

# GROW NT



A publication from the Northern Territory Farmers Association  
PO Box 748, Coolalinga NT 0839 Tel: 08 89833233 [www.ntfarmers.org.au](http://www.ntfarmers.org.au)

April 2020

## NORTHERN AUSTRALIA FOOD FUTURES CONFERENCE 2021

# New date: 1 - 4 March, 2021

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### **Flatten the Curve. Tick. Recover the economy. Hmmm**

Few would argue that our Territory and national leaders got it right over the last two months with respect to saving lives and shutting down community transmission of COVID-19.

Perhaps even fewer would argue that the resultant economic pandemic will be harder to cure. Territory farmers are already seeing markets collapse and income evaporate.

Our resourceful Vietnamese and Cambodian growers have been hit particularly hard. They and all the other smaller diversified growers have lost virtually all income from the local fresh produce markets. The larger, specialised growers of crops like okra, snake bean and bitter melons etc have seen their southern markets collapse, predominantly due to restaurant closures.

Our larger melon growers have also seen significantly lower sales as the food services sector contracts and many consumers, hopefully briefly, seek longer shelf life fresh food options.

The reality is the food services sector will not return for many months and by then Australia is likely to officially be in a recession... **the reality, is we already are.**

Ripe mango growers may benefit later in the year from the easing of movement restrictions and some repair in the food services sector however the decline in discretionary income as the recession bites will likely wipe out any good news.

We are working with Territory wholesalers and distributors to look at options to support smaller growers through local supply chains whilst lobbying government to ensure our popular markets are some of the first to reopen when restrictions ease.

Greg, Andrew and Simone will continue their great work with all affected growers particularly around new market opportunities, both locally and export.

The reality is that virtually no sector will be immune to the protracted economic downturn.

Those yet to plant annual crops or harvest have an opportunity to recalibrate so please speak to the team if you need advice or assistance.

I urge our mango growers and particularly the AMIA and NTMIA to begin working closely together now, in preparation for a tough season ahead. We have already seen demand and pricing for 'luxury' produce such as berries fall alarmingly.

There will undoubtedly be widespread downward pressure on pricing as the recession bites, so now is the time to lobby AMIA for an early and targeted spend of your levy funded marketing, to adjust expectations around volumes and returns but most importantly to work collaboratively to avoid crashing the market!

### **Altruism. Please tick.**

Thanks to CEO Paul's lobbying we have additional human resources to assist growers through these challenging times.

We now have a dedicated financial counsellor, Peter Cottle from Rural Business Support. Peter can be contacted via email

[p.cottle@ruralbusinesssupport.org.au](mailto:p.cottle@ruralbusinesssupport.org.au) or mobile 0429807444, and he is available to assist all members.

Please reach out to Peter even if your concerns are down the track. Be very aware that off farm income will be harder to find for the next year or two and job losses for partners or family are possible.

There is no fee for Peter's services and every appointment is of course confidential.

Farmers, particularly we men, have a habit of putting pride before reality. Please don't this time.

Safety nets exist for situations beyond our control like COVID-19 and the only shame is if you let yourself and your loved ones down by not asking for help when you deserve and need it. We are grateful to the Federal Government for supporting this position with Rural Business Support



Thank you to the NT Government for six months funding to enable NT Farmers to support job seekers and horticulture employers. We are very pleased that Aisla Connolly will be staying with NT Farmers to take on this role. Please reach out to Aisla around the tricky situation this year with staff recruitment.

Our website has had a major facelift and is now incredibly easy to navigate particularly for those seeking information on business continuity and COVID-19.

With such a rapidly changing landscape your Board is now meeting monthly via zoom conferencing with the executive also zoom conferencing between meetings and additionally as required.

Paul Burke and I speak on a daily basis and he is regularly on the phone to other directors. He has been a timely and invaluable addition to the Association and I can assure members he and our entire team are focussed on getting the Territory's farming community and our organisation through this crisis and the recovery phase.

Paul is on the phone virtually daily to Minister Kirby and DPIR CE Alister Trier, both of whom deserve great credit for working closely with our industry to minimise disruption.

We are also feeding our concerns directly to the NFF through their Hort Council with Paul and Tony Maher working closely on specific Territory solutions. **Big tick and many thanks to Paul and our dedicated team.**

Now, I was under strict instructions from editor Robyn, to find some positives and lighten things up... clearly no tick to date!

However, I came across the following sign at a large local freight company and the more I looked the more I found to chuckle about. Perhaps it was confusion with Scomo's messaging, otherwise our education system has a lot to answer for!

Stay safe everyone, check on each other and please avail yourselves of whatever assistance NT Farmers can offer.







As I sit here at my home office and reflect on the last couple of months, I struggle to comprehend the changes that have rapidly occurred for all Territorians. Our landscape has changed so significantly and the lifestyle we all treasure has been turned upside down.

