



Food & Fibre Gippsland

ANNUAL REPORT
2021



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We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Land we meet on.
We pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging and extend
that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people.



Foreword

MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas MP

When it comes to producing food and fibre, Victoria is leading the nation. We are Australia's largest producer of food and fibre products, and these make up almost half of Victoria's total goods exports.

Our food and fibre exports reached a record \$14.5 billion for the 2019-20 period.

It's not surprising that our products are so sought after, given the quality, passion, and innovation that our farmers and those along the food supply chain bring to the table. I know just how proud Gippsland producers are of this.

Congratulations to Food & Fibre Gippsland on another great year leading, innovating and collaborating for the food and fibre sector.

Despite the challenges exposed by the pandemic, it is heartening to see the continued efforts to foster a collaborative industry culture.

Food & Fibre Gippsland's achievements is recognised in this year's Awards, and it is a reflection on the incredible work coming from Gippsland that award nominations are so high and are from a diverse range of entrants across the region.

Moving forward from pandemics and natural disasters it is important that we continue to work together to ensure a thriving food and fibre sector here in Gippsland and across the State.

The Victorian Government is driving Victoria's recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and bolstering the economy through our 10-year agriculture strategy.

In particular we want to grow the value and output of agriculture through increased exports, investment, greater diversification and new products.

We are helping producers and manufacturers add value to food grown and processed in our State through the \$15 million Food to Market program. Our \$5 million Pathways to Export program is helping our agribusinesses to establish more trade pathways for our food and fibre.

We look forward to continuing to work together and promoting our State's premium food and fibre products.

The Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas MP
Minister for Agriculture and Regional
Development



CHAIR'S REPORT



Just a year ago, we celebrated presenting our first Annual Report of Food & Fibre Gippsland Inc. At the time, I commented that creating a new organisation can sound easy but doing so is much harder...

But what I didn't know when writing the report last year was that COVID-19 and the resultant pandemic was going to intrude into everything we do again! It's been quite a year for our members, for the Board, staff, and our CEO.

We were keenly planning to spend more time out visiting members. The Board was to meet at locations across Gippsland, hear directly from members about their concerns and desires, meeting with each of the six Local Government entities' Mayor and CEO. We managed one such visit, and also spent time at the East Gippsland Field Days – and that was all.

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 & Fibre in Gippsland?”

We have many people and organisations we wish to acknowledge, to thank for their support, skills, and time they have graciously contributed to Food & Fibre Gippsland Inc:

I acknowledge the group of supporters – the “Invited Observers” at our meetings – Karen Cain as CEO of the Latrobe Valley Authority, Leigh Kennedy (Gippsland Head of Campus, Federation University), Grant Radford (CEO at TAFE Gippsland), Cr Brett Tessari (Chair of One Gippsland and Mayor of Bass Coast Shire), and Graham Scott (Regional Development Victoria

I reported last year that F&FG had become a member of One Gippsland – the new regional body which arose from the former Gippsland Local Government Network. Now expanded with memberships by F&FG, Federation University, TAFE Gippsland, and Destination Gippsland. In terms of raising awareness of the food and fibre sector and the needs of our members, joining

One Gippsland has been invaluable; enabling us to have input to meetings with Ministers (and Shadows) at State and Federal levels.

My thanks to Board Members – Andrew Bulmer (Deputy Chair), Katrina Wallis (Treasurer), Stephen Angus, Brian Davey, Sallie Jones, and Damien Gannon. All contributed their skills and time to the work of the Board as we evolved our still very new organisation. Stephen Angus was a newly elected Board member from the 2020 AGM, bringing a broad skill set and an additional East Gippsland link.

We are farewelling a long-time Board member (and former Chair of East Gippsland Food Cluster Inc) at the 2021 AGM. Damien Gannon, a Gippslandian through and through is leaving us after many years' service to the organisation. Thanks for all your support and work Damo, we will miss you!

Our staff and contractors enable us to do what we do; so, our special thanks go to current people – Jody O'Brien, Julian Hill, Ben Gebert, Elena Nauta, Bonnie Dawson, David Grimmond, Nicki Keddie, Julie Tuhi, Molly Shelton, Hannah Farnham, Liz Fleming, and a warm welcome to our new Business Operations Manager who started this month – Tova Wilshansky.

Our CEO Nicola Pero has continued to do the sterling job she ran with last year... Thanks Nicola for your passionate support and commitment to F&FG!

Which brings me to our final thank you: **our members.**

Food & Fibre Gippsland's role is to identify ways to make the sector stronger, more efficient, and more profitable. We will continue to source funding for projects like those you will see in this report – projects that make our industry better and stronger, and in an expanding role – we take on greater advocacy and promotion of the sector.



Our website – newly updated, thanks Jody O'Brien - www.foodandfibregippsland.com.au makes the following call:

Connection

Joining the F&FG Member family is a great way to help build your business, grow your network, get access to programs and resources. It's all about being part of a group of like-minded people, all passionate about Gippsland's growth and prosperity.

Collaboration

We collaborate with stakeholders across industry, all levels of government, community, and research to build industry-led programs, connecting our members with resources and support. We encourage our members to collaborate with each other.

Innovation

Our new Learning Portal: We're integrating a state-of-the-art learning portal for businesses to upskill, learn and connect. Known as KE-DI (Knowledge Economy Digital Innovation) there is a members-only area where businesses of all sizes can connect and share.

Key Member Benefits:

- A network of likeminded businesses
- Collaboration opportunities
- Member events
- New Online Networking and Learning Portal KE-DI
- Tips and Business insights
- Support with grant applications
- Regular eNewsletters
- Advocacy on industry issues
- Opportunities to participate in key projects that can help your business grow

Sincerely,



Barry Rogers
Chair



CEO REPORT



What a turbulent and tumultuous year it has been!

I sincerely hope you enjoy reading this 2021 Annual Report and gain further insight into the breadth and depth of F&FG's advocacy and representation for the sector, and the dynamic list of program work being undertaken. The organisation and the collaborative work we undertake has evolved so much since the amalgamation. The future holds great opportunity for Gippsland food and fibre sector as we continue to navigate through, and beyond, the challenges of today.

Over the past year we have transitioned from an old and clunky financial system to the adeptness of Xero, providing our management team and Board with up-to-the-minute reporting clarity and oversight beyond that of previous years.

Our membership with One Gippsland has been of enormous value, enabling collective engagement with State and Federal representatives, collaborative advocacy dialogue and working relationships with the six Local Government Authorities. We are most appreciative of the collegiate involvement in this.

Our relationship and voice for the sector in Gippsland has deepened and flourished with Agriculture Victoria this past year, and I'd like to note thanks specifically to Dougal Purcell (Executive Director, Agriculture Services and Regions) Dr Sze Flett (Director, Horticulture Services, Biosecurity and Agriculture Services Branch), and Bruce West (Regional Leader South East, Biosecurity and Agriculture Services) for their support and collaboration.

We look forward to building on our regional growth sector relationship with Regional Development Victoria – Gippsland, and collaboratively working with the new Regional Director, Sara Rhodes-Ward (and a warm welcome to the role Sara).

Agritourism together with consumer curiosity and engagement holds great opportunity for our sector as the pandemic has grown awareness in local produce, supply chains, visitor

experiences all things food and beverage, and trust in provenance. We are excited about the opportunities and collectively working with and expanding our excellent relationship with Destination Gippsland.

Workforce capability and capacity has never been as important as it is right now and building on the education, training and skills for our broad sector supports continuing to expand on our great relationships with Federation University and TAFE Gippsland.

I, together with representatives from our team are thankful for the opportunities we have in contributing to so many committees, working groups, thought sessions and round tables. These include West Gippsland Dairy Leadership Group; South Gippsland Economic Development Strategy Advisory Group; East Gippsland Agricultural Sector Advisory Committee; Bass Coast Rural Engagement Group; Regional Skills Committee; TAFE Education & Training Board Committee; Federation University Australia Council; Destination Gippsland Board; Local Jobs Taskforce; Invest Gippsland; Agriculture Victoria Industry Advisory Group; Agriculture Victoria Horticulture Industry Sub-Group; Committee for Wellington; Southern Victoria Irrigation Development – and many more. This list will provide you with insight into the true whole-of-region engagement and contribution we make on behalf of our members and broader food and fibre industry and supply chain. Quadruple helix (government-industry-academia-community) engagement not only underpins the important work we do in partnering with Latrobe Valley Authority on Gippsland Smart Specialisation, but it is vital to all the work we do. As I often share with others, if we all focus on building a bigger Gippsland pie, the individual slices will by default grow!

We are greatly enjoying our new, but growing relationships with entities such as Gippsland Agricultural Group. Jen Smith, as the key driver of this group, thank you for your engagement this past year! Research farms and connectivity with farming groups in listening to understand what their challenges are, where they see opportunities, and how can we support, is fundamental to overall sector sustainability and growth.



Our fibre engagement is young but growing with early relationships brewing and we're looking forward to expanding on these with entities such as Gippsland Forestry Hub and working with members such as Aussie Wool Quilts on their expansion and as part of what we see as a potential textile renaissance for the Gippsland region!

We continue with our Co-operative Research Centres (CRC's) formal participation and are growing more opportunities to collaborate in projects with these as each year goes by. These include Fight Food Waste CRC; Future Food Systems CRC; Food Agility CRC; and a new and exciting CRC seeking approval this year which is Smarter Regions CRC (think all things AI and robotics, advanced manufacturing, sensor development etc!).

One of our most valued and longest standing relationships is with Food Innovation Australia Limited (FIAL) who are the national growth centre for food and agribusiness. Our co-contribution funding arrangement with FIAL is soon coming to a successful close, but certainly not our excellent relationship and shared cluster philosophies on collaboration, innovation, and building capability. Our amazing growth as a cluster is due to the funding, leadership, guidance, and support extended by Dr. Mirjana Prica as FIAL's Managing Director and her great team. We are excited about collaboration on new program opportunities and hope to bring an announcement on one of those in the new year.

