

Final Report

Melon industry communications evaluation, needs analysis and strategy development

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Melon industry communications evaluation, needs analysis and strategy development VM20001

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Summary

In October 2020, the melon industry funded project VM17001 'Industry development and communication' (Dianne Fullelove & Associates) concluded.

As the project neared conclusion the Australian melons industry required the knowledge needs of melon growers and associated supply chain to be investigated, and the effectiveness of current communication approaches to be reviewed in order to direct future communication activities.

Development of this strategy had a basis in two major activities undertaken over 14th September 2020 – 20th October 2020. These were:

- A melon industry communication needs analysis; and
- A review of current communication effectiveness of project VM17001.

Findings from a VM17001 communication review and melon industry needs analysis informed the development of this communication strategy for the Australian melon industry. An industry reference group was consulted during the review and provided input into refinement of the strategy.

The strategy has been developed based on cross-sectoral assessment of industry communication. It follows an audience segmentation approach and highlights areas where communication messaging may be applied nationally, and where messaging will need to be regionally nuanced. It also highlights scenarios where a targeted communications approach is preferred and identifies priority objectives (including important topic areas for communication). The strategy also identifies a starting pool of information sources that may be accessed in order to improve the quality of a future communications program, which may be updated in future versions of this strategy.

Keywords

Melon, communication, review, information, needs, MT17001

Introduction

Development of this strategy had a basis in two major activities undertaken over 14th September 2020 – 20th October 2020. These were:

- A melon industry communication needs analysis; and
- A review of current communication effectiveness of project VM17001.

The communication needs analysis and the communications review, including detailed methodology, can be viewed in a separate report (VM17001 communications review and melon industry needs analysis). Findings from these activities have informed the development of this communication strategy for the Australian melon industry. An industry reference group was consulted during the review and provided input into refinement of this strategy.

This strategy has been developed based on cross-sectoral assessment of industry communication. It follows an audience segmentation approach and highlights areas where communication messaging may be applied nationally, and where messaging will need to be regionally nuanced. It also highlights scenarios where a targeted communications approach is preferred and identifies priority objectives (including important topic areas for communication). The strategy also identifies a starting pool of information sources that may be accessed in order to improve the quality of a future communications program, which may be updated in future versions of this strategy.

The tactical section of this strategy is developed according to a three-year communication program. This strategy is designed to support development of a new project in which the industry development aspect is largely uncoupled from industry communications activities. It would be expected, however, that industry development activities undertaken by aligned melon industry projects would feed strongly into a stand-alone communication program.

Industry context

Melon production is one of the larger fruit growing industries in Australia, with the Australian melon industry currently consisting of approximately 250 growers farming on approximately 8,500 hectares located across Australia in diverse growing regions. By bioregion these are:

- NT - Darwin coastal, Daly Basin, McDonald Ranges;
- QLD - Cape York Peninsula, Wet tropics, Central Mackay coast, Brigalow Belt South, South east;
- VIC, NSW, SA - Riverina, Murray Darling Depression (Sunraysia and Riverland), Sydney Basin; and
- WA - Northern Kimberly & Broome region, Carnarvon region, Geraldton region.

The two major groups of melons grown in Australia are watermelons and muskmelons (rockmelons, honeydew, piel de sapo). Watermelons make up the majority of the Australian market (79%). Muskmelons make up the remaining 21% (with rockmelon making up 85% of this category).

Australia produced 291,089 tonne of melon in the 2018/19 growing season. This was comprised of 229,809 tonne of watermelon and 61,280 tonne of muskmelon. In the 2018/19 growing season melon production by state/territory was:

- Queensland - 33% (96,826 tonne);
- NSW - 27% (79,360 tonne);
- NT - 25% (64,193 tonne);
- WA - 14% (40,752 tonne);
- VIC - 2% (6,434 tonne); and
- SA - 1% (3,524 tonne).

In the last decade there has been significant diversification in growing areas with NT becoming a much larger producer for Australia, and growing regions farther south also becoming more significant (particularly NSW).

According to Fresh Intelligence Consulting (2020) within Australia melons are the third largest fruit group produced by volume after banana and citrus. Globally, melons account for 15% of global fruit production, with Asia dominating the production market at 68.5% and Oceania accounting for 0.2% global production. Watermelon production dominates the global production market, at three times the production of musk melon. Annual production in Australia equates to 260,000 tonne per annum.

Most Asian production stays in the pan Asian region. In the southern hemisphere most melon is exported from Brazil. In 2019, Australia exported 10,000 tonne of melon into Asia, 8,000 tonne into the Middle East, and 6,000 tonne into New Zealand.

At a global scale Australia produces significantly less melon per annum than other melon exporting countries, such as South America and China. However, the Australian melon industry has a distinct advantage based on the location of the majority of the world population (northern hemisphere) and demand during non-growing periods in the northern hemisphere. However, melons exported from Australia have a greater distance to travel than most other exporting countries (e.g. Australia to the Middle East). Therefore, maintaining freshness during export, and methods and technologies to achieve that, are extremely important. In relation to growing export opportunities, an additional challenge for the melons industry is in keeping abreast of consumer needs overseas, and how best to present the product to meet those needs.

According to a recent report by IndexBox, released in 2020, global melon consumption is expected to continue on an upward trend from 2020-2030, reaching a global market volume of 36 mega tonne by 2030.

Table 1: Harvest timing by state throughout the year (national production % based on 18/19 growing season).

