and what it could be used for. F&FG commissioned a comprehensive regional organic waste map through experts at Food Security Solutions and Buhler International in order to answer some of these questions. With release imminent, the map has utilised input from a broad range of producers, processors and other waste-producing organisations to develop an actionable resource that will inform new industry opportunities and potential investment in the region.

**The Sustainable Emerging Commodities** stream of the GS3 places focus on new, innovative commodities for the region, and how they could be locally grown and processed to generate maximum value. Seaweed and insects have been joined by industrial hemp within the project complement, with collaboration between F&FG, LVA and Regional Development Victoria (RDV) driving the formation of enquiry work around this new (but also very old) opportunity. Work on industrial hemp will begin in earnest in 2023, with research and initial stakeholder discussions having taken place across 2022.



Within the underwater realm of seaweed, project officer Elena Nauta has successfully guided the completion of the Deakin University and Blue Carbon Lab coastline study, which analysed the suitability of the Gippsland region to host a commercial seaweed industry. The report highlighted a high level of opportunity for the region; identified promising species; and laid out some of the potential end-use products for seaweed grown and harvested here. The report has gained significant acclaim, generating support from the Minister for Regional Development, in addition to a broad array of corporate, government and community interests. F&FG is collaborating with these stakeholders to meaningfully advance the opportunity. Besides the work on the report, F&FG's proactive stance in this space has led to our involvement in forums such as Seafood Industry Victoria's strategic

planning process; conversations with international venture capital funds; and increased knowledge-sharing with our European Union counterparts.

**Sovereign capability** and advanced manufacturing may be less familiar terms to some readers. Over the last two years, with increasing supply chain disruptions, it has become progressively important to develop resilience within local supply chains. Sovereign capability refers to our own country / region / areas' abilities to develop the products and services that our society and industries require, whereas advanced manufacturing refers to innovative, responsive manufacturing and value additions to base or primary products.

Examples such as the AdBlue or fertiliser shortages (which are ongoing) are prominent; however, often unseen are those such as the many food, textile and technology inputs that Australia imports from overseas.

F&FG has driven collaborative processes around local fertiliser production, feed production (using insects), ingredient production (Advanced Vegetable Processing) and is now delving into building products and textiles through the work in industrial hemp. Many of these work streams will ramp up in 2023, with more exciting developments to come.



# Supporting the Vegetable Industry and its People

The past twelve months have seen the first year of implementation of VegNET Phase 3.0, nationally coordinated by AUSVEG and regionally delivered by Food & Fibre Gippsland's regional development officer (RDO), Bonnie Dawson.

VegNET Gippsland has continued to make progress towards key focus areas of the five-year Regional Extension Strategy. Adopting an agricultural innovation systems approach, the project continues to review and refine activities to reflect the needs and desires of levy payers through the Regional Extension Advisory Group (REAG), one-on-one engagements and other mechanisms such as the EnviroVeg benchmarking report, each of which have reaffirmed the strategy's focus areas and cemented the project's plans.

VegNET Gippsland has continued to work closely with AUSVEG and other levy-funded projects to deliver biosecurity and pest and disease management activities. In May, two workshops/masterclasses were delivered with AUSVEG and Agriculture Victoria's Area Wide Management project in Korumburra and Lindenow, which were attended by 21 growers and industry members.

Bonnie's close connections with agronomists across the region have enabled her to efficiently disseminate resources about recently-established pests, Serpentine Leafminer and Fall Armyworm, enabling comprehensive preparedness across the region. A group of these agronomists were brought together in East Gippsland in May to participate in an in-field diagnostics trial for Fall Armyworm. Additionally, an online Q&A webinar on Serpentine Leafminer was delivered in September



2022, in conjunction with the other VegNET Victoria project.

Initial funding from the Commonwealth Government's Future Drought Fund for a soil moisture monitoring demonstration trial finished in June 2022. This project brought together local agronomists, Agriculture Victoria's Irrigation Extension team, their new horticulture industry development manager for the region, and the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority to understand the process, benefits and challenges of adopting soil moisture monitoring in intensive vegetable production.

A field day, which was attended by 12 growers and industry members, provided attendees with the opportunity to hear reflections about the project from host grower Walter Chadwick, warts and all. Two fact sheets were developed out of the project and have been made available on the Advanced Irrigation Technology page of the Future Drought Fund website.

Due to the challenges imposed by unseasonably wet conditions through the irrigation season, the host grower has agreed to continue with the trial over the coming summer (2022-23). This project has acted as a foundation for further trials to be funded by the Future Drought Fund through a "Hub-Hub" project – a collaboration between the Victorian, WA and NT Drought Resilience



Hubs – and is currently being extended out to three other vegetable growing sites across Gippsland.