Gippsland Smart Specialisation Strategy (GS3) is one of our most interesting programs of involvement. Being involved in the process of discovering, defining, developing, and delivering regional competitive advantage opportunities for food and fibre in Gippsland is incredible. The work is exciting, thought provoking, full of potential, and importantly aligns with our collaboration methodologies. Karen Cain, thank you for your leadership and courage as the CEO at Latrobe Valley Authority, you have an amazing team who are committed to outcomes, passionate about the process, and embrace a genuinely collaborative way of working.

Our members are front and center to what we do – a massive thank you for your support,

engagement with F&FG, and doing the excellent work each, and every, one of you do. YOU are what makes Gippsland's \$7B food and fibre sector the powerhouse that it is and the growth that we know collectively can be achieved in the coming year ahead.

Our team! You have put heart and soul into your work this past year and noting 'thank you' feels like insufficient recognition for your passion, integrity, commitment, pride, and absolute hard work. I am so proud to work with all of you and humbled by the opportunity to generate curiosity, courage, exploration, and discovery in our team sessions. Keep doing what you do!

To our Board members and Observer panel, you are awesome. A CEO can't be successful, or lead with strength, nor get the best from their team, without an excellent and trusting relationship with their Board. I deeply appreciate your support and guidance extended to me this past year, thank you.

To you, as the reader of the 2021 Food & Fibre Gippsland Annual Report, thank you for your interest and taking the time to read about our work. We are here. We are listening. We are active with programs and projects. We can support and assist your needs. Come and chat!



My best wishes,
Nicola Pero
Chief Executive Officer



COMMUNICATIONS, MEMBERSHIP & MARKETING



Our Head of Communications Membership and Marketing has many talents and this year, her experience of in front and behind the camera came to the fore in our extensive This is My Job series, production of a series of provenance videos for export, and the 2021 Gippsland Food and Fibre Awards. This exceeded 110 individual showcases of people, jobs, places, producers, and provenance, where together with Gippsland film makers, Jody was creative director, journalist, and producer. There are still a small number across fisheries and seafood processing to be completed early 2022.

A lot of research and analysis has been invested this past year to source a platform to streamline membership management and give ownership to members to control their own information within a membership directory. The platform Membership Works was selected and implemented in the lead up to June 30 with a range of automated features. It is also allowing all our team to take an active role in signing up new members, rather than the old way of manually filling out forms and manual uploading of membership. The online payment system supports quarterly payments allowing members to spread membership fee – a greatly appreciated option if cash flow is tight.

A new website has been created, using the Square Space platform, which allows us greater flexibility on design and content management, and more extensive search engine optimization (SEO) to drive google ranking and search results. We

continue to work and develop ways to optimise and maximise content creation and distribution via a range of communications channels, using the website as an anchor point to which everything is directed.

Our social media following continues to grow with 3,345 followers on Facebook, 1828 on Instagram and 1008 on LinkedIn. With social media a “pay to play” platform, we do not spend funds on boosting posts or Facebook Ads, making our reach purely organic.

Plans to create and launch a podcast were put on hold during Covid. This is a time intensive process to source, create and edit content, so we are continuing to look at ways this can be achieved.

Jody works hard to build awareness of the work of F&FG across local, metro, and national media, stakeholders and community whilst being an important trusted conduit to many people within our member businesses. She is always connecting the dots with products and people across all parts of the region and plans to be out and about even more in 2022 to unearth more stories in the region and beyond about the colourful characters and diverse, quality produce of Gippsland.





Membership

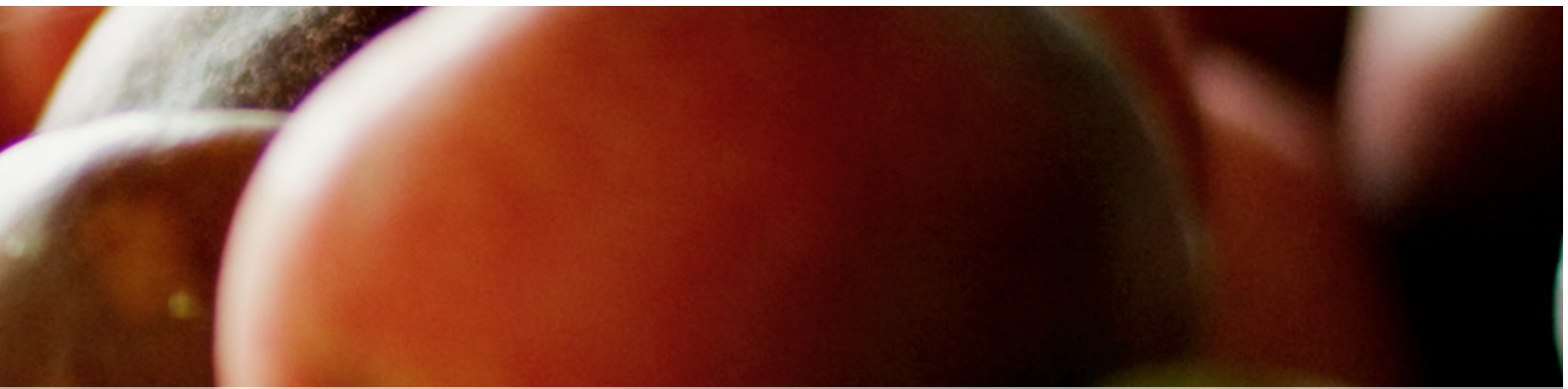
Organic growth continues with our membership expanding and growing annually. Even though the past year has been one of challenge and fatigue for many, a 20% increase in membership has occurred since November 2020.

Cycles of pandemic lockdowns, combined with general stress and exhaustion in the business community has meant Jody has not been as active in-person (and let's face it, none of us have been able to get out and about like we would!) with members and potential members in this last 12 months. She has however maintained regular contact and provided support to all existing members wherever and however possible in this time. We expect as activity increases over coming months and there is greater capacity to be networking and connecting with individuals and businesses, we will see even further continued growth.

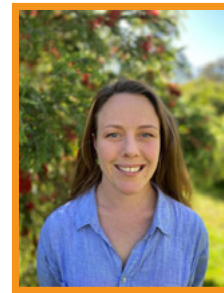
The value proposition of why to be a member differs vastly from business to business, but what we strive to continue to offer is advocacy, connectivity, collaboration, and support, and as our critical mass increases, we are planning to source and promote member discounts from a range of relevant service and product providers as another value-add benefit of being part of the Food & Fibre Gippsland member family.

Member Events

Covid has stifled all plans for the last 18 months for any face-to-face social events to eventuate, and we are acutely aware of the importance and benefit of people being able to network with each other, particularly if there is a feast of Gippsland Trusted Provenance involved! We are hoping and planning to deliver a number of informative and entertaining networking events across the region over the next 12 months and can't wait to see everyone with an on-screen frame!



VEGNET – GIPPSLAND



The past twelve months of VegNET have seen the formalisation of a five-year Regional Extension Strategy, accompanying project plans, and establishment of a Regional Extension Advisory Group (REAG).

Broad consultation with industry, including but not limited to members of the REAG, identified four strategic pillars for development priority:

- On-farm Biosecurity
- Protecting Waterways
- Smarter Growing AgTech
- Building Business Capacity and a Sustainable Workforce

Co-designed by our Regional Development Officer (RDO) and REAG, projects respond to the four strategic pillars, connecting and bringing together Gippsland regional industry stakeholders to strategically deploy skills and capacity. This is evidenced through the integration of multiple partnerships across those projects.

The first year of delivery has reaffirmed the focus of each of these projects, enabling further refining as needed. Whilst activity monitoring and evaluation has indicated success in increasing awareness and knowledge, it is anticipated further implementation over the coming five years will drive successful practice change within the industry and improved social licence from the community.

On-Farm Biosecurity

Despite constant threat of crop disease, pests and weeds, many regional growers see opportunity to improve their on-farm biosecurity practices to prevent incursions of exotic and endemic pests, disease, and weeds. This was particularly pertinent in 2020-21 with the industry threatened by incursions of two significant pests – Fall Armyworm and Serpentine Leafminer. While new exotic pests, disease and weeds continue

to threaten the region, growers and other service providers require knowledge and skills to effectively, and efficiently, identify those threats.

To respond to this gap, Bonnie has facilitated engagement and knowledge brokering between growers, agronomists and agencies involved in upholding the biosecurity of the industry. Two webinars delivered throughout the year, provided growers with updates surrounding the presence of Fall Armyworm and Serpentine Leafminer, as well as others such as Tomato Potato Psyllid and Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus (both relevant to growers of solanaceous crops, with TSWV also of concern to lettuce and legume growers). The second webinar, originally planned as an in-person workshop, also included a presentation on “reducing risk pathways”, contributing to ongoing efforts supporting growers in developing and implementing comprehensive on-farm biosecurity plans.

A visit from AUSVEG Biosecurity Coordinator, Callum Fletcher, in February 2021 gave opportunity to instigate a discussion group with 14 agronomists and growers from the Lindenow Valley, in East Gippsland. Just over 80% of post-event survey respondents indicated their interest in participating in further in-person group discussion style events. The event was a timely opportunity for mutual learning, with Fall Armyworm having recently been detected in the region. AUSVEG presented to attendees about the pest but also invited local observations from the field. According to the post-event survey, attendees gained an extremely high level of new knowledge and understanding, with the average response being 9.18 on a scale of 0 to 10.

Bonnie's scope of work has supported research conducted by Cesar Australia, for a Lindenow Valley grower to host a trap for a research project on Turnip Yellow Virus (carried by Green Peach Aphids).





Protecting Waterways

Evolving in response to the demand for improved water security, this project addressed recognition of off-set impacts which the industry has potential to create. The strategy identified need to optimise water use efficiency and minimise nutrient and sediment run-off, with industry seeking to increase demonstration of these efforts, reflecting improved social licence from other agencies and surrounding community.