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
QLD (33%)												
NSW (27%)												
NT (25%)												
WA (14%)												
VIC (2%)												
SA (1%)												

Current priorities context

Relevant investment plans, which were developed with a basis in addressing industry needs, were assessed.

At the time of writing the industry has an RD&E Strategic Investment Plan, developed by Hort Innovation, and an industry Strategic Investment Plan, developed by Melons Australia. Fortunately, these plans span a common timeframe (2018-2021 and 2016-2021 respectively). This means that the melons industry has a solid basis for high level direction of communication activities pertaining to R&D. Alignment of the Hort Innovation strategic investment plan and the strategic plan developed by Melons Australia is shown in table 2.

This communication strategy has been developed within the context of the Melon Industry Strategic Plan, objective 4.3 – *deliver improved grower communications and extension* – and the industry vision: *By 2020, the Australian Melon Industry will be vibrant, rewarding and exciting industry made of collaborative and engaged growers who produce superior quality produce in a clean and sustainable manner, which is valued by consumers and delivers increased sales and profitability across the supply chain.*

Specific SIP objectives where execution of this strategy will provide strong support are:

- By 2021, improved consumer perceptions of melon quality have supported increased domestic demand;
- By 2021, the Australian melon industry has increased on-farm production efficient, enabling improved returns for growers;
- By 2021, the Australian melon industry has developed and maintained export market opportunities, enabling increased returns to growers; and
- By 2021, the Australian melons industry has implemented actions in prioritised areas to mitigate and minimise risks including food safety and biosecurity.

Table 2. Synergies between R&D Investment Plan (Hort Innovation) and industry investment plan (Melons Australia).

SIP (Hort Innovation)	SIP (AMA)	Alignment
By 2021, improved consumer perceptions of melon quality have supported increased domestic demand	Ensure profitable and consistent availability of Australian melon to meet consumer demand.	• Quality assurance • Consumer confidence
By 2021, the Australian melon industry has implemented actions in prioritised areas to mitigate and minimise risks including food safety and biosecurity. By 2021, the Australian melon industry has increased on-farm production efficiency, enabling improved returns for growers.	Protect the viability of the Australian Melon Industry through efficient pest management systems and biosecurity management.	• Industry development • Pest management innovations • Best practice adoption • Risk identification & planning
By 2021, the Australian melon industry has developed and maintained export market opportunities, enabling increased returns to growers	To facilitate a sustainable and profitable production sector by increasing demand for Australian melon in line with increasing supply.	• Grow & identify markets • Maximise export opportunities
	Ensure the Australian Melon Industry has appropriate and sufficient capacity to manage industry development and respond appropriately to change by developing appropriate relationships and resources.	

Objectives

Objective 1: Improve industry engagement with levy investments

Justification: An industry review of current communications and stakeholder needs highlighted that industry stakeholders require greater clarity about how R&D levy funds are being expended, and what benefits they are receiving out of the levy.

Supporting achievements:

- Improve industry understanding of the decision-making process for levy funded initiatives;
- Increase melon grower engagement in the process of directing R&D investment decisions; and
- Improve industry understanding of levy funded R&D progress and outcomes.

Outcomes:

- Levy payers feel informed about the latest melon research findings;
- Industry stakeholders use the outputs of levy funded projects, integrating them into business systems to improve profitability and the consumer experience;
- Levy payers feel like they are listened to by levy investment decision-makers, and that they have an opportunity to be a part of the process;
- Levy payers and the wider industry frequently interact with R&D investments and associated service providers, and have an opportunity to take part in the design of projects, trialing of project outputs, and sharing their experience with other growers;
- Growers enhance levy project outputs by pairing local knowledge with external expertise; and
- Levy payers understand where funds are going and feel more confident that the levy investment will return a benefit to their business.

Objective 2: Strengthen industry resilience and connectedness

Justification: Geographic isolation of industry members, distrust and competition between businesses, a diversity of farming structures and sizes, and past industry crises have resulted in a fragmented industry with a weak sense of overall connection between industry members.

- Supporting achievements:
- Improve the sense of connectiveness between stakeholders in the melon industry;
- Build a stronger sense of identity and brand throughout the wider melons industry;
- Support increased sharing of ideas and information between members of the industry; and
- Facilitate crisis training, planning and coordination.

Outcomes:

- Industry members will feel more engaged with the wider industry and will feel comfortable attending industry meetings and taking part in industry forums;
- Industry members will feel greater motivation to participate in communication program initiatives after experiencing the networking benefits that the program supports;
- The increased sharing of ideas, approaches and information between industry members will support business improvements and industry innovations;
- Industry professional development and training opportunities will be more widely accessed;
- Trusted advice and information will gain high industry reach within industry during a crisis situation; and
- Fast recovery of the industry in the face of future crises.

Objective 3: Support growth of a positive industry reputation

Justification: Recent food safety issues have impacted the reputation of the industry. The industry has potential to access new export markets. Industry stakeholders emphasise the end goal of encouraging consumers to eat more melons.

Supporting achievements:

- Identification of grower and supply chain best-practice information, resources and training that will result in a consistent high-quality consumer experience;
- Improving consumer and regulator understanding of the Australian melon industry, how melons are grown, and the checks in place to ensure a quality product; and
- Improve consumer understanding of the versatility of Australian melons in meal preparation.

Outcomes:

- If future industry crises occur, consumers will be more likely to support the melon industry with continued purchases;
- Melon growers will have communication avenues available to demonstrate how they grow, and the products they produce;
- Consumers will be confident that melon purchases will give them a consistently high-quality experience;
- Consumers will be inspired to try new uses for melons in meals; and
- Regulators will make informed decisions concerning the melon industry and will recognise good practices being undertaken in the industry.