When you consider the implications of COVID-19 on businesses in general we all have a very daunting task ahead.

In a normal world my update would have been focused on the Food Futures Conference, this is not the case as the Board of NT Farmers reacted quickly to the new paradigm of a COVID-19 world. The Food Futures Conference has been postponed until the 1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2021.



NT Farmers have reacted quickly to members needs and are running a series of webinars, increased newsletters, and social media to ensure that our industry stays engaged and informed. We have updated our website to have all the relevant COVID – 19 information in one central place. Go to <https://ntfarmers.org.au/covid-19/>

Much has been accomplished in a very short period and the staff of NT Farmers are working at capacity to ensure that we continue to deliver outcomes for members across a broad range of issues.

In the Katherine region NT Farmers have worked with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to give water users in the Katherine area surety of water for the upcoming season.

The revised methodology that is being used will guarantee water user levels are consistent across previous years usage, whilst ensuring that growers that have developed new plantings will have the water to continue their operations.

Fall Armyworm has arrived in the Northern Territory and Kununurra regions, this pest was first detected in the Torres Strait early this year and has rapidly spread across the country. NT Farmers have contacted growers to discuss the implications of fall armyworm and have also worked with the Department of Primary Industries and Resources to develop fact sheets and treatment regimes. This devastating pest is something we will have to continue to work with as eradication is not an option.

COVID – 19 has consumed the working hours for many in government and industry, the sheer scale of changes has put pressure on the functions of government and in many cases, new legislation, regulations and policy is being developed all at the same time.

This has caused much confusion and a grid lock in the applications approvals process. NT Farmers are at the forefront of regular meetings to progress the situation and ensure that our industry sectors have a strong and coordinated voice at the table.

The system of applications approvals is at breaking point with many applications for COVID-19 management plans taking in excess of 21 days to be approved.

All agriculture enterprises that employ 10 or more staff and have packing sheds, will need to complete one of these plans. My suggestion is to commence work on completing a COVID-19 management plan as soon as possible, they are very detailed and complex. We have developed a COVID-19 management plan template which can be found on our website: <https://ntfarmers.org.au/covid-19/business-support/> NT Farmers are here to assist all members in this area, please reach out for support.

NT Farmers have successfully advocated for a dedicated Financial Counselling Service to be based here in the Territory to assist growers restructure their operations in these very difficult times. We welcome Peter Cottle from Rural Business Support to this role.



There has been significant downward pressure on produce price and demand. This is in part due to the hotel, clubs and pub industries going into forced shut down.

For some products that the NT Produces, this has caused a 50% reduction in demand. With this in mind all growers should be considering what their season looks like ahead and start having conversations with all their supply chain partners.

NT Farmers have partnered with Department of Business Innovation and Trade to place a dedicated workforce coordination role in industry to assist growers with workforce requirements.

Aisla Connelly is in this important role, please use this resource to assist your business with staffing needs. The government has set up an employer and employee matching service - [Territory Jobs Hub](#) - and I strongly suggest you register as an employer to ensure you have the work force you need when you need it.

NT Farmers are also working to develop new supply chains to assist with taking some pressure off existing supply chains. We have been working with NT Airports to have export opportunities available for growers.

Additionally NT Farmers are trying to establish a new supply chain to assist with getting produce to rural, remote and independent stores in the Territory.

In these challenging times it is essential to have a strong committed resource working for industry. NT Farmers have established strong networks throughout the Territory and nationally. NT Farmers are members of National Farmers Federation and AUSVEG and are using these networks to raise the concerns of growers in the north. I urge all industry members that are not financial members of NT Farmers to join us today. We are working tirelessly to benefit all industry and need your support to continue to do this. So please if you are not currently a member join us, as together we are stronger.

Finally make sure you are looking after yourselves and reach out to your neighbors and industry partners to check that they are OK. We will get through this and NT Farmers are developing a key set of priorities for the recovery stage that will assist to grow the NT economy and increase our production.



#AGFACTS

**95% of the fresh  
fruit & veggies  
we eat is grown  
right here in  
Australia.**



NT FARMERS ASSOCIATION

# GROWING OUR TERRITORY

WEBINAR SERIES COMING SOON



• INDUSTRY UPDATES • NEWS & ADVICE • IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Committed to keeping you informed, our new webinar series provides our members with the most relevant news and advice.

Hear from CEO, Paul Burke, and other industry experts as we navigate our way through COVID-19 together. You can expect regular industry updates, financial support advice, announcements on visa workers, border closures and much more.

Keep an eye on our Facebook page for upcoming webinars and videos.

All webinars will be available to watch on demand after each live session.