VegNET Gippsland's support of the Raising Aspirations in Careers and Education (RACE) region-wide project has continued. This has involved integrating content that represents the vegetable industry within the RACE professional development program, delivered to teachers across Gippsland. Additionally, the RDO has brokered connections between vegetable growing businesses and the program, resulting in excursions for a number of different schools from across the region, including Maffra, Sale and Swifts Creek.

Bonnie has also been involved in overseeing the delivery of a new program, 'Informed & Supported Workers' (funded by Agriculture Victoria) and brokering connections with industry. This program is funded until

June 2023 to deliver activities that support seasonal workers from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) background. Contractors Peter Mogridge and Janet Robertson have undertaken a comprehensive consultation process, engaging with 16 growers; CaLD workers from these businesses; and a number of other agencies to develop a program of activities which will be delivered over the coming six months, to improve the experience for CaLD workers and businesses alike.

The VegNET project has enabled Bonnie to participate in a number of professional development opportunities and undertake a technical leadership role amongst her VegNET colleagues with regard to water management. As a result, she had the opportunity to attend the Irrigation Australia Conference in Adelaide and also accept an invitation to adjudicate Zimmatic's Trailblazer Sustainable Irrigation Awards, involving farm visits in South Australia, New South Wales and Tasmania.

At present, Bonnie is working towards a number of significant activities which will be delivered in the first half of 2023:

- A study tour of growers and vegetable industry members from the University of Oregon, who will be travelling through Gippsland in



February 2023;

- The Victorian Vegetable Innovation Days, which will be held in Catani in April 2023 and replace the East Gippsland Vegetable Innovation Days (EGVID); and
- As a member of a project control group for Digital Innovation Smart Agriculture (DISA), an agricultural technology conference/expo which will be delivered by East Gippsland and Wellington Shire Councils in May 2023.



*We connect and grow*

GIPPSLAND'S **\$7 BILLION**

*food and fibre sector*



# Workforce Employment

As many of you know, F&FG has been partnering with Jobs Victoria since January 2017 when the program was first named Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN). We were then successful in the next iteration, being Jobs Victoria Employment Services (JVES) with our program delivery named Connect2Employment. Since starting with the Jobs Victoria programs, we've placed almost 700 people into jobs right across the Gippsland region.

These participants have been long-term unemployed, or facing long-term unemployment. The program provides mentoring support; courses, certificates and programs to get as ready-for-work as possible; procures PPE and uniforms; and supports with challenges such as vehicle repairs, driving licences, personal presentation needs for interviews, and much more.

Our focus areas are food and fibre, manufacturing and processing, agriculture and land management, seafood and fishing, forestry, tourism and hospitality. We have some flexibility to place participants outside these specialist areas and many of our members have benefitted, some on multiple occasions, from securing workforce needs through the program.

We encourage every one of you to engage with Amanda Gould, who leads

the JVES program to discuss the needs of your organisation – no matter how small or large!

We've facilitated and collaborated to deliver a wide range of experiences and initial basic training for participants, including 'Serving the Valley' and 'Get Serving' for hospitality; 'Get Growing' for



horticulture connection and awareness; 'Forestry Taster'; and on-the-job experience at events.

Just recently, the 2022 Melbourne Food & Wine regional activation, named 'Village Feast', was hosted in the beautiful village of Thorpdale in Baw Baw Shire. So many of our members were present and profiled - it was a weekend full of pride to see the glorious provenance of Gippsland and the expertise of our growers, makers, producers, chefs and more!

Part of the weekend's activations was a major lunch event in the Thorpdale Hall called 'Provenance, Fire & Wine', coordinated by Farmer's Daughters and their executive chef Alejandro Saravia. Through great collaboration, we provided all the serving team through our JVES participants - and the F&FG JVES team, including our CEO who came uniformed up and ready to serve!

It was a fantastic day, exquisite food and wines from Gippsland providers, incredible cheffing by Alejandro and his team, and our participants - though exhausted by day's end, had a blast and came away with hands-on experience in serving, clearing, and engaging with a fast-paced, excited and hungry audience. Success for all - a huge thank you to everyone involved, especially Amanda, Stacey, and Kellie for their management and co-ordination.



We know the workforce challenges being experienced are not going to disappear any time soon. There isn't a 'magic bullet' solution to this, but there are lots of options that can contribute to reducing the burdens being felt right across our food and fibre sector. If you have interest in securing a direct labour agreement through migration, then please reach out and we will connect you to our member, Regional Migration Australia. We're discussing with them the hosting of a webinar very soon, to inform on the migration options available and how even a small business with less than five employees can utilise these. A question and answer session is proposed to be included in the webinar. This will be well worth the attendance for all our members (and broader industry).