Objective 4: Raise the overall standard of industry production, harvest, and post-harvest practices

Justification: Identified key melon industry information topics that will support business improvement, resilience and profitability include export and market access, biosecurity, food safety, and melon disease. Industry stakeholders have emphasised that sub-standard practices in one growing business can impact the reputation of the entire industry. Overseas and domestic research have the potential to improve production practices, particularly those of small enterprises, reducing reputational risk to the industry through negative consumer experience.

In addition, there is interest from growers in receiving consumer insights and information on domestic market trends. Communicating information about domestic melon demand will be an important part of raising industry awareness of market volatility. An outcome of providing this information through a melon communication program would be an improved understanding of market variances and more strategic decisions in relation to supply of melons. This will facilitate transition of the melon industry from a supply-driven market to a demand-driven market and aid in reducing market gluts.

Supporting achievements:

- Improved industry awareness of high-quality international research findings and innovations, as well as overseas growing techniques, and domestic market status;
- Strengthened relationships between melon growers and subject matter specialists/researchers;
- Strengthened peer to peer learning and uptake of training opportunities; and
- Improved adoption of research findings and advice.

Outcomes:

- Improved profit margins due to increased input efficacy and reduced risk of pest and disease impact, soil health or plant nutrition issues;
- Increased motivation by growers and the wider supply chain to actively follow research and seek out melon growing innovations;
- Improved understanding by growers on how to find resources and research information;
- Reduced instances of market over-supply; and
- Improved skills base within the industry.

Communication program functions

A review of current activities and stakeholder needs analysis has highlighted major functions that should be fulfilled by a future melons industry communications program. These functions are detailed below.

1. Support industry connectiveness

A future communications program has the potential to support greater 'industry connectiveness', which has been noted in past strategies and situational reports to be a necessary factor in improving the performance of the industry as a whole. The importance of peer-to-peer learning in agriculture and other industries for improving across industry best practice, improved industry resilience, and for supporting an innovation mind-set has been demonstrated by several studies (Oreszczyn et al. 2010; Hamunen et al. 2015). Focussing communications on a 'show and tell' approach between industry members has the potential to increase trust, curiosity, and communication between growers (and industry supply chain service providers).

When we refer to industry 'connectiveness' what we are really aiming for is the building of industry social capital. Social capital is characterised by the strength of informal networks, opportunities to improve skills and knowledge, and regularity of organisational collaborations by Klepeis and Gill (2016), although there is no undisputed definition for this term and the meaning of 'social capital' does vary (e.g. Woolcock (1998) describes the concept as "the information, trust, and norms of reciprocity inhering in one's social networks" and Brehm and Rahn (1997) use the following definition of "the web of cooperative relationships between citizens that facilitate resolution of collective action problems"). Building social capital within a group or community (such as the melon industry) has been shown to build community resilience in the face of crises and to speed recovery.

"A comms program could facilitate getting to know more growers – feel more a part of the industry" -- Australian melon grower.

2. Keep a grass roots focus

A future communication program must continue to be informed by on-farm seasonal needs. All communication topics or activities undertaken throughout the program must be driven by the potential to deliver benefits to all growers or subsets of melon growers. Communication personnel involved in a future program should have a farmer first mindset and take steps to stay on top of industry needs, through regular consultation with industry stakeholders.

"Get in the field" -- Australian melon grower.

3. Promote best practices and best advice

Continuing to provide information about nationally relevant topics, such as biosecurity, food safety best practices, and labour law is an important expectation of a future program by industry stakeholders. Despite these topics being relevant to all growers and supply chain members, the communication program personnel should consider how information needs on these topic areas may differ between stakeholder groups.

"There is still a need for basic information to raise the standards...it takes one person to stuff everything up" -- Australian melon grower.

4. Be a bridge for views, information and ideas on industry R&D

A future communication program should coordinate and facilitate two-way communication in relation to the R&D levy. This function will support a positive feedback loop, whereby R&D investments are made according to grower priorities, taking into account a wide range of views, R&D project outputs are applicable to a wide range of stakeholders, and communication about these investments receives high engagement. This will in turn promote the contribution of further ideas and views from the industry, to continue informing investments.

"Communication doesn't just go one way – it's got to get taken back, and then passed through the chain on what the growers expect, what problems they're facing." – Australian melon grower.

5. Provide a source of truth for the industry

The importance of having a communication program that is a central contact point for industry members seeking information was widely viewed as a key priority of the next program. In particular, facilitating timely industry updates during a biosecurity outbreak, or food safety crisis is viewed as an important function of an industry communication program – a trusted source of information.

“The most important thing is that people know where to go if they do have a question.” -- Australian melon grower.

6. Align with best practice communication methods and adopt new methods as needed

Strategically adding variety to communication activities and aligning with communication best practices is required of future activities. This will ensure that quality of communications remains high, industry stakeholders engaged in the program know what information and level of detail to expect out of the program, and a variety of learning preferences are met. Activities to extend the reach of the communication program by ensuring that the right mix of knowledge brokers are included on stakeholder communication lists will be important in ensuring that program information penetrates groups of unengaged growers. Opportunities to continually professionally develop communication personnel involved in the program will support this function.

“Just sending an email from melons is not enough” -- Australian melon grower.