*Follow NT Farmers on Social Media*





# NEW DATES CONFIRMED!



## NORTHERN AUSTRALIA FOOD FUTURES CONFERENCE 2021

### Balancing Agri-Development and the Environment

### 2021 Program Highlights

- Over 50 speakers
- 3-day Conference program
- Industry showcase and exhibition
- Field trips / farm visits
- Welcome reception
- Barramundi Adventures experience
- Gala Dinner and awards
- Industry workshops
- Networking and business matching

#### Industry sessions on;

Cotton, grains, horticulture, fodder, rice, agroforestry and peanuts accross NT, WA and North QLD

**>> REGISTER NOW <<**



**1 - 4 March 2021**

**Darwin Convention Centre, NT**

**[www.foodfuturesntfarmers.org.au](http://www.foodfuturesntfarmers.org.au)**





The agriculture industry faces complex and dynamic challenges as the impacts of the COVID -19 (coronavirus) pandemic continue to unfold across Australia.

It is common for people to feel overwhelmed or experience distress, including anxiety and depression during difficult times.

The impact of Covid-19 is devastating and the toll it is taking on People's mental health is serious. There are services available to assist if you're experiencing distress.

To support people during the coronavirus outbreak Beyond Blue has created an online forum where people can share their stories and support each other.



**Covid-19 Community  
Forum**

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/online-forums/staying-well/coping-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

## Other Mental Health Support Services

Lifeline - crisis support Phone 13 11 14

Ahead for Business - small business mental health advice <https://aheadforbusiness.org.au/>

MensLine Australia - support for men <https://mensline.org.au/>

R U OK? Resources for conversations around mental health <https://www.ruok.org.au/findhelp>

SANE Australia <https://www.sane.org/>

Relationships Australia - relationship support services <https://www.relationships.org.au/>

Black Dog Institute <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/>

Standby - support for anyone who has been impacted by suicide <https://standbysupport.com.au/>

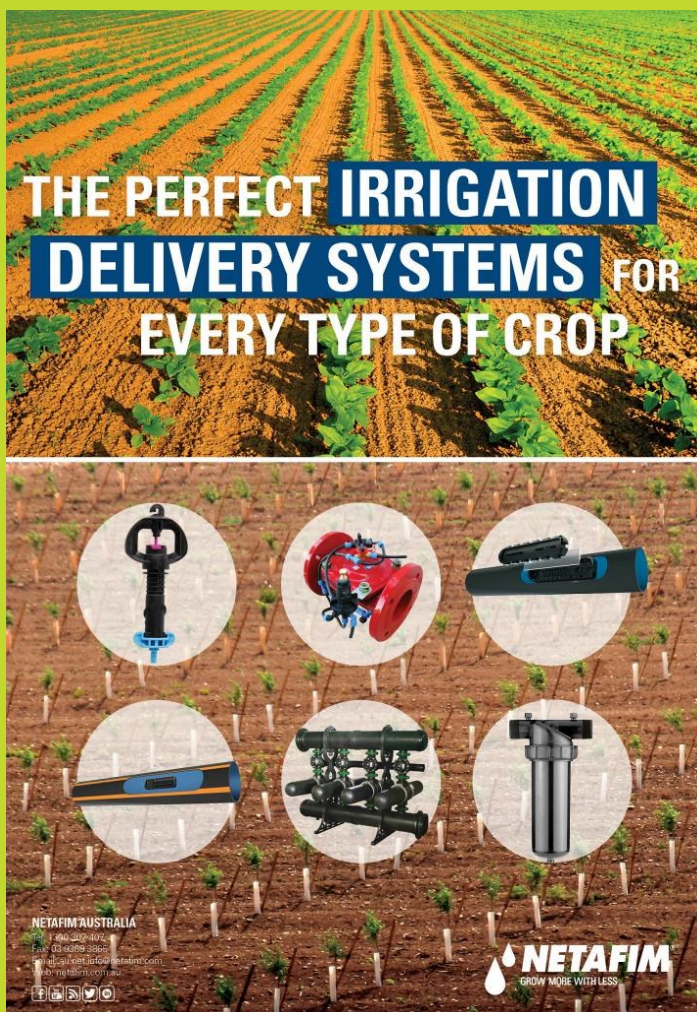
We will be calling for nominations for three directors from the below regions to sit on our board for a three-year term.

- Northern Territory and Northern Western Australia—Darwin.
- Southern Queensland and New South Wales.
- Northern Territory and Northern Western Australia—Katherine.

**To participate you must be a representative of an active producer member of AMIA e.g. Your employer/company must have active membership.**

If you are not a member, or have not paid last year's membership subscription, please use this opportunity to confirm your membership and have an opportunity to contribute to the composition of the board—or even be part of it. Have your say on key industry decisions today!

For further information regarding the AGM and election process please contact AMIA Company Secretary, Linda Bachmann on 0407 457 298 or [accounts@mangoes.net.au](mailto:accounts@mangoes.net.au).