Over the past year activities within the Protecting Waterways project included a farm visit to celery, leek and baby leaf growers, Schreurs & Sons Middle Tarwin property in South Gippsland. This visit was attended by twenty-one people. Attendees observed practices and design features that increase water efficiency and nutrient use through reuse and runoff minimisation, as well as how Schreurs & Sons have strengthened connections with surrounding community. Information on the day was presented by Adam Schreurs and Matt Bowler of the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, who shared the CMA's perspective about how the Schreurs are minimising offsite impacts from their operation.

Six months post the event a phone survey of six of the attending businesses indicated learnings resulted in success at instigating at least two large businesses to implement changes, particularly relating to drainage design. Each of the other surveyed growers stated the event increased their awareness of ways in which they could increase nutrient and water use efficiencies and protect surrounding waterways. One grower specifically indicated it drew their attention to the potential impacts of considerable nutrient loss from their property, and their intention to apply this knowledge at the next opportunity through infrastructure design and development. Two other growers reported from what they learnt on the day, their intention to increase plantings of native species to capture sediment and nutrients and therefore protect waterways surrounding their respective properties.

Growers across Gippsland have made considerable progress through the EnviroVeg framework which will be used to identify areas of further focus within this project. 28 vegetable producers in the Gippsland region are currently registered to participate in the revised EnviroVeg program, a significant increase of 12 growers from the previous year. Of those registered growers, 18 have commenced their online EnviroVeg self-assessment, with completion already achieved for 9 properties. A regional report will be produced when the data can be anonymised, after ten growers have fully completed the self-assessment.



VEGNET – GIPPSLAND

Building Business Capacity and a Sustainable Workforce

A significant collaboration outcome within the Food & Fibre Gippsland team has been the production of the This is My Job video series. Within the vegetable industry, 28 videos have been produced, featuring different jobs within four of the region's largest vegetable producing businesses, all of whom are Food & Fibre Gippsland members – Flavorite, Schreurs & Sons, Bulmer Farms and Hussey & Co.

Each of the four participating businesses have been provided direct access to the videos with the option to download and integrate in their own employment and HR related resources, as well as use in any recruitment drive activity being undertaken throughout the year.

Each of the growers provided extremely positive feedback from the videos, with testimonials including:

“The videos have been wonderful. We have shared them extensively on our social media platforms, we use them in our group interview presentations and have the links attached to our job advertising. The feedback we have received has been amazing, everyone is really impressed, particularly when holding online interviews and it has given really good insight into the business without having the candidates on site. Can't speak any higher to the content and quality. Once again thank you for allowing us to participate as they have proven very valuable.”

- Sue Ilett, HR Manager, Flavorite

“We are using the videos on our web site. Once you see our website, we have a section “Join Our Business” and the videos are centre of that page. I do think it's a very positive initiative and will certainly encourage potential employees to consider this industry. It also gives our customer a perspective they did not have before on what we do. It's been good.”

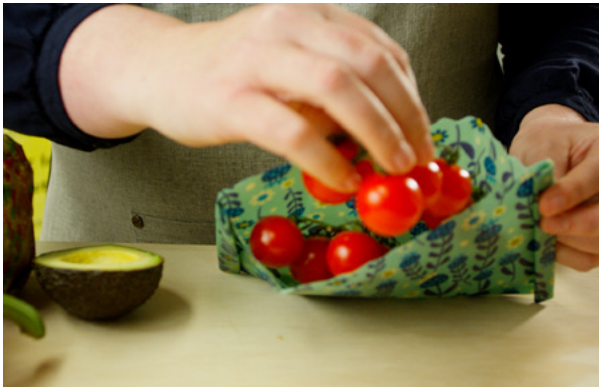
- Jeremy Haw, Owner, Hussey & Co

Each of these videos has been shared from the Food & Fibre Gippsland Facebook page, providing exposure to several thousand followers.

Regional Local Learning & Employment Networks (LLENs) plan to integrate these videos into school careers programs and other vocational education opportunities. TAFE Gippsland plan to show the This is My Job video series to students of the Certificates IV in Horticulture, Production Horticulture, Agriculture, and other relevant short courses towards the end of the school year. They intend to utilise these at the beginning of courses to introduce students to the industry.

	27 posts	AVG per video
1-2 minute video views	5,045	202
Engagements (Reactions/Shares/Comments)	3,119	125
Reach (times the post appeared in someone's feed)	46,511	1,860





VegNET Gippsland partnered with the 3-year CQU RACE program being delivered across Gippsland, resulting in establishment of four industry-school partnerships between growers including Select Produce, Flavorite and Bulmer Farms, primary and secondary schools in Maffra, San Remo, Philip Island and Mirboo North. Although most of the activities being delivered to support these partnership – incursions and excursions – experienced delay due to Covid restrictions, an incursion activity was facilitated between San Remo Primary School and Select Produce in Korumburra. While students could not access paddocks or company facilities at that time, they were introduced to the products – sugar snaps and snow peas – through the Managing Director. Bonnie as the program’s RDO and grower Adam Schreurs, further participated in a Horticulture Careers Panel facilitated by RACE Gippsland during Science Week.

In February 2021, VegNET Gippsland supported the Victorian Department of Health to deliver an important industry COVID-Safe planning information session for growers. Two seminars were delivered for growers and representatives in HR management positions, one in-person in June 2021, and the second online in August 2021. The latter was originally planned as in-person at Lardner Park, Drouin (West Gippsland), but again due to Covid had to be moved to an online format in the final stages of planning due lockdown restrictions. Both seminars included participation and presentations from:

- Victorian Farmers Federation Farm Safety program
- RACE Gippsland
- TAFE Gippsland
- F&FG’s Jobs Victoria Employment Service, Connect2Employment program
- This is My Job video series
- Agriculture Victoria – Seasonal Workforce Coordinator

Ongoing conversations facilitated by Bonnie with Food & Fibre Gippsland’s Connect2Employment, AMES, Wellington Shire Council and Agriculture

Victoria have included strategies to support relocation of CALD communities to the region and employment in the industry.

EGVID 2020

Following an outstanding delivery of the 2020 East Gippsland Vegetable Innovation Days, the EGVID Organising Committee, including Bonnie Dawson as the VegNET Gippsland RDO and Jody O’Brien - Food & Fibre Gippsland’s Head of Communications, Membership & Marketing, were recognised at both the State and National level. At the 2021 AUSVEG VIC Awards for Excellence, the team were presented with the R&D Adoption and Industry Impact Award, and then the National Visy Industry Impact Award at Hort Connections 2021. A great recognition of a lot of hard work and commitment in planning, liaising, and delivering an excellent event under challenging early pandemic circumstances.

VegNET Phase 3.0

Following a successful AUSVEG submission to Horticulture Innovation Australia Ltd (HIAL) to deliver VegNET 3.0, Food & Fibre Gippsland have been subcontracted to continue regional delivery of the project through until 2026.

Food & Fibre Gippsland is well-positioned to continue implementation of VegNET Gippsland, with Bonnie’s ongoing dedication having strengthened connections with both growers across the region and broader industry stakeholders. Despite Covid restrictions, Bonnie has maintained these relationships, visiting growers in person when possible and otherwise keeping in regular phone and virtual contact.

Bonnie’s leadership has developed strong working relationships with other industry agencies, particularly AUSVEG (Biosecurity, EnviroVeg and Communications teams), Agriculture Victoria’s local Irrigation Extension team and the new Horticulture Industry Development Manager. She has developed strong working relationships with many of the ten other RDOs around the country contributing to ongoing mutual knowledge development and collaboration.

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Soil Moisture Monitoring Demonstration

Food & Fibre Gippsland was successful in receiving a funding as part of the Future Drought Fund suite of grants, to implement a demonstration site of soil moisture monitoring sensors. “Growing Gippsland’s Drought Resilience with technology and better soil” contributes to the VegNET Gippsland strategy and the two focus areas of Smarter Growing with AgTech and Protecting Gippsland Waterways.

The project has been an opportunity to increase engagement between Gippsland’s intensive vegetable growing industry, Agriculture Victoria, and the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, with the two latter being represented on the Project Reference Group, in addition to AUSVEG through the EnviroVeg program, and technical advice provided by respected Elders agronomist Noel Jansz.

The project objective is to build drought resilience among Gippsland’s vegetable producers and concurrently work to reduce the risk of damaging nutrients and sediment finding their way into the Gippsland Lakes, by using soil moisture monitors to increase water use efficiency of the host landholder. Tripod Farmers are hosting the demonstration site at their Boisdale property on the bank of the Avon River in the Macalister Irrigation District. Tripod Farmers crop throughout the year, producing brassicas and salads, utilising irrigation through a Fixed Spray system.

This activation provides the host grower with an opportunity to experiment using soil moisture monitors to inform irrigation schedules, irrigation design and improve water use efficiency. Twenty CropX monitors have been procured and installed across a control site and a trial site. The control site will measure business as usual, while the Farm Manager will use data available on the CropX platform to inform irrigation decisions on the trial site over the peak growing period between October 2021 and April 2022. The project draws on additional sets of data and information for a comprehensive understanding of irrigation practices impact on the site. EM38 and grid soil mapping was conducted by Precision Agriculture at site, and regular analysis of weather records from an on-farm weather station and a nearby DPI weather station will be cross-referenced with the soil moisture data.

The Project Reference Group launched the project with an online webinar in October including presentations providing an overview of the project, the environmental context in which it is being implemented, and other programs and services available to the industry to support better irrigation practice.

Over the coming season regular updates will be published, providing an overview of the data and resulting irrigation decisions made by the host grower. The project will wind up at the conclusion of the peak growing season in April 2022, with a field visit and publication of a case study.





GIPPSLAND REGIONAL AGRIFOOD EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME (GRAEP) AND CONNECT 2 EMPLOYMENT

Gippsland Regional Agrifood Employment Programme (GRAEP)

Our highly successful GRAEP program was completed on 30 June 2021 with the final report and audit lodged with Jobs Victoria. GRAEP was part of the Jobs Victoria Employment Network program (JVEN).

We completed the program on a high; over the lifetime of the project GRAEP assisted and supported 150 participants to achieve 26 weeks of continuous employment. An additional 130 participants have transitioned to the new Jobs Victoria Employment Services (JVES) program, commencing 1 July, 2021 with 15 of those already tracking to achieve 26 weeks continuous employment.