7. Support a positive industry image

A focus on improving consumer, purchaser and regulator perceptions of the industry is an important aspect of future communication work. This can be undertaken through communication of research and advice that builds industry capacity to improve product quality and maintain product integrity.

“The priority should be putting melons in people’s mouths.” -- Australian melon grower.

Tactical workplan

Changes to current communication activities

Current melon communication activities as executed in the Hort Innovation funded project VM17001 (2017-2020) fall into the current categories:

- Monthly newsletter to over 1000 recipients;
- Quarterly magazine to over 200 melon growers;
- Organisation of a biennial industry conference and field day;
- Direct email notifications to industry stakeholders on an as needs basis;
- Maintenance of the industry website;
- Input into social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest); and
- Organisation of regional melon industry meetings.

Based on review of current communication activities and industry needs, update to current activities are described in Table 3. A whole of program tactical plan is shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Update to current melon industry communication activities

Activity	Current format	Update
Monthly newsletter	Direct email via Mailchimp platform and upload to website archive.	Continue.
Quarterly magazine	Printed copy posted to stakeholders and upload to website in flipbook form.	Reduce frequency to bi-annual.
Biennial conference	Location change every two years.	Discontinue. Replace with more frequent regional roadshows.
Direct email notifications	Delivered to segmented stakeholder lists based on sensitivity of information and audiences impacted.	Continue.
Maintenance of website	Resources, newsletters and magazine uploaded as needed	Continue.
Regional grower meetings	Held as needed, with topics decided based on regional and industry needs.	Implement annual roadshow set structure.
Social media	Consumer facing posts as needed.	Redirect Facebook platform to facilitate grower engagement. Discontinue Twitter account.

Communication channels

Website

Vision: An easy to navigate grower-focussed information resource that promotes business opportunities (such as training and grants), provides up to date industry resources or directs industry users to the best external resources, and highlights how growers can become involved in industry events and initiatives. This website offers value to consumers through the supply of innovative recipes for melons and informs consumers about melon growing using an engaging story-telling approach, featuring growers from across Australia.

Key points:

- During the VM17001 project a reduction in website traffic was observed. This was most likely due to the deletion of popular pages or failure to redirect links to popular pages when the website was redeveloped.
- Some industry stakeholders have difficulty finding appropriate resources.
- Consideration for how the consumer facing website pages can integrate personal stories from growers should be made.

Opportunities for improvement:

- Improved curation of industry resources for easier navigation and increased promotion of the resource portal.
- Identification of additional resources of use to the industry.
- Re-instatement of popular pages to improve site traffic.
- Making the consumer and industry facing components of the website more dynamic, by featuring seasonal articles, seasonal recipes, grower profiles, and industry opportunities.
- Improved Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) of website content and use of communication best practices, such as integration of SEO principles into article development.
- Provide an online mechanism for submitting feedback on the program progress, as well as for collecting industry views, concerns and ideas.

Foundational activities:

- Perform a thorough assessment of the industry website to determine from what pages traffic is entering by, how long they stay, and what parts of the website are stagnant. Re-instate popular pages if they have been deleted or perform URL re-direction as needed.
- Employ a web developer to perform a User Experience Design assessment and make updates to the website based on recommendations. Refer to the recent industry needs assessment when confirming website changes to ensure that key topic areas are easily accessed.
- Develop SEO informed article templates to ensure that content uploaded to webpages has the highest chance of being found through online searches.

Regional meetings

Vision: Regional meetings are conducted as a travelling event – the Melon Runner – twice each year, across up to three growing regions during each roadshow. Melon growers increasingly attend regional Melon Runner meetings in person or online as these meetings become more accessible. At these meetings they hear about the latest research, technologies and innovations. Industry relationships are strengthened through attendance and awareness of R&D levy investments and the value offering from the levy is increased.

Key points:

- Geographic distance makes attendance at industry meetings and the biennial conference difficult for many growers.
- Meetings predominantly held in QLD will lead to a growing sense of industry disconnection on the part of more isolated growers.
- Improvements in video conference technology, internet access and stakeholder comfort in using these technologies, particularly during covid-19, has raised levels of engagement in other agricultural industries.
- Dissatisfaction with, and disconnection from, R&D levy initiatives is apparent in the melon industry.
- Regional meetings can greatly enhance peer to peer learning opportunities.

Opportunities for improvement:

- Employing virtual engagement technologies, which has the benefit of saving time and expense for growers, and uploading speaker sessions to the program YouTube channel.
- Engaging growers in the planning process for regional meetings to ensure regional relevance and industry ownership (open call approach inviting growers to sit on the agenda planning group).
- Running of local varietal trial sites at each location as an additional draw card for smaller growing enterprises that do not trial varieties on-farm.
- Creating a relaxed learning and sharing environment (less formal than the conference).
- Integration of international speakers, training sessions, and industry consultation sessions into the meeting agenda.
- During the roadshow provide a channel to capture feedback on the program progress, as well as collect industry views, concerns and ideas.
- Feature grower speakers in each agenda who can share their learning experiences.
- Integration of farm and business bus tour visits into the agenda.

Foundational activities:

- Ground truth this approach with a sub-set of growers in various growing regions.
- Explore the potential for co-hosting Melon Runner roadshow meetings with regional grower bodies or supply chain businesses.
- Investigate sponsorship opportunities for support of the roadshow events and trial sites.
- Determine annual roadshow circuit in consultation with stakeholders, including Melons Australia.

