

Final Report

Citrus technical forums 2020-2024

Project leader:

Nathan Hancock

Delivery partner:

Citrus Australia

Project code:

CT20000

Project:

Citrus technical forums 2020-2024 (CT20000)

Disclaimer:

Horticulture Innovation Australia Limited (Hort Innovation) makes no representations and expressly disclaims all warranties (to the extent permitted by law) about the accuracy, completeness, or currency of information in this Final Report.

Users of this Final Report should take independent action to confirm any information in this Final Report before relying on that information in any way.

Reliance on any information provided by Hort Innovation is entirely at your own risk. Hort Innovation is not responsible for, and will not be liable for, any loss, damage, claim, expense, cost (including legal costs) or other liability arising in any way (including from Hort Innovation or any other person's negligence or otherwise) from your use or non-use of the Final Report or from reliance on information contained in the Final Report or that Hort Innovation provides to you by any other means.

Funding statement:

This project has been funded by Hort Innovation, using the citrus research and development levy and contributions from the Australian Government. Hort Innovation is the grower-owned, not-for-profit research and development corporation for Australian horticulture.

Publishing details:

Published and distributed by: Hort Innovation

Level 7
141 Walker Street
North Sydney NSW 2060

Telephone: (02) 8295 2300

www.horticulture.com.au

© Copyright 2024 Horticulture Innovation Australia Limited

Contents

Public summary	4
Keywords	4
Introduction	4
Methodology	5
Results and discussion	5
Outputs	6
Outcomes	7
Monitoring and evaluation	8
Recommendations	8
Intellectual property	9
Appendices	9

Public summary

The CT20000 project brought together Citrus Levy-paying growers, along with the broader citrus industry, to learn about research, development, extension and marketing (RDE&M) activities. The core objective was to drive a profitable and sustainable future for the Australian citrus industry by understanding pertinent RDE&M learnings. Hort Innovation Citrus Levy-funded projects are conducted in a broad range of areas, and their results must be shared with the citrus industry in an efficient way that resonates with stakeholders. The Citrus Technical Forum, and subsequent Australian Citrus Congress, provided the ideal setting to update levy payers on these activities, as well as other relevant trends and developments.

These events also provided an opportunity for growers, researchers and other industry members to network and learn from each other. By bringing a large cross-section of the industry together, these events promoted the exchange of knowledge, built and maintained relationships and celebrated the success of the Australian citrus industry.

Due to travel restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2021 event was rescheduled to 2022. The scheduled 2023 event was then delivered in 2024. The 2022 and 2024 events were held at the Novotel Twin Waters Sunshine Coast Resort in Queensland.

The 2022 event attracted 330 delegates and was highly regarded for the quality of content shared, along with the networking opportunities. Australian and international speakers provided relevant and high-quality information to assist the industry to increase productivity and profitability.

The 2024 event was rebranded as the Australian Citrus Congress; this branding will be used for major Citrus Australia-led conferences in the future. The 2024 event attracted 440 delegates. RDE&M learnings were shared by project leaders in traditional conference-style presentations, as well as dedicated posters in the exhibition hall. International and Australian speakers presented on a range of topics, including biosecurity, health, retail, the global economic outlook, trade, production, postharvest and agri-technology. Copies of presentations were made available to industry on the Citrus Australia website.

The 2024 Congress also included a pre-event study tour to the Bundaberg area, which was attended by 86 delegates. Delegates gained insights into breeding technologies, new production techniques, citrus variety development, and advancements being made in packaging and grading equipment.

A dedicated Biosecurity Symposium was also held as part of the 2024 Congress. Over 170 delegates took the opportunity to hear from world-leading researchers and plant health experts, who shared their knowledge on the risks that exotic pests and diseases pose to Australian citrus business.

A survey of 2024 Australian Citrus Congress delegates indicated that 84 per cent of respondents found the content to be 'very good' or 'excellent'. Delegates also stated that networking was their key driver for attending, followed by professional development.