GRAEP's strategies to engage and support job seekers into employment included:

- Pre-employment job readiness training partnering with Learn Locals
- Accredited industry courses
- Employer collaboration
- Participation in Job Fairs (both in-person and virtual) and industry workshops/forums
- Community services engagement
- Diverse and creative digital engagement (ie: This is My Job Series)
- Engagement with Commonwealth programs such as Harvest Trail and Local Jobs.

GRAEP collaborated with organisations, engaged with community services, and utilised social media to attract job seeker registrations. Over the past 12 months GRAEP utilised well established relationships with member organisations, community services, employment providers and other community connections to capture job seeker 'walk-ins' and provide support to ongoing employment.

Covid-19 created an environment of restricted contact, reduced employment opportunities and limited connectivity with stakeholders. The flow on effect of the pandemic impacted Gippsland's food and fibre production and supply chain businesses, resulting in job loss and/or reduced hours. Unemployment rates increased and the effect of social distancing meant it became increasingly harder for job seekers to stay connected and continue looking for work. During this time, the team focused on ways to keep job seekers connected whilst providing support wherever and however possible to food and fibre businesses, particularly from heavily impacted sectors with labour force shortages such as horticulture and hospitality. Some of these initiatives included:

Get Growing

Developed and delivered across Gippsland to job seekers of all ages, Get Growing supported engagement with GRAEP participants through activities they could undertake in their own home that stimulated health and wellbeing, provided support, and brought people together in a digital environment even though they were physically kept apart.

Get Growing stimulated interest in growing vegetables, provided opportunity to highlight jobs and careers in horticulture, which given COVID travel restrictions had led to high workforce shortages in Gippsland. The GRAEP team managed operations and monitored participant progress by providing knowledge and equipment to produce a home vegetable garden. Connecting GRAEP participants to the Get Growing Facebook group provided a community with a common goal – growing vegetables and supporting those feeling isolated.





Get Serving

The course Get Serving covers hospitality basics and was developed by the Traralgon Neighbourhood Learning House (TNLH). The GRAEP team collaborated with TNLH to deliver the course to Gippsland job seekers, co-created with industry and real time opportunities to put skills learnt to work in a real-time environment – a win-win for both job seekers and hospitality.

Working closely with Learn Locals in three LGA's over February and March 2021, the free program provided hands on experience in food preparation, customer service, front of house engagement and communication. Participants were given one-on-one guidance and support to write and/or update their resumes, as well as a work experience placement in a local café or restaurant.



This Is My Job Series

One of the most outstanding and successful initiatives of the program, 'This is My job Series' was rolled-out over the final 12 months of GRAEP. We invested in this series to help counteract pandemic limitations to pre-employment training and engagement. Creatively directed by F&FG's Head of Communications, Membership and Marketing in consultation with the GRAEP team, the educational and engagement video series was developed to grow awareness of the diverse range of roles available to people of all ages in sub-sectors within food and fibre. Horticulture, dairy, hospitality, wool, forestry and timber, food retail, small business, and food manufacturing from a selection of businesses of varying sizes across each of the six Local Government Shires.

These straight talking and right from the source resources have been widely distributed across social media and digital channels, utilised and shared by employers as part of their recruitment process, providing potential employees with greater knowledge of roles available. One of the most common comments we've heard about the horticulture series is people had no idea there were so many different and interesting roles available, outside of traditional perceptions of there just being "jobs for pickers".

This Is My Job Series will be used for many years to come with timeless content and messaging. A testimonial from a major protected cropping producer in Gippsland, Flavorite Hydroponic Tomatoes, comes from Group HR Manager Sue Ilett, "The videos have been wonderful. We have shared them extensively on our social media platforms, we use them in our group interview presentations and have the links attached to our job advertising. The feedback has been fantastic".



Harvest Trail

GRAEP collaborated with Madec, who manage the Harvest Trail program, to support the horticulture industry with workforce demands which were highly impacted by Covid. Through this collaboration GRAEP referred participants looking for work in harvesting and supported registrations received from job seekers by Madec, providing suitable PPE and additional supports as needed.

Feedback from participants and employers in relation to the GRAEP program, employment placements and outcomes was very positive, including from Jobs Victoria who provided excellent support to F&FG throughout the almost 5 years of the GRAEP program.

Connect 2 Employment

Food & Fibre Gippsland was awarded a new Jobs Victoria Employment Services (JVES) funding contract in the second quarter of 2021, with Connect2Employment (C2E) commencing 1 June 2021. C2E continues the important and successful work of GRAEP, providing employment support services using the relationships and foundations built by our GRAEP program, and spreading our reach across the entire region covering a range of industries including:

- Horticulture
- Hospitality
- Dairy
- Food Processing
- Manufacturing
- Transport
- Supply Chain
- Retail
- Food Manufacturing
- Logistics
- Fisheries
- Land Conservation
- Forestry / Timber
- Tourism
- Agriculture - Sheep & Cattle Farming
- Paper Manufacturing





C2E aims to have Jobs Victoria Mentors covering in each of Gippsland's LGA's and is still recruiting that full team. The current team includes:

- Nicki Keddie – Team Leader and Jobs Victoria Mentor
- Molly Shelton – Jobs Victoria Mentor
- Hannah Farnham – Jobs Victoria Mentor
- Julie Tuhi – Contract Administration

Several other F&FG team members contribute services into this program across stakeholder network engagement, communications, financials, and strategy.

Through hard work, perseverance and creativity using existing and new collaborations and networking, C2E has had success in addressing the pandemic challenges, registering 121 new participants, and supporting 79 of those participants into employment in just the first few months. C2E has supported employers with funding first week work trials, upskilling new recruits with required certificates and relevant training, and providing job seekers with appropriate work safe PPE and transport support.

A great example of how we are supporting organisations across Gippsland is a recent engagement with one of our FFG members, a busy dairy processor in South Gippsland which had experienced an immediate loss in staff numbers due to vaccination mandates. The labour gap was a threat to production capacity leading into Christmas, so the C2E team swung into action to identify immediate staffing needs and desired skills sets for this large employer. By utilising our C2E Facebook page and networks, the team were able to present five suitable candidates to the client's HR department in a turnaround of 4 days!

With restrictions now lifting C2E has already partnered with two of Gippsland's Learn Locals, ready to deliver the New Horizons pre-employment course in South Gippsland's beautiful town of Foster) and the beachside town of Lakes Entrance (East Gippsland). These commence shortly and throughout this course, facilitators will be utilising the 'This Is My Job' series to highlight the sector's diverse industries and careers.

Get Serving will again be rolled out across the region with C2E partnering with Learn Locals across Gippsland to deliver pre-employment training and other hospitality courses. These are scheduled to be delivered at the earliest opportunity to support the sector and deliver practical solutions for the huge labour shortages being experienced.

Food & Fibre Gippsland is thrilled that, despite the significant challenges from this year, the C2E are set to achieve their first milestone of the program, placing 100 job seekers into employment by the end of November – an outstanding result in turbulent times and an unpredictable environment.



GIPPSLAND CONNECT

— SMALL & MEDIUM ENTERPRISES EXPORT MARKETS



Funded jointly by the Australian Government's SME Export Hubs initiative, and the Victorian Government through Gippsland Regional Partnership, the Gippsland Connect SME Export program has been in operation for twenty-four months. Phase One and Two have been successfully completed with a revised Project Plan in place since November 2020 that carried through until finalisation of the Commonwealth grant agreement on 31 August 2021. The Victorian Government component of the program concludes end of March 2022.

Final project outcomes achieved, aligned to the project objectives included the onboarding of a diverse group of Gippsland and regions, Small and Medium Enterprises. This group included three established exporters now exporting to expanded markets, five established domestic suppliers who achieved their first sustainable exports, and a further eight now export ready and have submitted samples or are in the process of discussions with buyers.

Start up and first-time exporters who participated in the market and category specific programs achieved both positive and sustainable results. Many of the companies have been delayed due to domestic and international supply chain disruption, impacting cash flows and the ability to change quickly to an export focus.

Competitive strengths of the Gippsland Hub have been international market recognition of quality, reliability, and safe foods (clean, green, and trusted). International buyers have seen great examples of innovation, such as freeze-dried Bio Colostrum (from South Gippsland Dairy) delivering a much higher active ingredient

than competitors. This result is achieved via use of unique technology developed in-house in collaboration with support from CSIRO and FIAL.

Maffra Cheese has impressed markets with their use of non-animal rennet and ash rind enabling Halal certified, traditionally made hard cheese for export to Hindu and Islamic populations in SE Asia.

The Gippsland Hub competitive strengths have supported a higher value return on exports.

Commencement of the roll-out of the Gippsland Trusted Provenance brand in the fourth quarter of 2021 and first quarter of 2022 will assist exporting SMEs through the profiling of regional provenance and positioning at point of sale, with anticipated incremental increases of return.

Proposed next steps in maintaining the program till the end of March 2022 include:

- Continue the launch and roll-out of the Gippsland Trusted Provenance brand and Gippsland provenance guarantee system
- Complete a web based cyber security for exports on the Food & Fibre Gippsland website



Package Assisting Small Exporters (PASE)

Funded by the Commonwealth through the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment in August 2020, this program is due for completion in mid-2022. PASE has been designed to understand what is required to overcome barriers to trade for SME producers of fresh produce. The project scope includes digitisation and availability of select market information, with the aim of increasing export requirement transparency through overcoming barriers. To date the project has:

- Installed a portal shell in the KE-DI program (Export Barriers website).
- Selection, examination, and comprehensive documentation of six initial target markets:
 - USA
 - India
 - Hong Kong
 - Singapore
 - Malaysia
 - UAE
- Selection of three fresh produce key categories from Gippsland:
 - Dairy
 - Beef
 - Vegetables

Addressing The Challenges of Covid

From the perspective of engagement, the global pandemic has posed significant challenges in connecting Gippsland producers to international buyers via traditional channels such as trade fairs, one-to-one in person meetings, and product sampling opportunities.