Publications

Vision: The Melon Enews continues to be a recognised monthly communique from the program. It is the go-to source of wider industry news, information on industry opportunities and grower and supply chain resources. External collaborators regularly contribute material to the Melon Enews as a recognised high-reach engagement channel in the melon industry.

Melon News is converted to a bi-annual Melon Runner publication, that is released as a companion technical compendium to the Melon Runner roadshow. The Melon Runner publication contains technical research reports submitted by domestic and international researchers who are involved in the Melon Runner Roadshow for that period. This compendium provides benefits to industry stakeholders unable to attend the roadshow, provides a reference resource for those who did attend, and improves recognition of industry research and subject matter experts throughout the industry.

Key points:

- Melon Enews is widely recognised and highly appreciated by melon industry stakeholders.
- Technical notes and research reports are the most popular formats for information transfer.
- Industry news, biosecurity, export and market access, chemical use and permits, consumer insights and market trends, food safety, melon diseases are priority information categories. Information on industrial relations, industry opportunities and training are also of value.

Opportunities for improvement:

- Upload Enews issues onto the Melons Australia website as a webpage, rather than an externally hosted page to drive website traffic.
- Strongly promote industry opportunities (e.g. training, professional development, business grants) through Enews.
- Integrate grower profiles from around Australia as a regular offering in Enews and feature research adoption and business improvement grower case studies that celebrate an innovation and best practice culture.
- Provide an easy use mechanism in Enews to capture feedback on the program progress, as well as collect industry views, concerns and ideas.
- Deliver the Melon Runner as an emailed electronic publication. Continue to store the publication as a flipbook on the industry website.

Foundational activities:

- Develop a policy for Enews content inclusion, an SEO based template to guide the development of consistent article structure and determine basic newsletter structure.
- Develop a structure for the Melon Runner and test a draft version with the project reference group and other industry stakeholders before finalisation.
- Promote Enews as a channel for communication with the melon industry to external stakeholders, such as government, and industry groups.

Virtual forums

Vision: Growers, especially those who are more geographically isolated, have regular opportunities to engage with subject matter experts, and other growers – even international growers – without the need to travel. Growers feel increasingly more a part of a national and international melon grower community and form more relationships throughout the industry as a result of these opportunities.

Key points:

- Geographic isolation of melon farming enterprises contributes to a weak sense of industry connection.
- Covid-19 and improvements to regional internet services has increased skills and comfort with use of online training and engagement technologies.
- Industry members have an interest in learning about overseas technologies, farming systems and innovations.

Opportunities:

- Engage a higher number of growers, including previously disengaged growers, with the program by offering alternate methods for connecting with the domestic and global industry, and subject matter experts.
- Capture feedback in these virtual forums to assess program progress, as well as collect industry views, concerns and ideas.
- Place an emphasis on grower driven agendas for webinar topics, and virtual forum discussion topics.
- Regularly feature grower speakers on webinars who can share their experiences and knowledge.

Foundational activities:

- Discontinue the industry Twitter and Pinterest accounts. Develop a social media plan to guide management of remaining platforms – YouTube and Facebook. Convert the Facebook account into a closed group for melon growers to create a virtual group forum.
- Identify overseas subject matter experts and growers who may become involved with program activities (including the Melon Runner roadshow and industry publications).
- Develop a program of industry information and training webinar topics and execute, publicising the webinars across the program communication channels.

Additional activities

- At the outset of the program ensure the stakeholder database is up to date with current grower business information (crops grown, area farmed etc.).
- Integrate methods of collecting information on information gaps and training needs into all communication activities and use this information to inform program activities.
- Promote and celebrate instances where melon growers have received scholarships, awards, and accessed professional development.
- Explore needs relating to producing program outputs in other languages. Where possible, collaborate with industry groups that actively produce and distribute materials for English as a Second Language growers in order to improve program efficiency.
- Post-covid-19, pending lifting of travel restrictions, explore and coordinate levy-funded Melon Runner international study tours for industry members.

Direct email notifications to industry members on an as needs basis, particularly if there is an industry crisis, informing the industry about the status of the crisis.

Table 4. Objectives and tactics to support achievement of objectives based on a three-year program

Objective	High level tactics	Year 1 activities	Years 2 and 3 activities
<i>Priority activities:</i> • Undertake foundational project planning activities and set up project reference group. • Undertaken annual industry survey and information needs/training needs assessment throughout program. • Evaluation program progress at mid-point and program conclusion.			
Objective 1: Improve industry engagement with levy investments	• Develop processes for collecting industry feedback and ideas – funnel to Hort Innovation. • Regularly report on melon SIAP activities to wider industry. • Showcase R&D levy funded project progress and outputs. • Pro-actively develop methods to connect researchers with levy-payers.	• Set up online and in-person methods for collection of industry views and ideas • Confirm interaction the levy researchers will have with the communication program • Track levy payer level of feeling informed about industry research in annual levy • Integrate industry research into communication activities • Confirm methods for regularly reporting to levy payers on SIAP activities and investment decisions	• Undertake two roadshows throughout the year in at least three locations per roadshow • Continue webinar series • Publish monthly ENews • Publish biannual Melon Runner compendium, which includes technical notes submitted by roadshow speaker participants • Convert webinars and roadshow speaker sessions into YouTube videos • Manage Facebook melon community group page • Release direct email notifications for the industry as needed • Curate website resources, and update website as needed
Objective 2: Strengthen industry resilience and connectedness	• Organise communication platforms and forums that support engagement from growers across regions. • Improve the accessibility of regional industry meetings.	• Update stakeholder database with current grower data • Develop social media plan for Facebook and YouTube • Confirm roadshow locations and dates • Develop regional roadshow grower planning groups to advise on local meeting agendas • Launch webinar series	
Objective 3: Support growth of a positive industry reputation	• Take a storytelling approach, and strategically place grower profiles in front of consumers. • Prioritise communication of best practices and new knowledge that will raise the standard of growing practices and improve the consumer experience by proxy (e.g. picking at appropriate brix, grading best practices).	• Identify grower best-practice case studies for promotion across Enews and the website • Identify research and training opportunities and resources for improvement of growing and post-harvest practices • Update website with seasonal consumer information (e.g. new recipes)	
Objective 4: Raise the overall standard of industry production, harvest, and post-harvest practices	• Create opportunities to access training and professional development. • Use current data on information needs to inform communications, and add to this dataset by performing training and information needs analyses throughout the program life.	• Develop and maintain a log of relevant domestic and international research • Develop relationships with key subject matter experts and integrate their expertise into communication channels • Develop Enews content and curate website research content in line with industry needs • Update website based on User Experience assessment • Identify best datasets for consumer and market trends information (e.g. Neilson Australia) and organise access	