Keywords

Citrus, Technical Forum, Congress, RDE&M, Citrus Levy

Introduction

The Australian citrus industry is globally competitive and has experienced mostly positive growth over the last three decades. The industry is well-positioned to reliably supply the Australian domestic market and key export markets with fruit that is renowned for its colour and flavour.

To continue this growth trajectory, the industry needs to remain at the forefront of innovation to ensure all stakeholders are well informed, abreast of developments in markets, and aware of the latest available RDE&M. Rapid uptake and

adoption of RDE&M findings are also pivotal to the success of the industry. Similarly, industry needs to be aware of emerging risks in terms of biosecurity and global market conditions.

The 2022 Forum attracted 330 delegates. The event included a range of presentations on RDE&M updates in the areas of orchard management, pest and disease management, biosecurity, nursery development, new varieties, and commercial technology. A trade show exhibition ran alongside the conference program.

Following the success of the 2022 event, coupled with the success of the 2023 Market Outlook Forum (not covered in this project), Citrus Australia decided to consolidate its two major events under the banner of the Australian Citrus Congress, which launched in 2024. The event's conference program brought together a full range of RDE&M updates, coupled with global market updates, retail insights, health and nutrition research, trade and marketing information. The two-day conference program was supported by a trade show-style exhibition, scientific posters, networking events and the presentation of Citrus Australia's Annual Awards.

The two events provided an opportunity for the citrus industry to come together to learn, ask questions and raise ideas for future work that will help the Australian citrus industry continue to prosper. As a geographically diverse industry, these events provided citrus growers and those in the supply chain with the chance to connect and learn from each other.

Methodology

Both the 2022 Forum and 2024 Congress were designed to maximise opportunities for RDE&M uptake by levy-paying growers. A traditional conference-style speaker program was the centerpiece of each event, which included in-person and video conference presentations delivered by experts from across the global citrus industry.

Due to the broad range of topics covered on the program, presentations were generally kept short (~20 mins) with the opportunity for delegates to discuss further with researchers during session breaks. These snapshots into current and completed RDE&M projects gave delegates a good overview of work undertaken to support the growth and profitability of the citrus industry. To complement these presentations, information was also shared in poster format in the exhibition hall.

Field-based sessions were also conducted to showcase RDE&M learnings in a practical and tangible way. At the 2024 Congress, a study tour to the Bundaberg region included site visits to the Queensland Department of Agriculture's Bundaberg Research Station to learn about citrus breeding updates. This was followed by an autonomous tractor demonstration, a review of rootstock trial work, disease management trials and an update on future variety developments. The events catered to a variety of learning styles through different modes of information delivery.

Networking and informal information sharing were also critical components of each event. Growers shared techniques, successes, failures and ideas with each other. The events also recognised and celebrated the efforts of growers and researchers through the presentation of Citrus Australia's Annual Awards.

To determine the success of these events and help shape future events, delegates were invited to submit feedback and concepts for possible RDE&M investment via an online survey tool (Pigeonhole). Citrus Australia recognises the importance of ensuring the most relevant information from the Australian research sector is presented to growers and this is complemented with other relevant Australian and international insights. Feedback on the usefulness of the information was captured during and after the events. In particular, delegates at the 2024 event showed a high level of interest in hearing from citrus specialists from Florida and Brazil about the devastation Huanglongbing disease has caused to their citrus industries. Key learnings are now being applied by industry to prevent and prepare for the possible arrival

of this disease in Australia.

Results and discussion

2022

The 2022 event attracted 330 delegates and was highly regarded for the quality of content shared, along with the networking opportunities.

According to the 2022 Technical Forum Survey, 88% of respondents said they would attend the 2024 Technical Forum (rebranded Australian Citrus Congress), based on their experience. A total of 90% rated their overall experience as good or excellent. Importantly, 70% of survey respondents said they received information that they would apply to their business over the next 12 months.