This challenge has been addressed through a range of online initiatives including key government and industry stakeholders undertaking 'Meet the Buyer' online forums, and provenance digital productions.

The forums have resulted in ongoing conversations as relationships build, and demand for Gippsland products increases, as potential buyers from around the world re-establish export activity and supply chains in a (semi)-post global pandemic economy and environment.

To support some of the participants in their online activity and meetings, a series of professional mini-documentary style short films have been created to provide a digital visual resource introducing the producers, their location, and their products, giving potential buyers a more personal connection to people and place and importantly the clean, green environment of the Gippsland region. This initiative has assisted in facilitating more efficient conversations during online meetings as the potential buyer already has some background knowledge and understanding of the products and the brand.

These resources have also been used by the participants in their own communications channels and promotional activities and can be accessed on Vimeo and searching Food & Fibre Gippsland.



GIPPSLAND SMART SPECIALISATION STRATEGY (GS3)



2021 saw continuation of Food & Fibre Gippsland partnership with the Latrobe Valley Authority for the delivery of the GS3 food and fibre stream. GS3 is a regional development initiative focused to collaboratively developing new regionally competitive opportunities, with potential to drive long-term, sustainable economic and social advantage for the Gippsland region. Originally conceived as a methodology to assist in the prioritisation of Government funding within the European Union, Smart Specialisation (S3) is now a key global innovation, collaboration, and funding prioritisation framework. Gippsland is one of the only signatory regions outside of the Eurozone to Smart Specialisation methodology.

Key to the methodology is “Quadruple Helix” (industry, government, community, academia) engagement, collaboratively selecting and developing opportunities, testing value propositions, and building business cases for establishment of those opportunities.

These stakeholders direct and inform activities, research, policy change and engagement required to ensure an opportunity has sound value proposition. Throughout 2021 F&FG has worked with hundreds (if not thousands) of these stakeholders across the region, nationally and globally, shaping the work and ensuring fit for purpose.

The GS3 food and fibre stream expanded in both scope and team during 2021 with Elena Nauta joining as a Federation University Industry Placement Program student from December 2020 – June 2021, adding significant capacity to Sustainable Emerging Commodities (seaweed and insects). Elena will continue under a part-time basis as Graduate Project Officer through to at least June 2022. Elena joins Ben Gebert, F&FG’s Program Manager, and the LVA food and fibre team including Jeanie Hall as the area lead. The ongoing relationship with the LVA brings significant capability to the work of F&FG and demonstrates the positive results from excellent partnering and collaboration.



OPPORTUNITY AREA UPDATES

Collective Craft Malting:

The Collective Craft Malting Facility opportunity received a significant boost during 2021 with long-term collaborators and commercial proponents, Sailors Grave Brewing, receiving state and federal government funding to establish a new brewery precinct. The precinct, known as “Dunetown”, will be located on a picturesque property between Marlo and Cape Conran in Far East Gippsland. Sailors Grave have offered to house the Collective Craft Malting Facility at Dunetown alongside their own commercial operations which include their brewery; a hospitality venue; hop garden and other visitor economy / agritourism attractions. The Craft Malting Facility stakeholders landed on the concept of the facility itself being run as a social enterprise or within a “profit for purpose” framework, reinvesting profits into regenerative agriculture advancement; local Traditional Owner business initiatives; land / waterway stewardship and supporting the local economy. F&FG and LVA supported an application for further funding to assist in the financials associated with the malting facility equipment and are working to execute on the purchase of a pilot facility as requested by stakeholders. It is expected Dunetown will be built in 2023, with the Craft Malting pilot plant completed concurrently.

Advanced Vegetable Processing:

The Advanced Vegetable Processing (AVP) Facility opportunity matured to the point of investor socialisation throughout 2021 following completion of investment logic mapping and an Investment Prospectus. F&FG and LVA have begun conducting conversations with national and international investors in the establishment of the facility within Gippsland. Supporting factors such as the Victorian Government’s \$10m infrastructure investment into the establishment of the Latrobe Manufacturing Precinct will positively impact the trajectory of the opportunity with a focus. F&FG and LVA have joined forces with a other food industry operators nationally, under the facilitation of Food Innovation Australia Limited (FIAL), to submit a Commonwealth bid for a national



collaborative and connected eco-cluster. If successful, this federal funding program could fund circa one third of the AVP projected establishment cost. F&FG continues to work towards gaining solid investment in the AVP facility, with targets for commercialisation to commence in the upcoming calendar year (pending successful investment).

Carbon Economies:

Added to the GS3 remit in this past year, F&FG has commenced exploratory work on how our sector can more actively engage with Carbon Economies. The aim of this work is to deliver a carbon assets and liabilities register for the Gippsland region, ideally facilitating intra-regional (and inter-regional or inter-state) trading as part of net zero strategies. The concept of a formalised register would allow the Gippsland region to market its credentials on the carbon front, facilitating engagement with formal markets. Areas of work include determining how the region might be able to collaboratively develop tools and practices to generate economic benefit through existing, and potential future, carbon sequestration opportunities. Work during 2021 focussed on the discovery stage of the S3 process, where stakeholders are brought together to hear from experts on situational awareness aspects surrounding Carbon, ask questions, and begin to identify knowledge gaps. A workshop held late September comprised over 80 invitees, some of whom are actively contributing to reaching the GS3 Define stage, where specific opportunities become more crystalised. Discussions underway as at time of this Annual Report into the technical research and work required to advance the opportunity. Recognising the successful work of GS3, an interstate University undertaking R&D work for Agrifutures, have reached out to invite the participation of GS3 in their carbon pooling development work.

SUSTAINABLE EMERGING COMMODITIES

— INSECTS AND SEAWEED

2021 launched the Sustainable Emerging Commodities Stream of GS3 comprising two new projects – Alternative Protein (Insect) Farming and Seaweed Farming, with investigation into their potential both innovative and sustainable as regionally competitive advantage opportunities for Gippsland.

Alternative Protein (Insect) Farming:

Protein consumption globally has increased by 40% since only the year 2000. By 2030 it is expected traditional proteins (meat, dairy, etc) will still be of the largest value, with plant proteins as the largest by volume, and alternative/new proteins as the fastest growing.

Insects are consumed by over 80% of the world's population as a tasty, nutritious, and sustainable source of protein. Per 100g by weight, crickets contain approximately 65g of protein. Insects are a valuable source of micronutrients, including zinc, iron and vitamin B12, which are difficult to obtain in sufficient quantities from other alternative (non-animal) sources of protein, whilst having a much smaller environmental footprint. Another exciting application of insect farming is the ability of insects (black soldier fly larvae) to consume and grow off organic waste such as horticultural or dairy processing waste. The insects themselves are then processed into high value animal feed, creating a profitable circular economy.

Although broad consumer acceptance remains a barrier to widespread consumption in Australia, the market for edible insects is rapidly growing. In the next five years, the Australian insect farming is estimated to be annually worth \$10 million, while the global insect farming industry is expected to reach a value of \$1.4 billion AUD by 2023 and expand 44% annually by 2025. 14 active commercial insect farming businesses currently operate in Australia, and this number is quickly increasing as interest in the industry builds.

Food & Fibre Gippsland hosted three virtual workshops in 2021 as part of the GS3 Entrepreneurial Discovery Process, exploring potential of insect farming as a future industry for the Gippsland region. Topics included how insects are farmed, barriers to commercial scale production, and the potential of a regional insect-based organic waste processing facility. Opportunities arising from these discussions include an insect farming entry guide and package, and mapping of available organic waste in the Gippsland region. F&FG will continue investigation into the potential of native edible insect species, and opportunities to inspire new and exciting products co-developed by First Nations/Traditional Owner led initiatives.





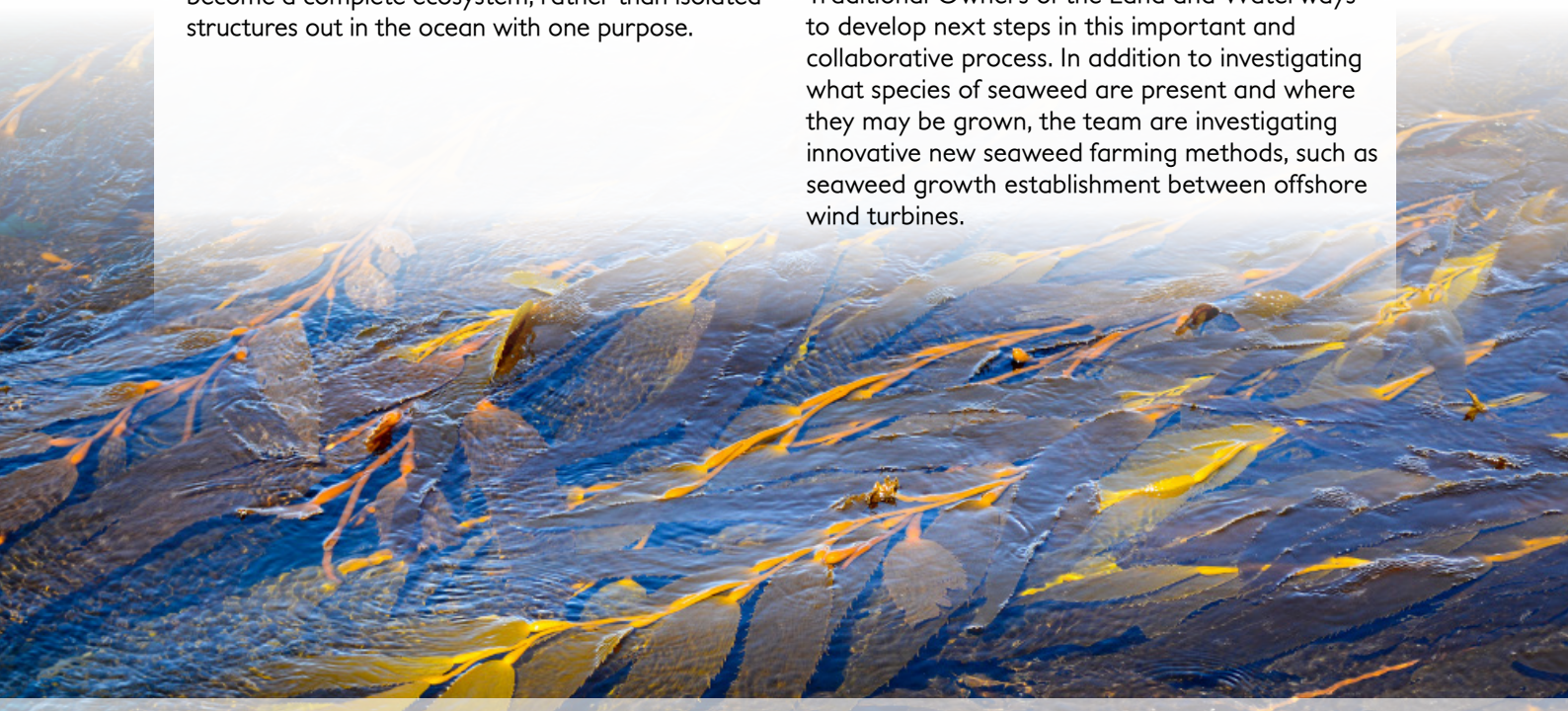
Seaweed Farming:

