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The Vine is the official bi-monthly newsletter for Australian sweetpotato growers and forms part of a broader communications project funded by Hort Innovation through the Sweetpotato research and development levy, with contributions from the Australian Government.

Our goal is to keep growers informed, supported and connected, while showcasing the value of levy-funded R&D and extension. We encourage you to read, share and engage with The Vine, and welcome your feedback. Please contact Australian Sweetpotato Growers Inc (ASPG) Executive Officer Bree Watson on aspg.sec@gmail.com or 0403 616 702 with suggestions or content for future editions.

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GROWER SPOTLIGHT

Sweetpotato growers Brendon and Judy Boon recently opened their farm to support a new community initiative connecting growers, youth and schools across the Bundaberg region.

As part of the Fresh Seconds, Stronger Communities project, Brendon and Judy hosted the project's first produce pick on their Delan farm, providing quality seconds sweetpotatoes that would be shared with local schools and community organisations.

The Boons worked alongside a team of four local high school students who had completed horticulture card training. Under supervision, the students gained first-hand experience harvesting sweet potatoes and learning about the work involved in growing food and the opportunities available within agriculture.

Through their support of this project, Brendon and Judy have demonstrated how growers play an important role not only in producing food, but also in educating future generations and building stronger local communities.

Judy and Brendon Boon :*"It was a pleasure to have the students from WYLD on the farm for the sweetpotato harvest, giving them an insight into the journey of produce from the paddock to their plates.*
The seconds ... are a valuable resource that are well utilised in programs such as Foodbank, Second Bite/Fare share, Ozharvest and Meals on Wheels.

UPCOMING EVENTS

FALL ARMYWORM

Join QDPI and BFVG for an interactive session to keep growers, agronomists, and industry stakeholders up to date with the latest fall armyworm (FAW) info.

What's covered:

- FAW identification, monitoring and regional growth rate.
- FAW management options
- Insecticide options, mode of action and natural enemies
- Insecticide resistance management

Includes free entry to Agrotrend and breakfast

Friday 11th September
Free breakfast: 6.30-7.00am

FAW session: 7.00-9.00am
Agrotrend Grounds, Bundaberg

Book Now!

2 HOURS OF POWER

The most profitable growers aren't spending less – they're spending more per hectare and generating almost four times the profit. That's what this session delivered by Planfarm is built to find in your business.

What you'll walk away with:

• A clear view of where your own 1%, 2% or 3% gains are sitting– right now

• An understanding that a handful of small gains can realistically mean a 5-10% increase in margin

• Key actions and solutions to apply immediately in your business with clear goals with actionable targets

Includes free entry to Agrotrend and lunch if you register

Friday 11th September
9.30am-11.30am
Agrotrend Grounds, Bundaberg.

Book Now!

INDUSTRY UPDATES

Horticulture Award Rates

The Fairwork commission have increased wages by 4.75% and are effective from the first full pay period on or after 1 July 2026. Sole Traders, Partnerships and Incorporated bodies (i.e. Pty Ltd businesses) that have not entered into a Workplace Agreement must use the Horticulture Award 2020.

Horticulture Award Pay Guide

Guava root-knot nematode

Although *Meloidogyne enterolobii* or Guava Root-knot nematode (GRKN) has not been detected in commercial sweetpotato production areas to date, on-farm biosecurity measures are your front line of defence to keep GRKN (and many other pests) out of your property.

Like other root-knot nematodes, *M. enterolobii* can be easily spread through infested soil and infected plant material. It is critical that growers are mindful of risk pathways and strive to avoid introduction to their property.

Signage, restricted access (particularly to cropping areas), machinery wash-down and use of clean planting material are all measures which can help to reduce the risk. Simple, low-cost measures can make a big difference in keeping your farm safe. For any queries regarding GRKN or soil sampling requests please contact Rach on 0436 928 512.

What to do when something looks unusual

LEVY PROJECT UPDATES

PW24001: Sweetpotato Industry Communications and Extension Project

2025-2030
Funding: Hort Innovation from sweetpotato levies matched by federal government funding

ASPG delivers the sweetpotato industry's communications and extension program, supporting growers through this newsletter, workshops, extension activities, farm visits, website updates, social media and more.

We've recently been out and about updating our industry photo library, including a visit with well-known grower and ASPG President Troy Prichard. These new images will feature in our long-awaited website refresh, which is now underway!

If you have quality images from your farm that you're happy to contribute, please send them to aspg.sec@gmail.com.

PW22000: Pest management for the Australian sweetpotato industry

October 2023 - October 2026
Funding: Hort Innovation from sweetpotato levies matched by federal government funding

With the project concluding in October this year, the team is busy consolidating learnings and preparing reports on project activities undertaken throughout the project, updating the list of resistant cover crops and fact sheets. The nematology team continue to process trial and survey samples and monitor nematode pests present, to maintain vigilance for guava root-knot nematode and other potential new threats to industry. Four populations of Meloidogyne javanica, an important root-knot nematode species in the Australian industry, were identified using molecular testing and put into pure culture for future research. The populations have also been forwarded (under permit and MTA) to the Louisiana State University AgCenter to be included in screening of sweetpotato germplasm for nematode resistance. This will benefit Australian growers, as current screening is focused on Meloidogyne incognita, the dominant root-knot species in the US industry.

The team at GRF have squeezed in a small virus transmission study at the last minute, to investigate the potential of Jassids to transmit sweetpotato viruses as we continue molecular testing of plants used in the glasshouse experiments. The pilot study at Gatton Research Facility to evaluate the effects of generational yield decline due to virus infection was harvested on the 17th of August and data analysis is underway. Project team meetings were held on the 22nd of June and the 25th of August.