Engagement with students (our future workforce!) to excite them about the food and fibre sector is paramount. We can't just encourage them to 'think about agriculture', we want them to imagine food and fibre more broadly and the values of contributing to a sector that helps feed the nation and the world. Values - and contributing to a better world - are important to youth!

Our whole F&FG team are working hard to deliver employment outcomes through our JVES program; collaborating with education, skills and



training providers; contributing to discussions in connecting pathways from leaving school, to TAFE, to university; supporting opportunities through direct migration; advocating for more micro-credentialling opportunities; delivering support programs for seasonal workers; and much more.

**Our members,  
industry  
partners and  
stakeholders  
are at the heart  
of everything  
we do.**



# Victoria Drought Hub - Gippsland Node Leader

Eight of these strategically important Hubs have been funded across the country through the Future Drought Fund (FDF), with one located in the State of Victoria. Each Hub is funded from 2021 through to 2024.

The Victoria Drought Hub (VDH) is highly collaborative and includes equal partners comprising University of Melbourne; Federation University; Deakin University; Latrobe University; Agriculture Victoria; and five Regional Node Leaders, being Food & Fibre Gippsland; Southern Farming Systems; Birchip Cropping Group; Mallee Regional Innovation Centre; and Riverine Plains.

Six programs of work are currently being delivered by F&FG:

- Future Fodder (in conjunction with Gippsland Agricultural Group)
- Green Dams (in conjunction with South Gippsland Landcare Group)
- Multi-sensor Technologies for Irrigation Management (collaboration between our AUSVEG VegNET program and the Drought Hubs in Southwest WA, Northern WA, and Northern Territories)
- Mental Health Training for Community Health Services

Professionals (collaborations currently being formed)

- Advanced Lignite Fertilisers (in conjunction with Arkho Industries and Latrobe Valley Authority)
- Management of Drought Soils (in conjunction with Gippsland Agricultural Group)

A National Adoption Officer program has been further funded to the national Drought Hubs network and F&FG is placing its Gippsland resources with



West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, and Gippsland Agricultural Group.

Maximising all collaboration opportunities, F&FG has been a steering committee member and contributor to the Agriculture Victoria Building Drought Resilience Pilot in Gippsland, of which intelligence and outcomes are cross-pollinated with all the drought-related work occurring.

An Agriculture Innovation Hub has now been funded across the Drought Hubs networks and whilst this runs independently of the Drought Hubs themselves, there is still strong alignment and connectivity. We will be making more announcements and public communications as the business planning finalises for the Victoria Agriculture Innovation Hub, which will have core focus areas including:

- trusted exporter of premium food and agricultural products
- champion of climate resilience to increase productivity, profitability and sustainability of the agricultural sector
- world leader in preventing and rapidly responding to significant pests and diseases through future-proofing our biosecurity systems
- mature adopter, developer and exporter of digital agriculture.



Whilst work has been busy and intense with the Drought Hub for our team, we would prefer to see more regular and informed communications for the work of the Hub across Victoria. To enhance this, our team will be generating its own regular communications for the Gippsland activities, starting in early 2023. Please either keep connected on our social media channels or contact our Marketing and Communications Manager, Barb Radley, to subscribe to the drought-specific comms program.

Whether traditional drought, or green drought, climate impact is becoming more intense through what seems like ever-expanding extremities, and with more regularity - so this work all forms a huge part in working with industry and community to enhance preparedness, resilience, innovation, and adoption.

Gippsland has always had its fair share of climate and nature-related crises, but we would like to take a moment to extend thoughts and support to our food and fibre colleagues across Victoria (and interstate) who are still battling these incredibly impacting floods.





# Food Innovation Australia Limited (FIAL)

We are so appreciative of the funding, collaboration and knowledgeable support from FIAL over the past several years. This year we completed our funding commitments through a successful acquittal; but our relationship doesn't end there, as we continue to build on the future for Gippsland – and our region's role on a national platform. We continue to meet regularly with the FIAL team, engage in discussions with our three original fellow clusters across the country, and now mentor the new clusters forming and storming under the guidance and support of FIAL.

What a great team at FIAL; what incredible knowledge they hold - and with such willingness to share! Their passion for collaboration, desire in driving innovation and opportunities for value-adding, and their strong purpose in promoting the proven value of working in cluster ecosystems is endless, incredibly worthy, and is embedded in the DNA of Food & Fibre Gippsland.

A special thanks to Dr. Barry McGookin for facilitating an incredibly stimulating workshop recently, focussed to 'low hanging fruit', and short to medium-term opportunities in Gippsland. We're looking forward to releasing the outcomes of that work very soon.

To Mirjana Prica as FIAL's Managing Director and her entire team, we sincerely thank you for all your support and we're really excited about building opportunities to work together moving forward. Gippsland has a major role to contribute in doubling Australia's agribusiness value-add by 2030.