Seaweed is rapidly gaining global recognition and traction as a versatile, sustainable, and nutritious source of protein. In addition to being a valuable source of protein for humans and animals and a powerful pharmaceutical and nutraceutical opportunity, certain species of Australian seaweed are being investigated for their ability to remove carbon from the atmosphere and reduce livestock methane emissions. Specific types of seaweed can sequester carbon at 10x the rate of above ground trees. This is a lucrative opportunity for the region when considering the factors of food, medicines, and positive climate impact.

Another important consideration for the Gippsland region is seaweed farming can provide or restore fish and shellfish habitats, improving biodiversity of fish populations and creating opportunities for multi-species aquaculture, ecotourism, or recreational fishing. Seaweed grows incredibly quickly (up to 30 times the rate of land-based plants), and provides shelter, a food source, and optimum conditions (by improving nutrient levels in the water) for fish growth in a short timeframe. The result is seaweed farms have potential to become a complete ecosystem, rather than isolated structures out in the ocean with one purpose.

Seaweed growing initiatives in Europe have successfully utilised wind farms and other offshore structures to support seaweed growth, which can then be harvested for food, alternative energy as a biomass, or to sequester carbon from the atmosphere. By using existing offshore structures, it negates need for ropes or platforms to grow the seaweed. Farming seaweed offshore has extensive environmental benefits given no fresh water or fertiliser is required.

F&FG and LVA hosted the online “Gippsland Seaweed Symposium” in April 2021 to discuss potential benefits of a seaweed industry for the region. Gippsland, with over 600km of coastline and a vast network of lakes and waterways, in addition to an established aquaculture industry, could potentially be a prime location for development of a dynamic commercial seaweed industry in Victoria (and connecting back to the AVP for processing!). One challenge is the limited information available on seaweed species types to grow in the region, and data on the environmental conditions needed to support seaweed growth. Our GS3 food and fibre team are undertaking discussions with organisations including Deakin University, Kelp Blue and Traditional Owners of the Land and Waterways to develop next steps in this important and collaborative process. In addition to investigating what species of seaweed are present and where they may be grown, the team are investigating innovative new seaweed farming methods, such as seaweed growth establishment between offshore wind turbines.



VICTORIA DROUGHT HUB - GIPPSLAND NODE LEADER

Victoria Drought Hub, funded by the Commonwealth of Australia in July 2021, is the shorter name for – Victoria Drought Resilience Adoption & Innovation Hub! Eight of these strategically important Hubs have been funded across the country, with one located in the State of Victoria. Each Hub is currently funded through to 2024.

The Victoria Drought Hub comprises a consortium of partners:

- University of Melbourne: Consortia Lead
- Agriculture Victoria: Drought Hub Partner
- Deakin University: Hub Knowledge Broker
- Federation University: Digital Platforms
- LaTrobe University: Capacity Building
- Five regional Node Leads
 - Gippsland: Food & Fibre Gippsland
 - South-West: Southern Farming Systems
 - North-West: Birchip Cropping Group
 - North-West Irrigated Horticulture: Mallee Regional Innovation Centre
 - North-East: Riverine Plains

The Gippsland node will coordinate locally based, credible community engagement and projects targeting the four key phases of drought:

1. Good years
2. Periods leading into drought (where things could go either way)
3. Drought
4. Recovery after drought

Our Gippsland program of work will support agriculture, environment, communities, and local Government to adapt and transform, and achieve both better preparedness and increased resilience to the impact of drought.

Collaboration is key and innovation is a strong driving force in the intended outcomes. Engagement with producers and ensuring producer-led contribution to projects within the Drought Hub program is front and center. A key role of the University partners is to respond to producer consultations and Node Leader proposed projects through research and development, innovative solutions, sharing of knowledge and supporting technology.

Aligning to Federal Government expectations, the Victoria Drought Hub is certainly not intended to be a business-as-usual program!



KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY DIGITAL INNOVATION (KE-DI)

The project brief that became KE-DI, was to design and develop a new online platform for delivering skills and knowledge to the food supply chain workforce. Recent meetings with the Victorian Department of Education and Training to demonstrate the technology build, resulted in outcomes well surpassing expectations of the Department.

This 2-year grant program was awarded in June 2019 through the Victorian Department of Education and Training with a due completion date of mid-December 2021.

The two-way engagement between Food & Fibre Gippsland and Learning Technologies Group (LTG - the software developers), recently resulted in significant changes in the capacity of Food & Fibre Gippsland web development with a global first technology that engages the employee either through a 'social' media interface or directly through a learning management system. This approach results in enhanced business-to-employee engagement, facilitates new ways of learning and upskilling the workforce, as well as providing a comprehensive database of micro-credentials and training materials.

When an F&FG member organisation was impacted by the Covid lockdowns KE-DI enabled that member to pivot from predominantly classroom-based training to fully online in just a few weeks – and they haven't looked back! The platform is now being used by a cross selection of industry operators and we expect to significantly be expanding on that as the funded development comes to a close.

KE-DI includes:

- Shared learning management systems and multi-level access
- The ability to federate (link to and from) with other learning management systems
- The ability to provide digital proofing via encrypted signatures to mitigate education qualifications fraud
- Multi-media engagement
- A globally compliant payment system
- Events creation and scheduling
- Users can schedule and book appointments with mentors, teachers, trainers, etc
- Forums and Workshops area (both private and public options)
..... and so much more for employers, employees, educators, trainers, innovators!

Food & Fibre Gippsland is currently exploring opportunities to commercialise KE-DI, together with the development and execution of additional modules to deliver future produce traceability for Gippsland.

Food & Fibre Gippsland extends an open invitation to engage in discussion and presentation on what KE-DI can deliver for your organisational growth, employee learning engagement, promotion and enhancement in collaboration and innovation.

What's your

FOOD OR FIBRE CHALLENGE, Gippsland?

Businesses of all sorts and sizes across the Gippsland food and fibre sector were encouraged to get involved in the What's Your Food or Fibre Challenge, Gippsland? program.

The program, funded by the Victorian Government's Gippsland Regional Partnership, has put food and fibre businesses in a prime position to turn challenges into opportunities, to collaborate with industry experts and develop innovative solutions to what could be holding back future business growth.

Aimed at established SME businesses who have been in operation for at least two years, in this program there has been no such thing as a bad idea. Getting access to a wide range of resources and subject matter expertise to help bring ideas and projects to life involved two steps, the first of which was to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI). Following that, potential project participants attended a Challenge Bootcamp day at Morwell Innovation Centre, joining a room full of peer businesses and people for a valuable day of building ideas – it was learning, information sharing and networking on steroids!

The Challenge Bootcamp supported businesses in being better equipped for preparing their full application and confidently pitch their challenge to the evaluation panel, who were looking for challenges with potential for growth and sustainability.

Seven dynamic final projects were selected and are ongoing until finalisation in early 2022 including:

- Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
- Bulmer Farms
- Kiel Industries
- Ingram Wild Caught Fisheries
- Gurneys Cider
- South Gippsland Dairy
- Gippsland Jersey

All are benefiting from comprehensive research and innovation support, collaboration from experts and leaders in academia, business, science and the food and fibre industry.





Traditional Foods

Organisation:
Gunaikurnai Land and Waters
Aboriginal Corporation
(GLaWAC)

This project will enable GLaWAC to carry the Gunaikurnai people's 60,000-year history of land care and custodianship into the future by producing feasibility and business planning into commercial product opportunities for traditional foods indigenous to the East Gippsland region.

Trickle Tape Recycling

Organisation:
Bulmer Farms

This project involves research into potential reuse or recycling options for single-use, non-biodegradable trickle tape used to maximise water in Bulmer Farms intensive vegetable farming. It aims to make their business and local agriculture more sustainable and has potential impact across the horticulture sector.

Flexible Food Grade Bin Liner

Organisation:
Kiel Industries

The Challenge program aims to help Kiel Industries develop a biodegradable food-grade bin liner that is strong enough to transport seafood while having the flexibility to sit within collapsible transport bins. The bin-liners will reduce the economic and environmental cost on the return journey from market.

Carp Fish Sauce

Organisation:
Ingram Wild Caught Fisheries

The objective from the program work here will help develop a business and marketing plan for Ingram Wild Caught Fisheries producing fish sauce from carp. The sauce has potential to become the only Australian-made fish sauce, while solving a significant environmental pest problem in Gippsland waterways.

Cider Pasteurisation

Organisation: Gurneys Cider

Gurneys Cider will benefit from research into the most efficient and environmentally friendly pasteurisation process for their business, enabling them and potentially other small-to-medium cider breweries to scale up.

Bio Colostrum Tablet and Powder

Organisation:
South Gippsland Dairy

Seeking to undertake further market development of bio colostrum as a commercial product and to conduct clinical trials and research, the project will further support South Gippsland Dairy engagement in the human nutrition space and help grow the local bio colostrum market segment for other dairies.