Audience segments

Providing value for growers, through achievement of the four communication program objectives, is the focus of this strategy. However, that does not mean that growers will be the only audience that communications activities will benefit and be directed towards. Table 5 provides a breakdown of key audience types and the benefits that they would receive from engaging with a melons industry communication program.

Table 5. Audience segmentation and value proposition from the program to each segment

Audience segment	Description	Value offering from program
Growers		
Growers – according to crop (rockmelon growers, watermelon growers, mixed melon enterprises, mixed commodity enterprises.	Rockmelon growing dominated by a small number of large enterprises. Watermelon growing comprised of small number of large enterprises, large number of medium and small-scale enterprises (Combinations of: Medium sized, primarily melons, mixed enterprise with vegetables, mixed with other systems, e.g. sugarcane or cattle, where melons may be an opportunity crop. Mixed melon enterprise where a combination of melons grown, including honeydew, and peel de sapo, are grown.	Notification of industry issues that may impact their crop (e.g. insecticide resistance, disease alerts). Information on new growing advances, technologies and research. Support in interacting with other growers (domestic or international) growing the same crop/s.
Growers – according to bioregion (Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia, Version 7)	NT - Darwin coastal, Daly Basin, McDonald Ranges QLD - Cape York Peninsula, Wet tropics, Central Mackay coast, Brigalow Belt South, South east VIC, NSW, SA – Riverina, Murray Darling Depression (Sunraysia and Riverland), Sydney Basin WA - Northern Kimberly & Broome region, Carnarvon region, Geraldton region	Notification of industry issues that may impact their region (e.g. pest distribution changes). Information on research findings or plans for research locally relevant to them. How they can take part in relevant research and form a relationship with the relevant researcher. Industry events in their region (melon events or those held by other relevant organisations). Professional opportunities (e.g. training in their region, or regional grants). Interaction with melon growers within their region and in other regions.
Regulators & authorities		
(Plant health personnel -	Plant health personnel (operational) are usually state government. Often staff are located within driving distance of	Make available industry communication channels for notifications from these groups when needed.

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operational staff, Plant health personnel (policy-makers), food safety authorities, accredited QA certification schemes (e.g. Freshcare), APVMA, Plant Health Australia)	melon properties. Some contact with melon properties. Plant health personnel (policy) can be state or federal government. Little to no contact with melon properties. Personnel in statutory authorities Statutory authorities may have little to no contact with melon properties. These groups can make decisions that affect growing logistics.	Information on current farm practices and melon growing challenges. Information on industry best practices initiatives.
Opportunity makers		
(Nuffield program, Hort Innovation, AgriFutures, training providers)	The Nuffield Program offers a professional development scholarship designed for growers each year. Hort Innovation offers occasional bursaries and professional development opportunities. AgriFutures coordinates the AgriFutures Rural Woman of the Year award. Training providers, such as TOCAL College develops government endorsed training modules for farm staff. Some modules are free.	Make available industry communication channels for notifications from these groups when needed. Promote industry profiles to and through these networks. Information on industry and grower successes and initiatives.
Management		
Project reference group	Independent group that can offer feedback, advice and direction to the communication resource on a regular basis. Can act as champions of the program.	Provide opportunity to input into activity direction and provide guidance for achieving program objectives via quarterly update meetings.
Hort Innovation portfolio manager	Assesses project progress at defined intervals. Can offer direction where required.	Provide opportunity to input into activity direction via 6 monthly reporting and ex officio status on the independent reference group.
Internal project manager	Provides strategic and operational direction. Assesses project progress regularly, and aids in determining project improvements where needed.	Provide opportunity to input into activity direction via regular (daily or weekly) updates on project progress, challenges and needs.