# Export Development

LOGISTICS

Over the past year, our SME Gippsland Connect and the Package Assisting Small Exporters programs have been successfully delivered and acquitted. Impacted by bushfires and COVID, innovation was paramount to successful outcomes. Virtual masterclasses and workshops in market intelligence were delivered for Japan, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the USA.

A knowledge portal to assist in mitigating barriers to export has been developed, to inform on labelling and composition regulations, tariffs and quotas, transport, and key in-country regulators and roles for Malaysia, Singapore, India, UAE, and Hong Kong. Competitor reviews were delivered for Canada, China, India, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, UAE, UK, USA, and Vietnam.

The Gippsland Trusted Provenance brand development has been strategically important to our export development work with international procurement supply chains, Trade Commissioners, and Global Victoria all providing highly complimentary feedback.

To mitigate COVID limitations on Gippsland exporters visiting buyers, and buyers visiting Australia, the F&FG team delivered a series of stunning videos

highlighting producers, their story, their location, and the clean, green and trusted provenance of the region. We encourage you to view these here: <https://www.foodandfibregippsland.com.au/sme-export-support-program>

Discussions are ongoing with a premium and exclusive retail chain throughout the



Middle East region (and opening in the UK during 2023), who are reviewing a range of producers and products our team has presented to them. We expect the next stage to progress early in 2023 and work is now underway with the same focus to Southeast Asia.

Opportunities are lucrative for Gippsland producers, at all scale of operations. We are working as hard for our larger exporters as we are for our smaller and emerging operators, where consolidation is key to entering new markets. Watch this space as our clean, green, trusted provenance of Gippsland gets more exposure on the world stage!



# Members & Strategic Partners

With our membership numbers growing each year, we continue to expand on the portfolio of member benefits. These include:

- Grants Guru member access, where our members can seek and source a range of grants to suit their business needs. Grant writing assistance is also available
- A new Jobs Board for members to list vacancies
- Members able to list and promote their events
- Ability for members to post and list special offerings
- Reduced membership pricing to join the Victorian Chamber of Commerce & Industry
- Preferential member arrangements for Gippsland Trusted Provenance branding
- Access to Export Connect development portal for a year at zero cost (rolling out shortly)
- Series of member networking events across the region (networking in Stratford this month!)

We're currently collaborating on several options to offer a range of energy opportunities - as this is an area where everyone's costs are starting to

skyrocket. Keep an eye out for the Wilandra Farms Smart Power event coming up early next year, where they are looking to share knowledge and practise on how they have reduced their dairy farm irrigation energy costs from around \$100k per year to under \$15k. Over the past year, one of our strategic partners, Leading Edge Energy, worked



with six of our existing members and helped them save a combined \$132,445 on their energy costs – awesome member-to-member/s collaboration! You can read more about that case study [here](#).

The fabulous international award-winning Craig Stelmack who owns Bear Bites Media, swapped out his knives as a chef to pick up a camera and lens and is weaving that photographic magic across the region with many of our other members and their products. His work is a feast for the eyes, and pun intended there! Take a peek at some of Craig's beautiful work [here](#), including working with members Northern Ground, Love in a Jar, Tinamba Hotel, Paynesville Pantry, Exquisite Treats, as just a few examples.

Please do check out our social media channels to see what many of our members are doing, the awards and accolades they are receiving both nationally and globally; Maffra Cheese Co., Sailors Grave Brewing, Gurneys Cider, Tinamba Hotel, Farmers Daughters, Good Land Brewing Co., and many more. We're always happy to make introductions between members (and beyond) and enhance the collaborations - with plenty already occurring.



We're very interested to hear from our members about joint procurement interest. We think there are opportunities across a range of areas. Just a few examples are insurance, freight, energy solutions, fuel, risk consulting, farming equipment, and PPE for workers. We'd love to get your thoughts and suggestions on this, so we can put focus to bringing new offers to help your business overheads and costs. Phoebe Hicks as our new Relationship Manager is eager to hear your views, so please reach out.

Phoebe will also be conducting some surveys and discussions with you to understand your priorities over the next 1-3 years, as this helps inform our work and supports us bringing benefit and offers that fit your needs.

As our members and partners, please tag us on your social media posts so we can share your success, or email Phoebe with some pictures and notes so she can post on our sites for you. Our social media channels are mentioned below, so just add us onto your post and we will share, share, share!