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Chamber of Commerce  
NORTHERN TERRITORY



## COVID-19 Farm Biosecurity signs

If any of our financial members would like a sign, please contact Greg Owens:  
0437092551

The signs have been provided by a joint initiative between NT Farmers  
Association and NT Mango Industry Association







# Broadacre Cropping in Northern Queensland

Webinar  
6<sup>th</sup> May at 6pm



Hear from the project leaders involved in three CRCNA/GRDC co-funded broadacre cropping projects in Northern Australia:

- Tony Matchett, Savannah Ag Consulting Developing an oilseed industry in Northern Australia
- Lance Pendergast, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAFQ) - Developing a broadacre cropping sector in northern Queensland
- Dr Joseph Eyre, The University of Queensland – Queensland Alliance for Agriculture and Food Innovation (UQ-QAAFI) De-risking broadacre cropping options in northern Queensland

The webinar will comprise of 15 minute presentations with facilitated discussion time. Registrations are limited to 100 attendees, however the webinar will be recorded and made available for those that register interest.

This is a free event. An email with Zoom instructions and webinar link will be sent to your nominated email address upon successful registration. If you have any questions please email [CroppingNA@gmail.com](mailto:CroppingNA@gmail.com)

Registrations close Sunday 3rd May. To register go to:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSesuCNqOIloOUWxbch8zZflvm5osz7L0H4RaazKAkEWri2dWQ/viewform>



We have updated our web page and added a tab with COVID-19 resources and information including a COVID-19 management plan template.

#NTFarmers

#support

#farmers

#feedthenation

Please go to the link below to access:

<https://ntfarmers.org.au/covid-19/>

In March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic produced several precautionary responses from consumers, NT and Federal Governments including rapidly strengthening those responses. As Employers the roll-on affect has meant many changes to the workplace to action physical distancing precautions and hygiene recommendations. On the NT Farmers website there are resources available including posters to display at your workplace and templates to help you implement the required changes. As an essential service it is crucial that food safety and best practice is adhered to. Here are some tips

- Space out workbenches to ensure physical distancing of staff (min 1.5m)
- Implement groups, smaller groups to reduce the risk of infection, keep these separate from each other
- Implement a roster system for shared areas i.e. Group 1 use of kitchen and lunch room between 11:00am and 11:40am, Group 2 between 11:45am and 12:25pm, etc.
- Implement a thorough cleaning regime for shared resources (kitchen, equipment, tables and chairs)
- Implement sterilising of vehicles after every use
- Reduce the number of people in vehicles to maintain the recommended 1.5m minimum distance
- Reduce the number of people sharing accommodation
- Promote hand washing and personal hygiene using posters around the workplace

If you require any information or assistance we are here to help, give us a call, or send us an email.

Our office has adapted to various home office spaces and our communications now include regular online video conferencing. We have the technology and know-how to **help you** through this learning curve.

Take this opportunity to provide your staff with **training**, there are many training opportunities online including induction pre-harvest <https://www.aginduct.com.au/> or <https://safefarm.com.au/>

and online training books including WHS, communication, hand and power tools <http://opencourses.net.au/industry/ahc/>

If there is any specific training you would like but cannot find online, please contact us.

Now is the time to pay it forward, be a mentor for the next generation and host a **Territory Legend** Trainee (see flyer over page).

Course fees are provided ,thanks to the NT Farmers program funded by the Department of Trade, Business & Innovation, NT Government.

Trainees can gain a Certificate III in Horticulture or Certificate II in Rural Operations within twelve months. Employers receive generous wage subsidies. Recently an Employer signed a training contract with an existing employee as a Territory Legend Trainee to study Certificate II in Rural Operations. The Employer felt that their children had been mentored by others and now is their time to repay the favour by assisting the next generation of farmers in the NT plant industries.

This year's **Northern Territory Training Awards** recognise excellence and achievements in Vocational, Education and Training for employees, employers and trainers. Nominations close 5:00pm Monday 18 May 2020.

<https://business.nt.gov.au/business/business-events/nt-training-awards>

Coming into the dry season and after the late wet season **fire mitigation activities** still need to take place. Slash firebreaks, conduct cool burns with [permits](#) to reduce the fuel load and have a fire management plan.

If you require further information please contact Aisla Connolly, Workforce Planning Coordinator phone 0400 416 558 or email [wpc@ntfarmers.org.au](mailto:wpc@ntfarmers.org.au)

*Photo credit: Aisla Connolly*







Now is the time to pay it forward  
Be a mentor for the next generation  
Host a

## Territory Legend Trainee

To access generous wage subsidies

Course fees provided for  
AHC21216 Certificate II in  
Rural Operations, or  
AHC30716 Certificate III in  
Horticulture

For further information contact:  
Aisla Connolly  
Workforce Planning Coordinator  
NT Farmers  
P: 0400 416 558  
E: [wpc@ntfarmers.org.au](mailto:wpc@ntfarmers.org.au)

Register with:  
Australian Apprenticeship Support Network  
[www.australianapprenticeshipsnt.com.au](http://www.australianapprenticeshipsnt.com.au)  
P: 8935 8200  
E: [gateway@aannt.com.au](mailto:gateway@aannt.com.au)

This program is funded by the  
NT Government, Department of Trade Business and Innovation.  
Charles Darwin University, RTO Provider No. 0373





Within weeks of the current epidemic emerging, Australia's awareness and acknowledgement of how easily and obscure disease can arrive, and spread has been well and truly recognised.