Consumers		
(current and potential consumers, retailers, importers)	These may be current and regular melon consumers, irregular melon consumers, or potential melon consumers. These may also be potential local retailers or domestic / international importers.	Ideas on new ways to serve melon. Confidence that each melon bought will provide a consistently delicious experience. Assurance that melon growing in Australia aligns to high food safety and environmental standards.
Supply chain affiliates		
(Independent agronomists, agronomy companies, seed suppliers, chemical companies, market agents, exporters)	Crucial elements in growing, storing and moving quality products.	Notifications about pest / biosecurity outbreaks. New advances in melon growing. Guidance on ways to support the melon industry. E.g. Relevant industry communications that may be extended through their network. Industry events for networking and learning opportunities.
Industry groups / potential collaborators		
(Melons Australia, Ausveg, Far North QLD Growers Assoc, Bowen-Gumlu Growers Assoc, Bundaberg Fruit & Vegetable Growers, Lockyer Valley Growers Inc., OrdCo, NT Farmers Assoc, Vegetables WA, Ausveg SA, NSW Farmers Assoc, Growcom, Australian Horticultural Exporters & importers Assoc, Australian Honey Bee Industry Council)	Grower and supply chain industry representative groups that may include melon growers in their membership, or produce communication outputs that reach melon growers, or reach segments of the supply chain (e.g. pollinators) that are important to the viability of the melon industry.	Invitations to collaborate on events, or other communication outputs. Collaborative approach to extending priority information (notifications, new resources, events) in order to extend reach to disengaged industry members.

Program information sources

To understand the potential domestic R&D levy-based information pool from which current and future melons industry communication activities may source communication material current and past projects were compiled (Table 6).

It is important to recognise that industry R&D had been funded through voluntary industry contributions since the early 2000s, and R&D is also undertaken on-farm and through affiliated industry service providers (seed companies, chemical companies etc.). Therefore, apart from R&D information derived from current and recently concluded industry investments, there is a pool of information that may be accessed from earlier research. Examples are:

- Development of a crop management program to improve the sugar-content and quality of rock melons (VX00019);
- Improving melon supply chain handling systems (VX04001); and
- Enhanced disease management in melons using natural defense activators (VX02030).

Activities to support sourcing of relevant industry information and to understand current information (and training) needs include:

- Maintaining a log of melons industry research, that is being conducted both domestically and internationally;
- Assessing past industry research for currency and potential for integration into future communications;
- Regularly consulting with industry experts and innovators, including growers and agronomists;
- Undertaking an annual information needs and training analysis with the melons industry.

In addition, research results may be drawn from other industries that have commonalities with melons (e.g. vegetables) on topics that are relevant across industries, such as pollination and soil health.

Linkages

In the context of a future program, which will likely have close linkages to an export development program and the current biosecurity program, communication personnel will also liaise closely with providers of the melon biosecurity preparedness project (in progress) and the export development program (currently in the tendering process).

Priority linkage projects for melon communications at the time of writing are:

- Biosecurity project (Plant Health Levy funded);
- Export development project (in tender);
- Food safety training, extension and capacity for the melon industry – phase 2 (VM18003), NSW DPI; and
- Export market data project (Fresh Intelligence Consulting).

Table 6. Compilation of current and completed melon R&D levy funded research, development and extension projects

	Extension, capacity building and crisis planning	Food safety	Pest management & biosecurity	Pollination	Chemical access	Consumer & industry insights	Project assessments
Current	Risk and crisis management planning for the melon industry (VM18002) 2020 Australia melon industry conference and field day (VM19002)	Food safety training, extension and capacity for the melon industry – phase 2 (VM18003) The effective control of listeria on rockmelons through alternative post-harvest treatment methods	Understanding the role of honeybees in CGMMV epidemiology (VM18008) RD&E program for control, eradication and preparedness for vegetable leafminer (MT16004)	Development and implementation of protocols to enable importation of improved honeybee genetics to Australia (MT18019)	Regulatory support and coordination (pesticides) (MT17019) Generation of data for pesticide applications in horticulture crops 2018 (ST17000) Melon industry minor use program (VM16000)	Category and consumer impact monitor (ST19031) Australian horticulture statistics handbook (HA18002)	Ex-post impact assessment (MT18011)
Complete	2018 Australian melon industry conference and field days (VM17000)	Food safety, training, extension and capacity for the melon industry (VM17002)	Characterisation and management of Fusarium wilt of watermelon (VM12001) A model for industry planning and preparedness for and incursion of Varroa mite (MT12049)	Understanding practices in key pollination areas (MT13027)	Melon and pineapple industry SARP report updates (MT18007)	Consumer insights for the Australian melon industry (VM18000) Australian horticulture statistics handbook 2015-2018 (AH15001) Transformational innovation performance analysis (AI13011)	

Considerations for executing a successful strategy

Project planning & supporting structures

The pillars of success for a future communication project will be:

- Maintenance of regular workplans to underpin this strategy;
- Development of an independent industry-based project reference group;
- A project manager to oversee performance and direction;
- Collection of performance metrics and regular evaluation of program progress and feedback; and
- Clearly defined deliverables in accordance with this communication strategy.

Scope creep of the program must be avoided. Feedback during recent industry consultation has strongly highlighted the benefit that stakeholders (growers and supply chain service providers) have gained out of having an industry development manager as central contact point to aid in troubleshooting of issues. Going forward it will not be feasible for communication program personnel to perform an industry development role while delivering on the objectives outlined in this strategy. However, this program can perform the role of ensuring that key industry information points can be identified (e.g. the industry biosecurity manager, subject matter experts, or relevant QA certification scheme contacts) and industry members can easily determine the services that these contacts can provide.

Unless program components are outsourced to specialist providers, program personnel must have access to necessary hardware, software and subscriptions. They may include, but are not limited to:

- Design and video editing software (e.g. Adobe Creative Suite, Canva.com subscription);
- A laptop, good quality camera, audio hardware (recorder and lavalier lapel microphone);
- A subscription to an online marketing platform (Mailchimp), polling software (e.g. Qualtrics or Survey Monkey), and stakeholder management software; and
- Access to consumer and market trend data.