- [Instagram](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Vimeo](#)



We're proud of each and every one of our members and partners and we hope you are proud of the work we do with you and the Gippsland food and fibre sector, so we encourage you to include in your own postings:

#foodandfibregippslandmember

#foodandfibre

#gippslandtrustedprovenance



A massive thank you to all our members and partners! Our Local Government Authority partners and government agencies we work and partner with – the policies, levers, and influence of government at all levels is so vital. The world is moving from a linear economy into a circular economy, so this partnering becomes even more important as we bring ‘all voices to the table’ to grow our region's food and fibre production, supply chain connections, and profiling of our outstanding restaurants, cafés, entertainment and hotel venues.

We are entering that crazy, silly season of Ho Ho Ho and all things Xmas. Please support local – we have incredible and amazing produce where you can order online and send direct, arrange gift vouchers for family and friends. Please use our member portal to upload some pictures and posts as specials for Xmas and we'll share and promote these out to the public!

Have a great year ahead, engage with us so we can work to amplify your success, help find solutions to your challenges, connect you to others for growth and diversification, make the right introductions for export, find you workers, bring presenters to the region that you want to hear from, arrange courses and webinars for areas of interest ... and more!



# Gippsland Trusted Provenance Brand

Have you checked out our videos celebrating and profiling some of the provenance, producers, locations, and stories? Take a few minutes, look and share the love we feel for our region and food and fibre producers with these stunning digital assets: <https://www.foodandfbregippsland.com.au/gippslandtrustedprovenance>.

Gippsland Jersey were an early adopter with the branding, embedded within their labelling since March 2022 – and of course if we are talking produce, provenance, and regional producers, then Gippsland Jersey are leading ambassadors for shouting that message from the rooftops – thank you for flying the Gippsland produce flag so strongly GJ!

We're working with several members on implementing the branding into their labelling and packaging ... so keep an eye out for Maffra Cheese and Village Dairy as theirs launches soon. And we're working with Farmer's Daughters for brand support, which will highlight even more their commitment to the profiling and promoting of Gippsland produce – Alejandro Saravia and the FD team are so committed to supporting regional provenance through their new restaurant in Federation Square – Victoria, and specifically to Gippsland provenance through Farmer's Daughters restaurant in Collins St, Melbourne. Watch this

space for some exciting announcements during 2023!

Our export discussions with Global Victoria representatives and Trade Commissioners have been outstandingly positive. They love the concept of having a strong regional brand, pointing directly to regional provenance, and supported



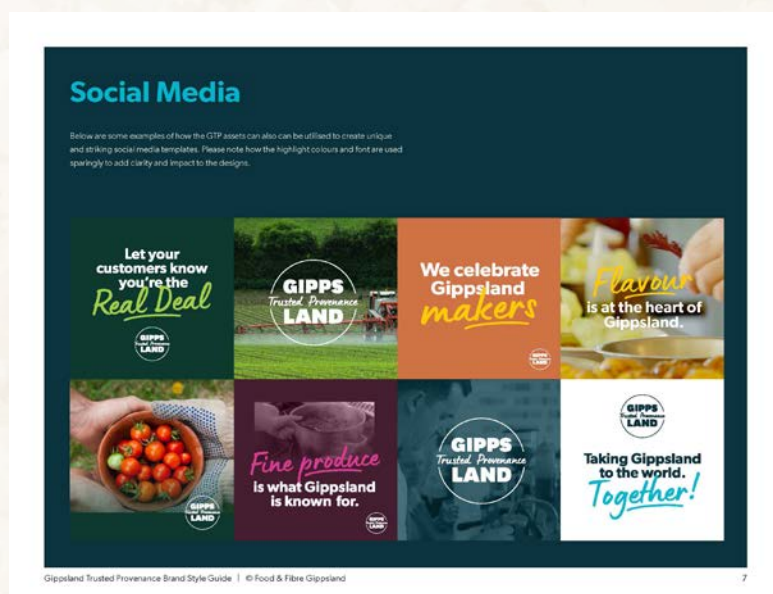


# GIPPS *Trusted Provenance* LAND

with the professional videos as collateral for supermarkets and other retail outlets to use as promotion of the region and our producers. And that was the very reason for Destination Gippsland to collaborate and contribute (together with Latrobe Valley Authority, FIAL, and Wellington Shire Council) to the brand logo design and its visual linkage to Gippsland's visitor economy branding!

We are currently working to secure funding to develop and launch a directory on F&FG's website for the promotion of what produce is available, from where, and at what times of the year. This will be promoted to chefs and food and beverage retail procurement managers, for public consumer awareness, for visitors to the region seeking to connect to the source of provenance. It will be a strong way we can inform the supply chain in Gippsland, in order to support and buy local and reduce those food transport miles!

COVID has certainly promoted and reinforced the importance of provenance, health and wellness, the role of nutrition, and food trust and security. Climate impact is dictating responsibility to consider food miles, so even just regionally, there is importance in provenance pride and purchasing trusted produce from within Gippsland (so yes, retail outlets such as markets,



cafés, and restaurants, can carry the Gippsland Trusted Provenance branding to show their commitment and support!).