This awareness has not only reached the urban and peri-urban areas of the country but had a significant impact on the farming sector as well.

The by-line '**Biosecurity It's everyone's business**' has gained a new level of understanding and empathy with many key stakeholders.



The recent completion of the NT Farmers Biosecurity Champions Project highlighting key messages around ensuring '**Our farm, Our future**' is, coincidentally, a timely reminder of this same awareness. Biosecurity not only protects people, plants and animals, it protects our ability to trade our production both nationally and internationally.

A special mention must go to our recognised champions of industry, Chris Nathanael (Tropiculture), Han Siah (Tropical Primary Products), Julie-Ann Murphy and Al Petersen (Rum Jungle Organics) and Greg Owens (NT Farmers IDM). These northern producers and advocates underpin what it means to show resilience and dedication to our industry.

NT Farmers are particularly grateful for the opportunity to deliver the key messages these growers believe in and the efforts they strive for in order to demonstrate sustainability in industry. All of them have simple biosecurity procedures and protocols that anyone can adopt and follow. They review them regularly as the need arises and their on-farm biosecurity plans give them greater confidence with the ever-changing demands and faces of the farming sector.



- Farm inputs
- Farm outputs
- People, vehicles and equipment
- Production practices
- Ferals & weeds
- Train, plan & record

Now, more than ever, is the time to update or ultimately develop your own biosecurity on farm management plan. Moving towards ramping up an existing plan or developing a new plan is far easier and cheaper than reacting once a problem has occurred.

The plan is not a one type fits all approach but rather a simple workable model that suits your own unique production system. It should include the capacity for traceability with a consistent approach to monitoring and surveillance protocols as well as outline a clear course of action or response should a situation arise, like a pest or disease incursion. A simple plan should have 6 essential areas.

NT Farmers can assist you with helping to develop or update a plan for your farm. To get started just downloading the simple **FarmBiosecurity App** on your smart phone or tablet is a great place to start. This will take you step by step through considerations for your plan. It's as simple as starting with a 'lock the gate' approach.

Over the next couple of weeks our member community will have the opportunity to place signage on their front gate illustrating the adoption of a biosecurity on farm management plan with reference to COVID-19. NT Farmers welcomes anyone who would like to display this signage on their gate and understand for some this will be your first positive step towards the journey of engaging in good on farm biosecurity practices.

Remember, NT Farmers is here to help you.

Any further information or assistance please email [bio@ntfarmers.org.au](mailto:bio@ntfarmers.org.au)

**You can be a champion too!**

## BIOSECURITY

OUR FARM, OUR FUTURE



YOU CAN BE A **CHAMPION** TOO



Han Shiong Siah



Greg Owens



Julie-Ann Murphy



Chris Nathanael



# Biosecurity News

## Citrus Canker

The declared restricted areas for the control of citrus canker in the Darwin, Palmerston and rural areas were lifted on 20 March 2020. The restricted area in Katherine was lifted in November 2019. This means you can plant citrus trees again. You should still monitor your plants and report any signs of the disease. Control area movement restrictions still apply.

#IYPH2020 Protecting Plants Protecting Life



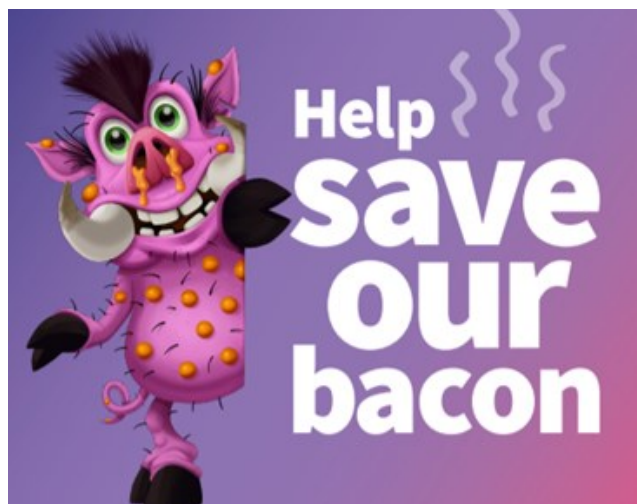
## African Swine Fever

A disease that has devastated the global porcine population, killing 800 million pigs, has spread to Australia's closest neighbour, Papua New Guinea. This has placed Australia's Biosecurity on high alert.

