

MEDIA RELEASE
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New app will tell growers when plants need watering

Horticulture Innovation Australia (Hort Innovation) is joining forces with agriculture technology company The Yield to deliver an exciting new tool for growers – a mobile app designed to help guide irrigation decisions.

Hort Innovation Research and Investments General Manager David Moore said that knowing when and how much to irrigate crops can be a challenge for growers, particularly because only a portion currently use moisture probes to make these decisions on their land.

“This new app will harness the power of technology to take away some of the uncertainty growers face when deciding when the best time to irrigate is, and how much water might be needed,” he said. “It’s a simple, easy-to-use solution that will help growers improve irrigation efficiency, with flow-on effects for crop yields, profitability and sustainability.”

With a focus on brassicas, carrots, lettuce and leafy vegetables, initially the app will allow growers to enter a location, crop type and crop growth stage to get a quick and easy estimate of vegetable crop water use and soil water balance.

Ultimately growers will be able to simply enter a planting date for their crops and have crop growth stages adjusted automatically, with the new app providing crop-specific water balance predictions. To do this the app will use information from the Bureau of Meteorology and newly developed ‘crop coefficient’ data and modelling from this research project.

This research project is being funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia Limited using the vegetable industry levy with co-investment from The Yield and funds from the Australian Government.

The app will also have the ability to draw from on-farm microclimate data and analytics where growers have on-farm sensors. The models enabling the app will be developed in partnership with The Queensland University of Technology, a leading research organisation in the field of bioinformatics and data analytics.

Ros Harvey, Managing Director of The Yield, said the app will continue to be developed together with growers to ensure that it is easy to use, with a selection of Tasmanian and Queensland growers already taking the trial app for a spin. “The Yield is excited to be partnering with Hort Innovation and its growers in co-creating this irrigation tool,” she said.

The first release of the app is expected in October this year, with a basic free version and a paid subscription service with added functionality to be available for iOS, Android and Windows platforms. This project is agile science in action,” Ros said. “Instead of waiting three years for research outcomes, we will progressively release updates as the research progresses. This gets results out of the lab and into growers’ hands quicker.”

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