Phoebe is talking to members about incorporating Gippsland Trusted Provenance in their branding, so don't hesitate to make contact to get your discussion occurring early. It's so important we all collaborate under branding such as this, to keep 'building that bigger pie' for Gippsland.

# What's Your Food or Fibre Challenge, Gippsland?

The pandemic certainly was an unforeseen challenge. It put limitations on some of the important face-to-face engagements needed to mentor, nurture and support the successful entrants – but everyone involved was able to (yes, we will use that pandemic-abused word!) pivot and achieve some great outcomes from the work.

From developing a business plan for a Traditional Foods supply chain in collaboration with Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC), a comprehensive feasibility study was undertaken including engagement with community, industry, and leading chefs. GLaWAC expect to have their first products available for sale in their Bush Café by the end of this year. We can't wait to eventually see their dried herbs, spices and produce on restaurant menus and look forward to supporting wherever we can.

Scaling up production and developing a marketing profile for Ingram Wild Caught Fisheries' fish sauce made from carp (and managing a pest issue at the same time) was a fascinating project included in The Challenge. Did you know that 100% of fish sauce is **imported** to Australia? That's certainly a market with opportunity for domestic production

and supply.

Gurneys Cider showed their willingness to collaborate in sharing information as they progressed research into the most efficient, effective and environmentally friendly pasteurisation process in their cidery operations. This project sought to support scaling up their business, and through the sharing of outcomes potentially scale-up other small-to-medium cider breweries.



Marketing and business plan development was undertaken to support the fabulous Gippsland Jersey dairy business as they look to their future expansion opportunities; and South Gippsland Dairy benefited from marketing plan development for their products (including their amazing colostrum, which is now being exported through participating in our export development work!). Kiel Industries embarked on a challenge to design and develop a biodegradable food-grade bin liner, strong enough to transport seafood but still able to sit inside collapsible transport bins – the challenge of this project remains an ongoing challenge for the time being.

It was fantastic collaborating with Federation University who led the program, and the many partners involved who provided mentoring, advice, and guidance, asking the hard questions needed for innovation, including Latrobe Valley Authority, FIAL, TAFE Gippsland, Food Agility CRC, Committee for Gippsland. The program was supported by Regional Development Victoria who funded the work through Regional Partnerships Gippsland. We would love to see this program evolve and grow and become an annual innovation opportunity for Gippsland's important food and fibre industry.



# Notes, Thoughts & Thanks

And just like that, another year has gone by! It's been one of growth for the F&FG family as we expand our programs; deepen and broaden collaboration across the region; enhance advocacy at local, state and federal government levels for our value-chain; and increase benefits and opportunities for our members.

Our wonderful F&FG team – thank you for all you do!

Like all of you, we too have faced workforce challenges and over the past year invested in our valued human resources through multiple initiatives. For members of our team on fixed FTE arrangements, a nine-day fortnight has been trialled with great outcomes – no loss in productivity, significant benefits in terms of work-life balance and positive mental health management for our hardworking crew.

Our much-loved head of communications and marketing, Jody O'Brien, said "see ya" but not goodbye earlier this year. Jody is now leading People & Culture for our member, Bulmer Farms, so we see Jody remaining related to the F&FG family! A huge thank you to Jody for her nurturing of our members, driving and developing our marketing and communications, and her all-round passion for our sector and F&FG.

Stepping into the role of marketing and communications manager is Barb

Radley, who joined the team in October and has brought her calm and experienced approach to the role. You will see our e-newsletters soon back in regular cycles, introduction of shire-specific e-newsletters for our local government partners, some 'specialist release' e-newsletters (season celebrations, high profile programs such



as the Drought Hub, as just a couple of examples).

Phoebe Hicks has recently joined F&FG as our new Relationship Manager. Phoebe is making her way through contacting all our members and partners, so if you haven't had a chat with Phoebe yet, it won't be long before she makes contact. Member networking events are being scheduled; please join those occurring in your region. Collaborative member-to-member opportunities lie within these gatherings and networking is a trusted way to stimulate the discussion.

Following some internal restructuring, Ben Gebert is stepping into a General Manager role with oversight of all our programs and increased stakeholder engagement. Our Head of Operations, Tova Wilshansky, recently departed F&FG as she prepares for an interstate move. Tova has helped deliver process and procedure through comprehensive policies, an employee manual, compliance and reporting - a big thanks to Tova for her contribution, as we wish her good luck with the next chapter!