One positive is with the existing border closures and restrictions due to COVID19, Australia currently has a better chance of keeping ASF at bay. There is no cure and the entry of ASF into Australia would significantly impact the over \$2billion industry.

All pig owners, whether they are commercial farmers, hobby farmers, pet owners or those who come into contact with pigs, including feral pigs must also play their part. Registering your property for an identification code or PIC is required by law.

#helpsaveourbacon



## Fall Armyworm

Fall Armyworm (*Spodoptera frugiperda*) has been discovered across multiple regions in the NT

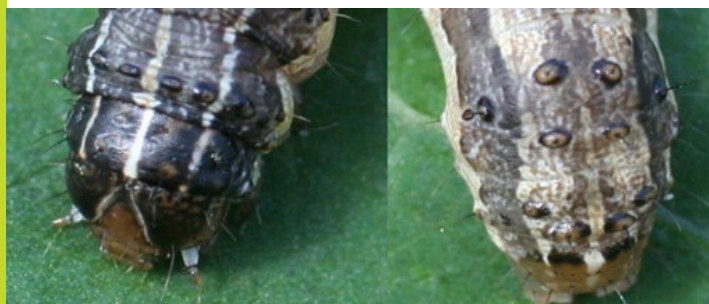


and northern WA and unfortunately is spreading rapidly. It is known to eat a number of agricultural crops and eradication is now believed impossible.

Minor use permits in Australia have been issued by the APVMA on FAW for various crops – access the permit portal here <https://portal.apvma.gov.au/permits>

There is nothing for irrigated pastures as yet so options are limited and discussions are being had around minor permit uses and WHP for fodder production fits.

They can look very similar to other armyworm species and caterpillars. Larger FAW have 4 prominent spots on their second last body segment. They also have a distinctive Y shape on head capsule.



Source: <https://thebeatsheet.com.au/fall-armyworm-should-you-be-concerned/>

There is a collaboration between the DPIR and NT Farmers to grow a maize and okra demonstration trial at Coastal Plains over the coming months with respect to generating sentinel data on the FAW and its potential impact on agricultural production systems in the NT.

The trial will also look at IPM opportunities and the fit this can have with minimising FAW populations. This will include work on reducing adult numbers as well as larval stages of development.





# The importance of managing safety in agriculture

**Agriculture is recognised by Safe Work Australia as being the most dangerous industry to work in due to the combination of hazards as well as the fact many farmers work alone or in remote locations. More than one in five workers who died at work, worked in Agriculture. It has the highest fatality rate of any Australian industry (14.8 fatalities per 100,000 workers).**

## What is being done about this?

Sadly, statistics show that a very low percentage of Australian agribusinesses have a current safety management system in place, but this is changing. By becoming more aware of the risks and penalties associated with not having a safety system, business owners are starting to change their attitudes and increase acceptance when it comes to safety.

## What is a safety management system?

A safety management system is a process that is put in place by an employer to minimise the risk of injury and illness. When implemented correctly, it becomes part of the culture and impacts the way people carry out their jobs.

## Why do I need a safety system?

As a business owner, there are legal requirements that you must comply with to ensure your workplace meets WHS obligations. This may include the health and safety of your customers, employees, visitors, contractors, volunteers and suppliers.

The principal WHS law in the Northern Territory consists of the Work Health and Safety (National Uniform

Legislation) Act, supported by the Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Regulations.

## Do I need a safety system if I don't employ anyone?

WHS legislation does not differentiate between an employee, contractor or a family member working on your farm. If you have any worker coming onto your farm, you hold the same legal obligations to provide them with a safe work environment and safe systems of work as you would an employee.

## What happens in an investigation?

Record keeping is the key to protecting your business against any unfair claims or disputes. If a regulator was to come onto your property, they will request to see your safety management system. They are likely to:

- conduct interviews with any person who was present or who may know about the incident/workplace
- take photographs
- ask to see appropriate documentation such as inductions, maintenance records, training records, safe work procedures and policies as well as any other evidence that demonstrates the business has an active attitude to safety in the workplace
- any associated Contractor and Partners will be contacted related to the investigation.

## What can I do?

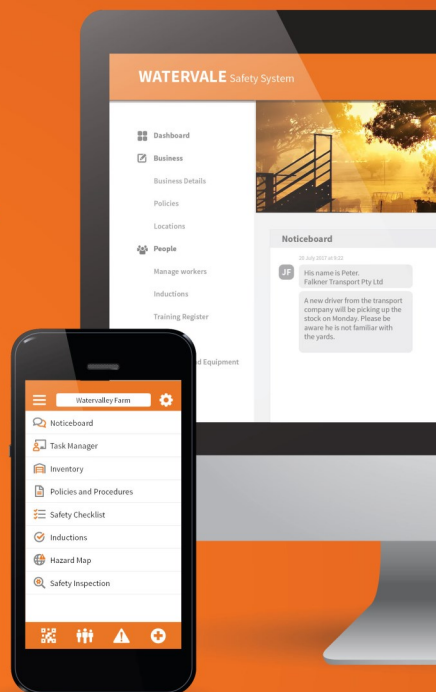
Agribusiness owners are urged to improve their processes to help make their workplaces safer and their businesses prosper. We understand this task can seem unattainable when faced with a hefty workload and an insurmountable amount of paperwork.