The decision was made to hold the 2022 Forum in a resort-style venue to encourage peer-to-peer networking. This enabled delegates to continue their conversations in an informal atmosphere outside of the event. Delegates rated this highly.

2024

The 2024 Congress attracted 440 delegates, with more than 145 citrus growers in attendance. Forty-eight speakers delivered presentations across the two main conference days, which included four keynote sessions and four breakout/workshop sessions. Fifteen speakers delivered presentations at the Biosecurity Symposium, run as part of the Congress event, while nine experts presented insights as part of the pre-Congress study tour.

According to the 2024 Australian Citrus Congress survey, 84% of respondents rated the quality of information presented as very good or excellent. The top three reasons for attending the Congress were professional networking (33%), program content (22%), and professional development/ learning (18%).

Citrus Australia recognises it can be difficult to directly attribute grower practice change and outcomes to learnings from events like the 2022 Forum or 2024 Congress. Citrus Australia sees major events as critical components of information sharing, but notes they form a part of the overall ongoing sharing of information and ideas across industry. Growers may implement forum learnings immediately, or they may take in the information and spend time reviewing and testing theories (often for years) before making practical changes on-farm. Regardless of the immediacy of implementation, bringing people together is the key element of a forum. Without these events, it is difficult to share information to such a broad audience.

Photos/images/other audio-visual material

Photo reports from the 2022 Forum and the 2024 Congress have been submitted as appendices, as have copies of Issue #1 2022 and Issue #1 2024 of the Australian Citrus News magazine. These editions include summaries of key presentations from both events. Every levy-paying citrus grower receives a copy of Australian Citrus News.

Outputs

Table 1. Output summary

Output	Description	Detail
--------	-------------	--------

2022 Citrus Technical Forum	Report on 2022 Tech forum Review in Australian Citrus News Presentations recorded and made available to all levy payers Videos made available to all levy payers Audio recordings, where appropriate Communications Report	Post-event report supplied to Hort Innovation at MS103. Articles were included in Issue 1 2022 of Australian Citrus News. This edition has been submitted in the appendices. Powerpoint slides, video and audio presentations were made available on Citrus Australia's website, as per an approval process from presenters. These resources were removed in January 2023. Provided with MS103 for this project.
2024 Citrus Technical Forum (Australian Citrus Congress 2024)	Report on 2024 Congress Review in Australian Citrus News All presentations available (when speaker permits) on Citrus Australia website Key presentations recorded and made available to all levy payers on Citrus Australia website Edited videos made available to all levy payers Audio recordings where appropriate Communications Report	This Final Report provides a comprehensive overview of the 2024 Congress, meeting all reporting requirements. Articles were included in Issue 1 2024 of Australian Citrus News. This edition has been submitted in the appendices. Powerpoint slides were made available on the Citrus Australia website, as per approval process from presenters: https://bit.ly/4b987mg On the advice of speakers and the event's professional conference organiser, Citrus Australia did not release video or audio recordings of speaker presentations from the 2024 Congress. An overview video was published on Citrus Australia's YouTube channel: https://bit.ly/4dw28JE Audio recordings of speakers and delegates were included in an episode of Citrus Australia's monthly podcast, The Full Bottle: https://bit.ly/3UMIP8Y Provided in portal – ACC 2024 Communications Report

Outcomes

Table 2. Outcome summary

Outcome	Alignment to fund outcome, strategy and KPI	Description	Evidence
Change in grower knowledge and awareness of applicable research	Outcome 4: Industry participants have increased skills, capacity and knowledge	Citrus growers were provided with a broad range of RDE&M project updates to expand their expertise and awareness of levy-funded research	Completed delegate surveys Direct feedback from delegates
Improvement in knowledge of how to access latest industry information		Citrus growers gained knowledge of levy-funded RDE&M projects and delivery partners	Direct feedback from delegates
Increased awareness of new RDE&M, management techniques, biosecurity risks and strategies, and market developments		Citrus growers gained knowledge of levy-funded RDE&M projects to improve on farm practices to improve profitability	Completed delegate surveys