With Ben's reducing role in our Latrobe Valley Authority partnering on Smart Specialisation, Elena Nauta is stepping into the Smart Specialisation lead role. Elena joined us as a graduate student from Federation University and has had an outstanding year of growth and



achievement, leading the important work we've been doing in seaweed and insect farming.

Bonnie Dawson, who heads up our VegNET program work, was deservedly recognised for her growing expertise in advanced irrigation knowledge and adoption. Bonnie was selected as one of three judges for the Zimmatic Trailblazer Sustainable Irrigation Awards.

Our fabulous Jobs Victoria Employment Service (JVES) team have been paddling hard and fast to meet targets and milestones in such a challenging workforce environment - but goals they have indeed kicked! Julie Tuhi and Nicki Keddie, who expertly delivered the previous program (JVEN), transitioned out to other life choices over this past year. Under the leadership of Amanda Gould, the JVES team have continued to go from strength to strength. They are spread across the Gippsland region with

people being placed into jobs in every shire. A massive thank you to Amanda and her team; Stacey Borg, Brodie Anderson, Kellie Lewis, Ben Macdonald, and Amber Potocnik!

We have new contracting for some of our programs; a warm welcome to Janet Robertson and Peter Mogridge, who are delivering our new Informed and Supported Workers (ISW) initiative. The program is now well underway.

Dr. Julian Hill had been working with F&FG before we even amalgamated. Julian brings depth of experience on a global scale, diversity in knowledge and practice, expertise in supporting our program bidding and applications, and is now driving our role as the Gippsland node leader for the Victorian Drought Hub – thank you Julian, your support and expertise are always greatly valued and appreciated!

David Grimmond has done an outstanding job over the past few years, developing and delivering our export work. During the acquittal phase of those programs, David has taken some personal time away; however, we're excited to be welcoming him back soon in a fantastic new program to be announced with Empauer!

Several of our team undertook a TAFE Leadership course during this past year; Ben Gebert has successfully completed the 2022 Gippsland Community

Leadership Program (GCLP), and our CEO was one of a selected group to undertake Leadership in the Circular Economy, hosted jointly by the Victorian State Government and the United Nations Staffing College.

Our systems and processes have been evolving; the past year has seen implementation of the MembershipWorks portal, a customer relationship management system (CRM) rolling out internally now; a refresh and relaunch of our website; and the development of an employee manual with the great team from Full Circle HR.



An Employee Assistance Program to support our team wellbeing was also implemented - it's been a busy year!

### **Programs & collaborations**

We're excited about the Gippsland Food and Fibre Awards program being back in 2023. The potential of 'award fatigue' for entrants and judges alike meant a better solution was to host the program every second year. Stay tuned for updates and details, to be announced early in the new year.

We've delivered lots of other programs not detailed in the report specifically, but we'll mention just a few. Seasonal Workforce Industry Support Program (SWISP) has been granted, delivered and successfully acquitted. Further development of our KE-DI platform (Knowledge Economy Digital Innovation) occurred, while the culmination of the Workforce Training & Innovation Fund (WTIF), funded by the Department of Education & Training, is something we will be building even further on, moving forward. Lastly, a business chamber grant to enhance engagement was delivered over several months.

F&FG were recently awarded a new grant program to help address the growing challenge across our entire region with deer. Further details of this will be forthcoming in the next few weeks - we're looking forward to



collaborating with our six Gippsland shires in this initiative and thank each of the Local Government Authorities for their committed support in bidding for the program.

We've collaborated with almost every university operating in Victoria, and of course our ongoing and valued relationship with Federation University and TAFE Gippsland continues to grow intelligence and strategy around training and skills for the food and fibre value chain. Make sure you stay connected to our news throughout 2023, as we have an exciting line-up of opportunities currently being worked on with multiple higher education providers!

As we know, collaboration is KEY to sustainable growth and development, performing a central role in building the 'bigger pie' for our region. Collaborative practice is fundamental to sharing knowledge and acts as a primary driver

for working together to achieve innovation. F&FG continues to collaborate and work with members, partners, and broader industry and we cannot thank all of you enough for your trust in our expertise, your appreciation of our transparency in the way we work, and your support to programs that help drive capacity and capability for our sector in the region.

- Regularly programmed meetings between Food & Fibre Gippsland, Regional Development Victoria Gippsland, Latrobe Valley Authority, and Agriculture Victoria ensure we are sharing information and intelligence, collaborating on developments, mitigating duplication, and delivering best outcomes for our beautiful region and the food and fibre sector
- We sit on the board of One Gippsland with all six Local Government Authorities, together with key industry sectors for the region, working together to build advocacy for key projects and a representation of the region
- Within our team, contribution is made to numerous boards and committees across the region and include rural engagement groups; those of the tourism and visitor economy to connect our agritourism and food and beverage activities;



education and regional skilling and training; land management; regional investment attraction; workforce; and agriculture industry reference groups at state level.

