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LAUNCH OF THIRD APPLE AND PEAR ORCHARD PROGRAM

Hort Innovation has kicked off the third Apple and Pear industry *Productivity, Irrigation, Pests and Soils (PIPS3) program*. The program covers apple and pear orchards across the country and focuses on new technology and advanced management systems and applying integrated biological management to pests, diseases and soil.

Hort Innovation Research and Development Manager Adrian Hunt said, “The program is in initial stages of establishing research activities. It will deliver new research and build on the success of previous PIPS programs and benefit apple and pear growers. PIPS3 will execute an integrated program of activities across the whole orchard system.”

Four sub-projects of the program* will work collaboratively and conduct trials with integrated activities and standardised methods on commercial orchards across key growing regions and at Agriculture Victoria’s [Tatura SmartFarm](#).

The whole-of-system approach will help research teams collaborate on needs identified by the apple and pear industry such as: managing orchards in variable climates; meeting customer expectations; using resource inputs more efficiently; and fostering greater sustainability through biological solutions.

Apple and Pear Australia CEO Phil Turnbull welcomes the announcement of the PIPS3 investment in projects across the apple and pear supply chain.

“Quality research and development helps our industry to keep moving forward and ensures local and overseas consumers continue to trust, enjoy and afford fresh Australian apples and pears.

“The PIPS3 projects are well aligned to the challenges for our industry and come at a time when consumer trust and expectations, labour challenges and climate-adaptation are well and truly on the radar.”

Two of the sub-projects, managed by Agriculture Victoria, focus on new technology and advanced management systems that maximise fruit quality, yield and labour efficiency. These projects are prepping industry for scalable mechanisation and automation. They aim to improve orchard management by using sensing systems to monitor fruit development and explore opportunities for robotic harvesting. They will also focus on training methods, planting densities, rootstock, sun protection and irrigation strategies to adapt to changes in climate.

The final two sub-projects managed by Agriculture Victoria and the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture work across apples and pears to measure outcomes of applying a range of integrated management solutions in orchards and focus on soil health and pest and disease management. The projects seek to provide a step-change to operating more sustainable production systems that proactively integrates management of pests and disease and soil.

Adrian Hunt said, “Apples and pears have come a long way since the first PIPS program, it’s exciting to see the new program get started and build more knowledge for growers.”

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**The four sub-projects include:*

- *Advancing sustainable and technology driven apple orchard production systems, Agriculture Victoria*
- *Developing smarter and sustainable pear orchards to maximise fruit quality, yield and labour efficiency, Agriculture Victoria*
- *Strengthening cultural and biological management of pests and diseases in apple and pear orchards, Agriculture Victoria*
- *Improved Australian apple and pear orchards soil health and plant nutrition, Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA), a joint venture between the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government'.*