Dairy Factory of the Future

Organisation:
Gippsland Jersey

Developing a feasibility study into Gippsland Jersey creating a centrally located, all-inclusive dairy manufacturing plant enabling supply chain efficiencies and attracting a visitor economy experience, the Challenge project work could see Gippsland home to a world-leading dairy hub.

'What's your Food or Fibre Challenge, Gippsland?' is funded by the Victorian Government Gippsland Regional Partnership and being delivered by Federation University Australia and Food & Fibre Gippsland with partnering and support provided by Regional Development Victoria, Food Agility CRC, Food Innovation Australia Limited, Latrobe Valley Authority, TAFE Gippsland and Committee for Gippsland.

SEASONAL WORKFORCE INDUSTRY SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Seasonal Workforce Industry Support Program (SWISP) is a 6month program (July – December 2021) aiming to provide targeted support to industry bodies in undertaking collaborative activities to strengthen the seasonal horticulture workforce.

The Gippsland horticulture sector is characterised by the range and diversity of enterprises (ranging from soft fruit, apples, and pears to field scale vegetable production, protected cropping, and many small-scale artisanal producers).

Significant labour force constraints exist that can impact production and profitability, especially across industry sectors relying on consistent 365-day employment periods.

Food & Fibre Gippsland received funding for this program work through Agriculture Victoria to understand the many diverse barriers to employment in our sector, such as engagement strategies with communities, delivery of materials and content targeted to assist future successful transition into the horticultural seasonal workforce, transport, and lack of local housing suitable for temporary workers and their families.

SWISP will:

1. Deploy key materials/content products to support and connect local job seekers to employment opportunities and businesses to a digital platform.
2. Deploy key materials/ content products that support businesses with seasonal workforce issues including recruitment of seasonal workers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and other communities (including an example of an employer and employee checklist).
3. Deliver reporting on a strategy for the future transport and mobility of workforce to regional places of work.
4. Deliver DHHS and other COVIDSafe directions via a digital platform (F&FG's KE-DI platform) to regional horticultural businesses (facilitated through the VegNET program).



GIPPSLAND TRUSTED PROVENANCE BRAND

Like many have experienced during 2021, resourcing has been a challenge. Food & Fibre Gippsland has now resourced this program for the final phase.

Fully developed, with templated access licences and supporting agreements, the Gippsland Provenance Brand is ready to roll out as a regional asset.

Once formally launched in the first quarter of 2022, verified Gippsland producers will be able to utilise the brand to distinguish their produce on local and international stages. The visual identity of the brand aligns closely to Destination Gippsland's regional Gipps - (all kinds of wonder) - Land branding, and F&FG are collaborating with Destination Gippsland and digital design specialists to build an online home for the Gippsland Trusted Provenance brand, allowing consumers and businesses to access information about participating producers, provenance and how to access that produce.

Development of this brand always held importance however this has been heightened so much more with Covid driving up awareness of supply chains, transparency, traceability, and overall trust in the food system.

Gippsland having a visual brand to collectively use both domestically and globally, maximises the opportunity of "clean, green, trusted" connection with consumers be they located in Europe, Asia, or Australia.

Team F&FG are really excited for 2022 and the Gippsland Trusted Provenance activities, so please do watch this space!

The logo features the word "GIPPS" in a bold, white, sans-serif font at the top. Below it, the words "Trusted Provenance" are written in a white, elegant script font. At the bottom, the word "LAND" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The entire text is enclosed within a thin white circular border. The background of the logo is a dark green on the left and a golden-brown forest scene on the right.

GIPPS
Trusted Provenance
LAND

GIPPSLAND FOOD AND FIBRE AWARDS

The 2021 Gippsland Food and Fibre Awards program was simplified from the previous year into six category awards and three premier awards for 2021.

In the uncertain and often relentlessly stressful months of pandemic lockdowns impacting economic and social conditions, challenges existed for Gippsland businesses, no matter their size, to resource the engagement for entering the Awards.

We were fortunate to contract Liz Fleming to project manage the Awards, providing expert skills as the Efficiency Coach to work with businesses on completing their entries. From 111 entries across nine categories, the winners of the 2021 Gippsland Food and Fibre Awards represent an impressive cross section of the region's dynamic \$7B industry.

Gurneys Cider claimed the prestigious title as the 2021 KPMG Gippsland Agribusiness of the Year, receiving a \$5,000 cash prize and the opportunity to work with KPMG's Agrifood Tech team in 2022. Gurneys also earned the Building Capability award for initiatives that included fostering a local food culture where trusted provenance is at the forefront of everything they do.

In a competitive field, Shelley Walker from South Gippsland Dairy was named Female Agribusiness Leader of the Year and will benefit through the opportunity to participate in the 2022 Women's Leadership Program with Leadership Victoria.

For his business courage, foresight and contribution to both industry and the region, Matt Vaux from Rosedale Butchers received the Young Agribusiness Leader award, securing a place in the TRAIL Emerging Leaders Leadership Program with the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation.

The Driving Innovation Award went to Flooding Creek Fungi, recognizing the efforts of Josef Sestokas and family to create an urban mushroom farm supplying high quality gourmet mushrooms to local and Melbourne based restaurants, and keeping home cooks stocked with their premium produce.

The Prom Coast Food Collective, reaching almost \$1 million in sales last year has been recognised for commitment to sustainability and adaption to change, winning the Sustainability Award.

Gippsland's food and drink manufacturing industry features a broad range of large and small businesses, with this category presenting two awards reflecting that. Winning the Small Food and Drink Manufacturing award was the Burra Brewing company, an iconic destination brewery in Korumburra, whilst Burra Foods, an Australian dairy ingredient processor also from Korumburra, was recognised for their achievements in Manufacturing Excellence by being named the Large Food and Drink Manufacturer winner for 2021.

Even amongst a global pandemic, Gippsland businesses have still been able to pursue their export goals and tap into new markets. Trafalgar based Victoria Valley Meats got the judges nod for their efforts in these challenging times and are very worthy winners of the Export Award.

The Fibre Award went to Just Add Trees, a well-deserved recognition for project management and consultancy services helping small and large-scale farms integrate trees into their planning, improving productivity and resilience.

A surprise award incorporated into the 2021 line-up recognised and rewarded resilience, with Myles Nichols from Great Alpine Flowers as the deserving recipient. Acknowledging the ability to successfully pivot after the devastating black summer bushfires in East Gippsland and create a new business model in pandemic impacted times, benefitting not just Myles business, but a cohort of local businesses along the way.

Minister for Agriculture and Regional Development, the Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas MP congratulated all the winners and praised the Gippsland region for its productivity and innovation. "Gippsland is home to a number of Victoria's large-scale producers and processors, a growing number of small to medium enterprises, along with creators of artisan brands and products that are all collectively putting the





region on the map. It's pleasing to see such a diverse group of businesses all driving innovation and success in their own way."

The Awards program is made possible thanks to a diverse group of organisations passionate about the continued growth of Gippsland. These include founding partners KPMG Australia, Australian Rural Leadership Foundation and Leadership Victoria, Gold Partners National Australia Bank, Southern Rural Water, TAFE Gippsland and Gipps Dairy, Silver Partners Commonwealth Bank, Bega Cheese, Dyers Transport, nbn Local, VicForests and Federation University. Local Government pride in the sector is evident through the commitment of Bass Coast Shire Council, Baw Baw Shire Council, East Gippsland Shire Council, Latrobe City Council, South Gippsland Shire Council and Wellington Shire Council, with further industry

and government partner support from Agriculture Victoria, Regional Development Australia, Food Innovation Australia Limited and Latrobe Valley Authority. Amongst challenging times, we were delighted to grow our Awards partner group in 2021, with Gipps Dairy, Bega Cheese, nbn Local, Vicforests and Regional Development Australia all enthusiastic newcomers to the program.

A debrief of the 2021 program will take place in December, with planning commencing early 2022 for the fourth year Awards, taking into consideration feedback from entrants and non-entrants, encouraging broader and deeper participation, and potentially bringing some consumer-based, people's choice style engagement into the mix!

2021 Gippsland Food and Fibre Award Winners & Location

Award	Winner	Location	LGA Shire
Agribusiness of the Year	Gurneys Cider	Foster	South Gippsland
Female Agribusiness Leader of the Year	Shelley Walker- South Gippsland Dairy	Korumburra	South Gippsland
Young Agribusiness Leader of the Year	Matt Vaux – Rosedale Butchers	Rosedale	Wellington
Driving Innovation	Flooding Creek Fungi	Sale	Wellington
Sustainability	Prom Coast Food Collective	Foster / Meeniyan	South Gippsland
Small Food and Drink Manufacturer	Burra Brewing Company	Korumburra	South Gippsland
Large Food and Drink Manufacturer	Burra Foods	Korumburra	South Gippsland
Exporting	Victoria Valley Meats	Trafalgar	Baw Baw
Fibre Award	Just Add Trees	Buln Buln	Baw Baw Shire
Resilience	Great Alpine Flowers	Bairnsdale	East Gippsland

2021 AWARD WINNERS

Driving Innovation
Flooding Creek Fungi



WINNER

Food & Drink Manufacturing
(fewer than 10 employees)
Burra Brewing Company



WINNER

Food & Drink Manufacturing
(more than 10 employees)
Burra Foods



WINNER

Resilience Award
Great Alpine Flowers



WINNER

Female Agribusiness Leader
of the Year
Shelley Walker - South Gippsland Dairy



WINNER

Young Agribusiness Leader
of the Year
Matt Vaux - Rosedale Butchers



WINNER

Exporting
Victoria Valley Meats



WINNER

Building Capability
Gurneys Cider



WINNER

Agribusiness
of the Year
Gurneys Cider



WINNER

Sustainability,
Land Use, Water
Prom Coast Food Collective



WINNER





Food & Fibre Gippsland

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Australian Government's Future Drought Fund

Commonwealth of Australia

- Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
- Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources

Food Innovation Australia Limited (FIAL)

Horticulture Innovation Australia Ltd (HIAL)

State of Victoria

- Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions
 - Agriculture Victoria
 - Jobs Victoria
 - Latrobe Valley Authority
 - Regional Development Victoria
- Department of Education & Training
- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

Food & Fibre Gippsland extends appreciation and thanks for your support!