### **RATs, RATs and more RATs!**

We know our members, and the whole food and fibre sector, were hurting over COVID-19, when mandatory vaccinations and testing were put in place. Locating Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) kits were like hunting gold. We decided to offer a solution and our CEO reached out to the Victorian Farmers' Federation and Fruit Growers Victoria, inviting them to collaborate. This turned into a mammoth logistical exercise of hunting RATs, negotiating procurement, and midnight calls tracking freight clearance. Ausworkwear & Safety got on board with us and provided transport and drivers, with more middle of the



night logistics calls, freight being cleared and then not, drivers on standby - and finally we secured over 60,000 RATs, got them back across the border into Victoria and distributed to mini-hubs with our colleagues from VFF and FGV. From there, all those who had ordered boxes were allocated days, times and locations (such as car parks in local towns) for collection. It was nail-biting putting it all together, but well worth all the effort for members and stakeholders of the many organisations involved. "You saved our bacon" was something we heard from many at the pick-ups.

**56,000**   
**RATs INCOMING**



**NEXT STOP: VIC FARMS**



# Our Board & Our Team

## Our Board

BARRY ROGERS **Chair**  
KATE WALLIS **Deputy Chair**  
KYLIE HOLMES **Treasurer**  
ANDREW BULMER **Board Member**  
BRIAN DAVEY **Board Member**  
SALLIE JONES **Board Member**  
STEPHEN ANGUS **Board Member**  
MICHAEL GROGAN **Board Member**  
SIMON JOHNSON **Board Member**  
SARA RHODES-WARD **Board Observer (non-voting)**  
CHRIS BUCKINGHAM **Board Observer (non-voting)**  
BRUCE WESTON **Board Observer (non-voting)**  
LEIGH KENNEDY **Board Observer (non-voting)**  
GRANT RADFORD **Board Observer (non-voting)**



## Our Team

NICOLA PERO **Chief Executive Officer**  
BEN GEBERT **General Manager**  
BARB RADLEY **Marketing & Communications Manager**  
PHOEBE HICKS **Relationship Manager**  
BONNIE DAWSON **Regional Development Officer - VegNET**  
ELENA NAUTA **Project Officer**  
LUKE TOWNSEND **Student Graduate**  
DR JULIAN HILL **Drought Hub - Gippsland Node Leader**  
DAVID GRIMMOND **Export Development**  
AMBER POTOCHNIK **Connect2Employment Business Administrator**  
AMANDA GOULD **Connect2Employment Team Leader & Jobs Victoria Mentor**  
STACEY BORG **Jobs Victoria Mentor**  
BEN MACDONALD **Jobs Victoria Mentor**  
BRODIE ANDERSON **Jobs Victoria Mentor**  
KELLIE LEWIS **Jobs Victoria Mentor**  
JANET ROBERTSON **ISW Contractor**  
PETER MOGRIDGE **ISW Contractor**



# Acknowledgements

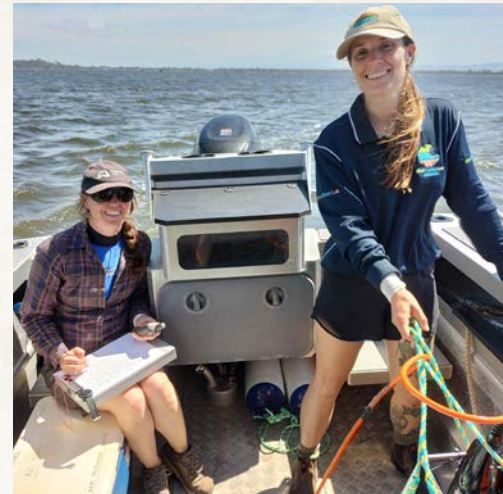
It is with sincere gratitude that we acknowledge all of our valued members, partners, and program funders. Whether in the paddock, the office, the family home, the shearing shed, or offshore, you are the driving force behind all that we do.

This year has brought back the joy of being together again, sharing local food, wine and beer in venues run by passionate people committed to showcasing your products locally and globally.

We are inspired by all of you who live and breathe passion for the food and fibre industry in our magnificent region. The communities you are part of are strong, innovative and well-placed to leave a lasting legacy for future generations of Gippslandners.

To each of you we say thanks - for your energy, commitment and drive; and your endless vision and enthusiasm. There are so many people to thank, it would be difficult to name you all. However, we genuinely know what an incredible contribution you make to advancing productivity, prosperity and profitability within our region, while caring for our planet.

With your leadership, the future looks bright for Gippsland.





Food & Fibre  
Gippsland



*Our mission is to lead  
capacity building,  
innovation and  
knowledge-sharing*