Monitoring and evaluation

Table 3. Key Evaluation Questions

Key Evaluation Question	Project performance	Continuous improvement opportunities
1. To what extent has the project achieved its expected outcomes?	The project has increased grower knowledge and awareness of applicable RDE&M.	Ensure any future events offer the most recent R&D developments.
2. How relevant was the project to the needs of intended beneficiaries?	The project increased awareness of new RDE&M, management techniques, biosecurity risks and strategies, and market developments amongst citrus growers and supply chain members.	Ensure growers can put forward topics of interest for inclusion at future events including international research.
3. To what extent were engagement processes appropriate to the target audience/s of the project?	The program for each event was structured to optimise learning opportunities for citrus growers and supply chain members. Careful consideration was given to the format and length of speaker sessions, while networking opportunities were maximised to promote peer-to-peer learning. Each event was supported by a comprehensive communications program, which included event promotion and the extension of key	Include more 'hands-on' learning opportunities to the program, allowing delegates to see innovation taking place on orchards, in packhouses and processing facilities.

	insights through Citrus Australia's communications channels.	
4. What efforts did the project make to improve efficiency?	Concurrent breakout sessions were delivered focusing on efficiencies in production, post-harvest, ag-tech and variety development, allowing delegates to select their key interest areas.	Try to deliver breakout sessions as standalone sessions rather than concurrent, so people can attend all streams rather than having to choose. Citrus Australia is also exploring the prospect of staging future editions of the event in regional centres, making it easier for growers and industry service providers to attend.

Recommendations

Based on the success of the 2022 and 2024 events, Citrus Australia has committed to hosting a major annual event, Australian Citrus Congress, up until 2029.

Future editions of the Congress will apply and build on key learnings from the 2022 and 2024 events, with regards to optimising delegate experience and the transfer of knowledge.

This will include the inclusion of more 'hands-on' learning opportunities within the program, whereby practical insights and updates on levy-funded RDE&M projects are shared in orchards, packhouses and processing facilities. A desire for more 'hands on' learning opportunities was one suggestion put forward in the 2024 Congress survey. This recommendation is primarily targeted at attracting more growers to each event.

Another initiative will be to hold the Congress in a major citrus growing region every second year. This will improve accessibility to the event for growers in the host region, while also providing the opportunity to populate the program with more 'on-farm' content, which is likely to attract more growers from other areas of the country.

Citrus Australia strongly recommends growers and other industry members attend future editions of the Congress to stay updated on RD&E projects taking place across the citrus sector. The leaders of various Citrus Levy-funded projects will be invited to present at each event. Careful consideration will be given to the best format for each speaker to ensure the knowledge and insights presented at the Congress result in tangible benefits to citrus businesses that attend.

Citrus Australia intends to showcase grower uptake of RDE&M learnings from future events in the form of case studies. These may include growers who have implemented on-farm practices or packhouse improvements and could take the form of magazine articles, podcast episodes, or practical demonstrations at future regional events. Tying the event with the learnings helps reinforce the value of attending the events, while also achieving the SIP outcome of ensuring industry has increased skills, capacity and knowledge.

The Congress will also acknowledge the work of researchers and growers through the presentation of Citrus Australia's Annual Awards, while steps will be taken to increase networking opportunities for delegates to connect and learn from each other.

By 2029, Citrus Australia aims to be getting at least half of all registered Citrus Levy payers to the Australian Citrus Congress.

Citrus Australia recommends that Hort Innovation continues to support the Australian Citrus Congress with project funding under the Citrus Levy. Citrus Australia has submitted a tender for the new Australian Citrus Congress (CT23007) project.

Intellectual property

No project IP or commercialisation to report

Appendices

1. Australian Citrus News, Issue #1 2022
2. Australian Citrus News, Issue #1 2024
3. Photo Report, Citrus Technical Forum 2022
4. Photo Report, Australian Citrus Congress 2024