BOARD MEMBER PROFILES



Barry Rogers

Chair

Barry Rogers is the Board Chair, contributing many years of Board, industry, and community experience in the Gippsland region.

Barry represents Food & Fibre Gippsland on the Gippsland Technical School Committee and the Gippsland High Tech Precinct Project Planning Group.

He is a leadership developer, trainer, and coach – working to support directors, senior managers and community members grow and hone their leadership skills. He's been a part of the Gippsland Community Leadership Program for over 25 years; a board member/chair, executive director, program manager, and participant: espousing the theme "Growing Gippsland's Leaders".

An accredited 5 Behaviours of Cohesive Teams and NLP (Neuro-Linguistics Program) facilitator, Barry is a lifelong Gippslandian – who is lucky enough to have spent some of his early years in other parts of Victoria before coming home in his early twenties!



Andrew Bulmer

Deputy Chair

Andrew is the Managing Director of Bulmer Farms, one of Australia's largest producers of Fresh salads. The business is based in Lindenow, East Gippsland and farms ten different properties over around 500 hectares in the Mitchell river Valley. Andrew puts their success down to "hard work, resilience and a passion for quality".

Awarded the 2017 ABC and Kondinin Groups Farmer of the Year, he is a passionate advocate for Horticulture who is committed to making a positive contribution to Industry and regional communities, with a strong interest in farm innovation and new technologies. Andrew is also a graduate of Course 24 of the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation.

Andrew is heavily involved in school based traineeship programs and helps to provide pathways for young people in careers in Agriculture.



Kate Wallis

Treasurer

Kate is the Executive Manager Regional Agribusiness for Gippsland with Commonwealth Bank, this role covers agribusiness and commercial banking across Gippsland with a strong focus on supporting communities and building awareness and investment in agriculture.

Kate hails from Berrys Creek in South Gippsland where she grew up in a family beef farm operation with farms in Gippsland and Rutherglen. She brings a wealth of experience to the Board with her background in investment banking, commercial and retail lending and distribution, international experience in the UK, USA and Asia in project management, people leadership, strategy, trading, technology systems and agribusiness.

Kate is passionate about the growth and sustainability of Gippsland, specifically in the areas of agriculture and services to agriculture.





Brian Davey

Board Member

Brian Davey has a background in the coal and power sector with more than 30 years experience in the operations, financial, marketing and technology sectors of the industry.

Brian commenced his career with the SECV in the Latrobe Valley and worked in a variety of roles and was promoted to General Manager level. On privatization Brian joined a newly created private power entity in a senior management role and took up management positions in HR, Operations and Marketing.

Outside of work Brian has been an experienced Board member with more than 11 years as member of the West Gippsland Healthcare Group and has served as Chair and vice Chair for 7 of those years.

Along with his wife he runs a small stud beef farm in West Gippsland.



Stephen Angus

Board Member

Stephen is an accomplished executive leader, a qualified IECL coach and grew up on a farm in far East Gippsland, beginning a life long association with farming and farmers.

Together with his wife Leecia, Stephen runs a family business, Snowy Advisory which has a deep commitment to sustaining and expanding agricultural businesses.

Stephen's focus is developing confident and effective leaders, while strengthening team and organisational ability. His passion is to encourage and support enterprises so they can thrive.

He has worked at executive levels in various organisations throughout his career and has developed a deep understanding of the qualities that help make our people better managers and leaders.



Sallie Jones

Board Member

Sallie Jones is Co-Founder and Managing Director of Gippsland Jersey, an independent, farmer-owned premium milk brand based in country Victoria. No stranger to the dairy industry, Sallie grew up on the family dairy farm in East Gippsland where her parents were pioneers in value-adding to all of the milk they produced by turning it into ice cream.

Gippsland Jersey is passionate about looking after dairy farmers, ensuring they are paid a fair price for their milk and Sallie has leveraged her Gippsland Jersey identity and profile to help break down the stigma associated with mental health issues in the industry and the agribusiness sector in general.

Her love for regional Victoria and her local community knows no bounds, and she thrives on bringing ideas, events and activities to life she knows will deliver benefit, joy and wherever possible, that good dose of kindness to any herd they touch.

Board Observers

Karen Cain – Latrobe Valley Authority

Leigh Kennedy – Federation University

Grant Radford – TAFE Gippsland

Cr. Brett Tessari – Representative from One Gippsland

Representative from Regional Development Victoria

TEAM PROFILES



Nicola Pero

Chief Executive Officer

Following a globally proven career, Nicola brings cross-sector experience in the Gippsland region, multi-level stakeholder and political engagement and is passionate about our Gippsland region growth opportunities for the food and fibre supply chain.

Excited about the future direction of the organisation, Nicola is focussed on supporting the entire value chain in which Gippsland already contributes to almost 50% of Victoria's food and fibre production.

Nicola is a board member of Destination Gippsland and Governor-in-Council Appointee to Federation University Australia Council.



Jody O'Brien

Head of Communications, Membership and Marketing

Jody brings a wealth of communications and engagement expertise, with many years' experience across a diverse range of industries, programs, brands and businesses.

A natural storyteller, and a self-confessed "foodie", Jody loves Gippsland and is always finding ways to collaborate with stakeholders locally and further afield to grow awareness of the region's growers, producers, makers, and personalities.

Networking comes naturally to Jody so she loves catching up with members and businesses and helping them join the dots to drive growth and identify new opportunities.



Tova Wilshansky

Business Operations Manager

An accomplished business all-rounder, Tova has had a long career in senior leadership and consulting roles particularly in the fields of Business Operations, Process Efficiency, HR, Sales and Customer Experience, in a multitude of industries, blending the unorthodox and innovative with traditional and proven methodologies and practices.

Tova is passionate about the region, moving to Gippsland from Melbourne some 3.5 years ago, running her own successful business consultancy and working with Not For Profit organisations in the horticulture space across the whole Gippsland region, developing close working relationships in the area.





Dr. Julian Hill

KE-DI
Victoria Drought Hub
SWISP

To support the need to develop workforce capabilities for now and into the future and to build stronger partnerships across industry, training providers and TAFEs, Julian is implementing an innovative and collaborative project, designed to drive real transformational change.

Julian has an extensive background in the management of research development and extension in agriculture and horticulture and has many years of experience in strategic and operational leadership at both a board and executive level.



Ben Gebert

Smart Specialisation
Project Manager

Ben Gebert brings a wealth of community development and corporate business experience to the project and his role, with a passion for building thriving, sustainable communities.

With his core values of integrity, trust, respect and perseverance, Ben has a deep commitment to identifying and fostering potential within all members of the community and being a driving influence on meaningful, positive change.



Elena Nauta

Graduate Project Officer
- Smart Specialisation

Elena is an aspiring nutritional researcher and academic high achiever, supporting the Gippsland Smart Specialisation Program in a graduate project officer capacity.

Excited to be exploring opportunities that furthers her knowledge and career within the food and nutritional science industry, Elena is working with Ben and the LVA team on strategies for the development and establishment of offshore seaweed and alternative protein (insect) farming for human consumption in the region.



TEAM PROFILES



Bonnie Dawson

Regional Development Officer
- VegNET

Bonnie supports capacity building for the region's vegetable industry.

A current post-graduate student of Agricultural Science and a graduate with Bachelor of Health Sciences and International Development, Bonnie has significant experience in stakeholder engagement and project management, with an interest and developing knowledge of the agricultural sector.

Drawing on all of her career experience to date in community engagement, local food systems, agriculture and business, Bonnie enjoys engaging with producers and supporting their vital and dynamic contributions to the Gippsland community and economy.



David Grimmond

Gippsland Connect
- SME Export Hub

Program Manager David heads up our SME Export Hub Program where he is supporting a range of up to 20 Gippsland Agrifood SME's improve their capabilities, increase exports and support business / industry growth.

David is also responsible for the PASE program, helping Gippsland SME producers understand what is required to overcome barriers to trade for fresh produce. The categories covered in this program are dairy, beef and vegetables.

With extensive experience in export, David is providing specialist guidance to the participating businesses to ensure maximum impact and success.



Nicki Keddie

Team Leader
Jobs Victoria Mentor

Nicki is the Team Leader for our Connect 2 Employment Program.

She grew up in East Gippsland and returned to the area after 12 years of travelling and working in sales and marketing. Amongst managing family and business, Nicki completed a Diploma of Case Management in 2015 with a view to working in the Community Services / Development industry.

With five years' experience working in the JVEN Program and two years with an indigenous program before joining Food & Fibre Gippsland's Employment Program, Nicki is very well connected and a valuable support for job seekers and employers alike.





Hannah Farnham

Jobs Victoria Mentor

Hannah has extensive experience across a range of fields including business management, marketing, sales and events. During her time within small business as well as large corporate organisations, Hannah discovered a passion for networking and making new connections within the community and with her clients.

Throughout COVID lockdowns, Hannah helped international students left without work or assistance. She helped them find jobs by creating resumes and cover letters for free. Hannah lives on Phillip Island, with strong family ties in the Baw Baw Shire.



Molly Shelton

Jobs Victoria Mentor

Molly has extensive experience and knowledge in a range of fields, she has previously worked in retail, hospitality, health care and most recently spent the last 5 years as a Police Custody Officer with Victoria Police.

A caring individual with a passion for networking and connecting with the community and people from all walks of life, Molly is Gippsland born and raised and has many connections within the region. She strives to support job seekers and employers any way she can!



Julie Tuhi

Program Administration
Connecct 2 Employment

Julie has extensive experience in business, finance, management and HR in the private sector, hospitality and education, having worked in Australia and Asia. Julie has strong family ties in East Gippsland and returned to live in the region back in 2015, working in the employment services sector. Julie works closely with job seekers and potential employers in the region and is passionate about supporting people of all ages, from all walks of life, to pursue a career in the agrifood sector.





Food & Fibre Gippsland

ANNUAL REPORT
2021