Being prepared without compromising productivity can be achieved by using a system that meets your obligations and is tailored to your specific needs.

## Forget the paperwork – go digital.

A digital safety system for your agribusiness.

For businesses that want to get rid of the paperwork, improve efficiencies and keep their workers safe.



T: (08) 8490 0939 | [safeagsystems.com](https://safeagsystems.com)

The NT Cropping project has kicked off with great results being gathered across the Katherine/Douglas Daly region on the rain-fed and irrigated plantings.

With the delay in the wet season, rainfed planting were delayed. These crops, even in this significantly dry year have been receiving enough rainfall that they will provide good results and great learnings for future plantings.

Early in March, DPIR in conjunction with CSIRO, QDAF and WA DPIRD ran an extremely good Field Day in the Douglas Daly that showcased Integrated Pest Management techniques for crops, especially cotton in the North. This field day was a great success, with a high-quality program and very well organised by the Department of Primary Industries and Resources. The event was very well attended by local growers, with excellent interactions being held in crops on not only IPM between growers and researchers, but on a range of farming techniques, options and trials for future plantings.



*The March Field Day was well attended. Credit Andrew Philip*

The establishment of cotton crops on six commercial farms continues to create real interest in expanding production (especially 'rain fed' and with supplementary irrigation to finish the crop off) in the coming year.

NT Farmers is confident that a cotton gin can be built in Katherine for the 2022 season, with strong support from farmers, ginning companies and the NT Government.

The cropping project is planning to look closely at a range of crops during the dry season in the Katherine/Douglas Daly region as well as Central Australia.

Crops to be looked at will include peanuts, hemp, chickpeas, mung beans, soybeans, rice and other grain crops.

It looks like the legalities and permit system is almost available to start hemp plantings in the NT, with NT Farmers working closely with commercial hemp supply chain companies and interested farmers to see how a sustainable and profitable hemp industry can be developed.

Still the main issue towards development is access to land (either as purchase, lease or joint venture) and where applicable, surface water from wet season flows.

Landholders and farmers that have interest in trialing cotton and other crops that may fit into a cropping system are encouraged to contact myself well in advance of next seasons planting window to get the information on best management practices required to give the best results.

There a growing pool of expertise developing, with existing growers (both local and interstate) prepared to share their experiences.

NT Farmers is looking at sustainable opportunities to create access to suitable land and water for agricultural Developments that may go on to form designated agricultural precincts.



*Cotton plants in Douglas Daly. Credit Andrew Philip*





## Helping NT farm businesses navigate uncharted virus territory

Northern Territory primary producers are facing some complex challenges as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are felt across all sectors, and producers work to keep farm businesses running productively.

Delivering needed support for NT farmers at this challenging time, Rural Business Support (RBS) has recently welcomed a new full-time rural financial counsellor, Peter Cottle, based in Darwin.

RBS works with cattle producers, fruit and vegetable growers, fishers and the operators of small rural businesses to better understand their financial position and build their resilience. The service is free, independent and confidential for eligible clients.

Peter says that while the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve and changes the way Territorians do daily life, RBS can assist farmers and growers to manoeuvre their business through the crisis.

“It may be difficult to see a clear way ahead at the moment, but there are options available to help farm businesses get through this and out the other side,” Peter said.

“These options may include Australian Government assistance such as the Farm Household Allowance (FHA), JobSeeker or JobKeeper payments, which could provide a level of financial relief for a time. Or perhaps it’s exploring whether a business loan through the Regional Investment Corporation (RIC) can help.

“RBS can also support clients in talks with their lenders – is there potential for their bank to relax their loan terms for a time? At the moment some banks are offering welcomed interest rate relief and non-secured loan terms.

“Being locally based and committed to Northern Australia, I’m well positioned to help farmers and growers to take a look at their business and truly understand their financial position. Together, we can then come up with the strategies to navigate through the financial challenges of operating a small business in these uncertain times.”

Supported by the Australian and Northern Territory Governments, RBS is currently supporting more than 580 farmers and rural related businesses. The NT position is the result of additional funding received from the Australian Government for RBS to support Territory producers and small businesses that are dealing with the impact of drought.

Peter’s role builds on the support being provided by RBS business analysts Lloyd Wright and Lachie Hood.

**To be connected with one of the RBS team call 1800 836 211 or for more information visit [www.ruralbusinesssupport.org.au](http://www.ruralbusinesssupport.org.au).**

The National Farmers Federation has produced a helpful guide which contains basic advice on managing the impact of COVID-19 on farming workplaces. You can download a copy [here](#).