If you would like a block sampled for nematodes, please contact Rach on 0436 928 512, we will be only too happy to sample it for you. If you are using cover crops that you would like tested for nematode resistance, feel free to contact Rach or Sandra on 0427 604 144. All we need is a cup of seed.

Image: (L) RKN symptoms, (R) Assessing roots from the pilot study at GRF

PW21002: Causes and management strategies for skin loss in Sweetpotato

September 2022 - August 2026
Funding: Hort Innovation from sweetpotato levies matched by federal government funding

With the skinning project now wrapped up, the team has been busy completing the final industry resources, including a Best Practice Guide, five fact sheets and a location-specific advisory guide. These bring together learning's from field trials, commercial field and packhouse surveys, SmartSpud® assessments and research into the physical causes of skinning damage, with the aim of giving growers practical options to reduce skin loss under different production conditions.

Retention samples collected during the project also provided a useful visual reminder of what can happen after relatively minor damage occurs. Scratches that initially looked minor often became darker and much more obvious as the roots were retained over time, showing how small injuries at harvest or during handling can become a bigger quality issue later in the supply chain.

The SmartSpud® work also helped identify areas in harvest and packhouse systems where handling could be improved, while reinforcing that skinning is not just about impact. Abrasion, friction and shear during harvesting and handling are also important parts of the story, which is why the final resources focus on practical ways to reduce damage from the paddock through to packing.

Image: Left Root 1, skin damage at harvest, Day 5, Day 11 and Day 25. Right root 2, skin damage at harvest, Day 5, Day 11 and Day 25.

Hort2018/195: Improving root crop resilience and biosecurity in Pacific Island Countries and Australia

August 2022 - June 2026
Funding: The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) from federal government funds.

Since the last newsletter, David Shorten and Michael Hughes have completed their visit to Samoa, Fiji and Tonga as part of the ACIAR-funded root crop resilience and biosecurity project. The trip provided a great opportunity to work alongside local researchers, extension staff and growers, assist with harvesting and assessment of pathogen-tested versus non-pathogen-tested sweetpotato trials, and provide hands-on support and training.

A major focus of the project is helping Pacific partners improve access to healthier planting material and strengthen local capacity to recognise and manage virus problems. At the same time, the work is helping build stronger links between Pacific and Australian researchers and improving our understanding of sweetpotato virus threats across the region.

The Australian study component of this work concluded at the end of June, with the project now extended until June 2027, to allow international teams to complete their components. Across the project, virus surveillance and diagnostic capability have been strengthened, sampling and detection methods have been refined, and staff at the Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees (Fiji) have continued virus indexing and cleaning important sweetpotato varieties so pathogen-tested material can be returned to participating countries for multiplication and evaluation.

Image: Left, Michael Hughes and a Fijian sweetpotato farmer discuss a demonstration plot to evaluate planting in raised rows, compared to traditional mounds. Centre, Sweetpotatoes imported from New Zealand, individually cling wrapped in Samoa, for sale in a Samoan supermarket. Right, cutting vines to plant a demonstration trial at the Ministry of Agriculture in Samoa.

Image: Mike and David visiting the Ministry of Agriculture's tissue culture lab in Samoa.

INDUSTRY NOTICEBOARD

Melbourne Merchant seeking new customers

Regal Produce are a Merchant at the Melbourne Markets, they are seeking new customers to help fill a growing demand for coloured sweetpotatoes.

Contact Tony Gallace
regalproduce@bigpond.com
0422 303 808

Hort360 Water Quality from top to bottom

~ an article by QFVG ~

For growers involved in Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers' (QFVG) Hort360 Great Barrier Reef Project funded by the Queensland Government, the connection between productivity and water quality is being put into practice. Their approach demonstrates how sustainability can be embedded into practical management decisions - from managing the canopy above, to maintaining groundcover and building healthier soils below. Project Manager Michelle Haase presents two case studies of this in action below.

Hort360 Case Studies

Tackling root-knot nematodes with a biological solution

~ an article by FMC ~

For vegetable growers, root-knot nematode remains one of the toughest soil pests to manage. These microscopic pests attack developing roots, reducing plant vigour, yield and quality while causing severe deformities in root systems of vegetable crops such as sweet potatoes, carrots, fruiting vegetables and cucurbits. With few traditional synthetic nematicide options now available, growers continue to look for new effective tools and practices that fit within their existing production systems.

One new biological solution attracting a lot of attention is Catulia® Bionematicide, which has been undergoing extensive field evaluation in Australia over the past five years, and internationally for more than a decade.

The Australian programme has encompassed more than 50 trials across key vegetable-growing regions, with a strong focus on sweet potatoes in the Bundaberg region as well as other parts of QLD and across Australia. This Development program has deliberately targeted sites with high root-knot nematode pressure in selected vegetable crops.

The results have been encouraging. Across multiple locations and seasons, Catulia® has consistently delivered a level of nematode control comparable to leading synthetic nematicide standards. Trials have shown reduced root galling and healthier, more vigorous crops compared with untreated control, demonstrating the product's ability to perform well in a program under some high nematode pressure situations.

Catulia® combines two microbial strains that colonize the root zone and protect the roots from root knot nematodes. The product is expected to be exempt from MRLs and plant-back restrictions, it also provides growers with greater flexibility when planning crop rotations while supporting long-term resistance management as part of an integrated approach to nematode control.

Catulia® is progressing through the Australian registration process. Stay tuned as this promising biological solution moves one step closer to becoming available to Australian growers.

More info here

Hort Innovation Strategic levy investment | SWEETPOTATO FUND

This project has been funded by Hort Innovation using the sweetpotato research and development levy and funds from the Australian Government. For more information on the fund and strategic levy investment visit horticulture.com.au

AUSTRALIAN SWEETPOTATO GROWERS INC.

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