Program personnel will also benefit from professional development opportunities, such as crisis management training, media training, writing for the web training, or SEO training. Building capability among program personnel will also stem from building industry knowledge and industry contacts over time.

With the finalisation of VM17001 significant industry corporate memory has been lost. It is recommended that the previous IDM be contracted as a program advisor for the first six months in order to facilitate development of industry relationships and knowledge.

Maximising program reach and efficiency

There are opportunities to strengthen communication program reach by integrating communications with organisations that have demonstrably strong reach among supply chain stakeholders. E.g. the Australian Horticultural Council for Exporters and Importers council can send relevant notifications to exporters, who are in turn are an important knowledge pool for growers (Fig 1).

This creates opportunities for information to be distributed more broadly, creating trusted information pools that represent alternate communication types/channels. These opportunities for creating further reach should be maximised wherever possible through careful assessment of stakeholder and collaborators.

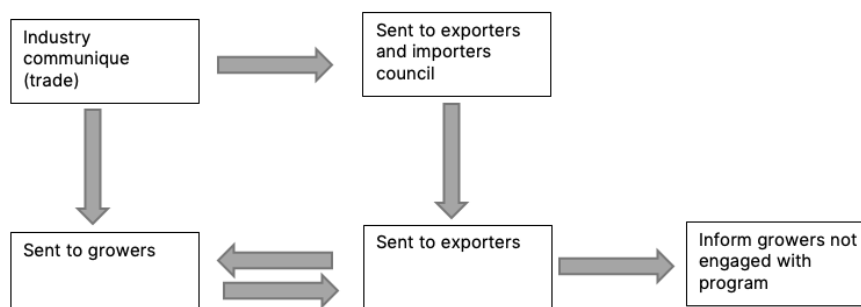


Figure 1. Example of creating further reach by identifying collaborators with aligned networks.

Resourcing

This communication strategy may be executed by one Full Time Equivalent person, a group of individuals, or a consortium of organisations.

The type of person or persons required to meet these requirements will have varied skills and a variety of attributes, including, but not limited to:

- Experience working in horticultural industries – an understanding of farm needs and challenges will greatly improve making judgment calls on information requirements throughout the year;
- A broad professional network in horticulture;
- Strong interpersonal skills are required in order to continue achieving timely and practical outputs, as well as developing relationships and appropriate industry knowledge; and
- Past experience in developing communication materials in high pressure situations (such as during a feed safety incident) and experience in handling sensitive information would be beneficial.

(There is also opportunity for the next communication program to set aside funds for outsourcing of crisis communications management to another organisation with experience in this undertaking, leaving the melons communication program free to arrange industry spokespeople and supply pertinent industry information.)

Why monitor and evaluate?

A communication program can cost a significant investment in time, money and resources. Claiming that a program has provided a positive return on investment requires evidence that it has led to the improvement of knowledge, confidence, quality of life, profitability or other measurables that are in line with the investment objective.

Constantly learning from what our monitoring data tells us and modifying program tactics to better achieve that which has been defined as 'success' will ensure that the program is constantly moving towards its predetermined vision.

Thus, ensuring investor confidence and improving stakeholder benefits are key reasons why monitoring and evaluation activities are an important tool within a large program. However, a monitoring and evaluation framework is only effective if it is used as a matter of routine, rather than only at the conclusion of the program!

Collecting performance data and forming an assessment

Collection of performance data should be undertaken throughout the program life. Confirming the key mechanisms for collecting data and development of appropriate templates should be done at the program outset. Methods of collecting data are included in Table 7.

Performance data should be assessed against the key evaluation questions at least mid-way through the project and at project conclusion. Key evaluation questions:

1. Achievement of outcomes: To what extent has the communication program improved knowledge and awareness of melon research?
2. Relevance: To what extent has the communication program met the needs of industry levy payers?
3. Engagement: To what extent were the target engagement levels of industry levy payers facilitated by program activities?
4. Appropriateness: How did the communication program vary its activities to suit the preferred learning style of industry levy payers?
How much alignment was there between industry needs and communication activities?
5. Efficiency: What efforts did the communication program make to improve efficiency of communication activities?
6. Impact: To what extent have communications supported on-farm decision-making?

Table 7. Monitoring and evaluation guidelines

Communication channel	Data collection methods	Performance metric
Website	- Website traffic data - Annual melons industry stakeholder survey	Improved traffic to consumer and industry pages over time. Improved website usage by industry stakeholders. Positive feedback from industry and examples of resources and information from the website being used on farm and in the supply chain.
Grower meetings	- Feedback forms – hardcopy and online - Attendance data - Annual melons industry stakeholder survey	Positive feedback from levy payers. Increasing attendance over time.
Publications	- Annual / bi-annual information and training needs assessment with levy payers - Increased newsletter subscriptions - Annual melons industry stakeholder survey	Information needs collected over time align with key topics shared in communication activities. Positive feedback from levy payers. Uptake of opportunities promoted through the newsletter.
R&D levy liaison	- Tracking input from levy payers - Feedback from Hort Innovation	Increased input into R&D levy investment ideas over time. Levy payers increasingly feel more informed about industry research.
Webinars	- In-webinar polling - Annual melons industry stakeholder survey	Knowledge change from webinar or webinar series.
Social media – Facebook and YouTube	- View counts - Comment feeds - Account membership - Annual melons industry stakeholder survey	Anecdotal reports of research adoption. Increased account membership. Positive feedback from levy-payers. Anecdotal reports of the program facilitating new relationships.

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