*Right: Peter Cottle*





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# Charles Darwin University/NT Farmers Association Sustainable Farming study tour and ideas exchange to the Punjab

hosted by Punjab Agricultural University and Central University at Bathinda.

## Episode 2: Of Kinnows and Cotton written by Greg Owens



Packed kinnows ready for distribution

**Kinnows** are the most popular citrus grown in the Punjab with 53,045 ha producing 125,000 tonnes of fruit in 2018-19. That is a yield of 23.5 tonnes per ha. Kinnows are a bit like a mandarin or an easy peel orange and were in peak season in December when we visited.



Ripe kinnows ready for harvest 120kg per

This photo was typical of the crop load the better managed orchards were carrying. Kinnows were readily available all through the regions from roadside carts and stalls in the densely packed markets. They seemed to have a big role in weddings as well as everyday consumption as fresh fruit and in the many juice stalls throughout the towns.



Brick lined head irrigation tank for citrus orchard

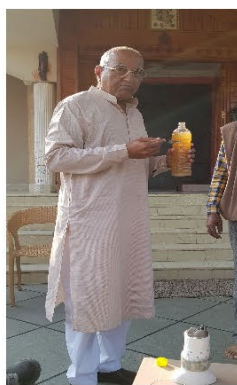
The orchards we visited relied on furrow irrigation from ground water or from the canals that bring water from the mountains to the Punjab. The furrows are initially close to where the young trees are planted, then are moved out to the dripline of the trees as they grow. Eventually the furrow from one row meets the furrow from the next row and the

mature orchard has one furrow running down the middle of each row.

Orchard owners tended to have larger established farms developed by consolidating family parcels and the money to invest in the infrastructure required and diversity to cope with the seasonal income from fruit production. The brick-lined water head storage tanks and concrete head trenches seen here are becoming more common to reduce water loss and improve the irrigation efficiency of the area as water resources tighten and salinity is becoming a bigger issue.



Concrete walled head irrigation trench



Fermented fruit tonic organic spray

We visited one of the most progressive and spiritual farmers near the Rajasthan border who had a strong commitment to sustainable practices. He had a very efficient effluent digester that produced liquid fertiliser as well as matured compost from the cattle and crop wastes. He has added a small Biochar generator that also supplements the electricity supply to his farm. He makes a fermented citrus organic tonic from his own fruit that is diluted and sprayed onto his trees. Good enough to drink! We all had to have a taste, sort of a citrus vinegar flavour but not unpleasant.



Biochar and electricity generator



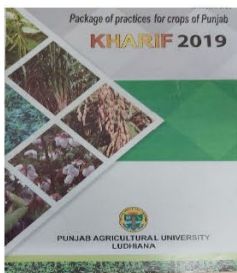


*Packing kinnows in the field at night*

The kinnow fruit is harvested at full ripeness and with appropriate packaging can last up to 8 weeks. Our host has just put in a modern grading line in a new shed as well as the more traditional hand packed crates still being packed in the existing shed next door. We were given samples of this excellent fruit to help us on our journey.



*New kinnow packing line size grader*



**Cotton** is the major fibre crop of the Punjab. If my conversions are right, in 2018 there was 287,000 ha of cotton grown with 1.2 million bales of cotton produced. There is a mix of Bt and non-Bt varieties grown across the region and excellent advice provided by the agricultural universities such as our hosts, the Punjab Agricultural University in Ludhiana and the Central Punjab University at Bathinda. The support for growers from the universities was very visible and was evident in the strong relationships we saw between the growers we visited and the university representatives. Resources produced by the universities are practical and easy to use as well as informative background materials.

The cotton is grown in the same flood irrigated fields as the wheat and rice. There was more cotton the further south we travelled into the warmer and dryer areas. The bolls are handpicked and dried and the lint collected and bagged onto the same tractor trailers that carried the majority of the farm produce in the area. Then off to the cotton gins to be processed.



*Typical cotton field ready for harvest*



*Tractor trailer loaded with cotton lint*

The rest of the cotton plant is harvested and bundled to provide a renewable fuel source for the villages. These bundles of cotton stalks were a common sight throughout the cotton growing areas.



*Cotton stalks bundled and drying for fuel*



*Kamal and Tou inspecting quality cotton garments in Ludhiana*

India has 1.4 billion people that need to be clothed as well as fed. Cotton plays a central role in providing fibre for the population. As well as that, India is the third largest exporter of cotton after China and the USA with exports worth \$8.1 billion and was 13.7% of the world cotton market in 2018. This provides jobs and foreign cash that make the Punjab a major economic driver as well as a food bowl for India. These two crops play a vital role in developing and ensuring sustainability for the country.

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For more information contact NT Farmers Association:

08 89833233

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