

Final report

Project title:

Dried prune industry communications and extension program

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Delivery partner:

Australian Prune Industry Association Inc

Report author/s:

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Project code:

DP22000

Date:

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Public summary

Project DP22000 built on previous communications & extension projects (DP19000 & DP18000) with its objectives to help Hort Innovation:

- To increase engagement (reach) and awareness, knowledge and skills supporting the adoption of best practice in the growing, processing and marketing of Australian prunes with the aim of maximising the profitability of the Australian industry
- To identify research required by the prune industry, including research aimed at improving the quality of dried prunes
- Promote understanding of the prune levy system, how growers can get involved in industry consultation and the role of Hort Innovation and engagement with the national R&D portfolio to all levy payers.

The project delivered effective communication & extension services that provided industry stakeholders with timely & relevant information, including research results and best practice information aimed at enhancing innovation and industry profitability. Outputs delivered ensured that industry stakeholders were well informed and able to make more informed business decisions.

Project outputs included:

- Preparation of articles for the "Vine" magazine, a quarterly publication
- Preparation of regular editions of the Ausprunes e-news
- Grower field events & annual grower forums

Importantly, input and guidance was provided regularly by members of the Project Reference Group.

A variation to the original project agreement was approved in October 2025 to provide funding for a visit to Australia by an international prune industry expert & a short 3 month extension for the current project. The overseas expert visit was highly successful & has helped the local prune industry to enhance its relationship with the California prune industry.

The project has achieved the following outcomes:

- Increased awareness of Hort Innovation's R&D investments in the Australian prune industry
- Knowledge transfer to the prune industry stakeholders on R&D, best practice, emerging risks and opportunities
- Increased adoption of R&D program outcomes to build a stronger, more resilient Australian prune industry
- Enhanced communication and sharing of knowledge and new technology information
- Increased understanding of the statutory R&D levy system and the role of Hort Innovation.

Keywords

Prune R&D levy; communications; extension; field events; Growers' Forum; the Vine magazine; e-news; promotion; prune processors; prune marketers; best practice management; Project Reference Group (PRG)

Introduction

The Australian prune industry has had a long involvement in industry development projects, concluding with project DP15002 in mid-2018.

In recent times, APIA has been contracted by Hort Innovation to deliver a number of communication and extension projects (DP18000, DP19000 & DP22000).

Recent projects APIA has delivered include:

- DP11001 Technical Development for the Australian Prune Industry (ended 30/10/2014)
- DP14000 Technical Development for the Australian Prune Industry - Stage 2 (ended 31/10/2017)
- DP15002 Innovation and Adoption program for the Australian Prune Industry (ended 1/7/2018)
- DP18000 Communication and extension for the Australian prune industry (ended 21/12/2019)
- DP19000 Communication and extension for the Australian prune industry (ended 21/12/2022)

With relevant experience and capability APIA was well positioned to oversee this project and manage the communication and extension activities to be delivered through project DP22000 and achieve the intended outcomes which included:

- increased engagement and awareness of growers and industry stakeholders of best practice, industry R&D investment portfolio and project outputs by communicating valuable information.
- Increase of grower and industry stakeholder understanding and skills in best practice, industry R&D investment portfolio and project outputs by communicating valuable information.
- Growers and industry stakeholders have a greater understanding of the levy system and the role of Hort Innovation
- Enhanced communication and networking have led to greater sharing of knowledge and information on technical developments across the prune industry.

APIA's strong networks within the prune industry were useful in helping project activities to be delivered effectively.

Methodology

The following activities were undertaken to enable delivery of project outputs listed:

- **Preparation of articles for “The Vine” magazine.**

For each edition of The Vine (4 per year), the project activities included:

- Preparing minimum of 1 technical article per edition (up to 2 pages)
- Identifying topics to include R&D updates, industry development and other relevant technical information drawn from relevant domestic and international sources
- Liaising with Paula Smith (sub-contract journalist) regarding content (topics, space requirements etc) for each edition and agreeing on a simple work plan as well as the Project Reference Group as required
- Co-ordinating with any external contributors to ensure articles are contributed in a timely manner
- Emailing content for articles to Paula Smith to enable articles to be finalised in close consultation with contributors, including the proofing of articles
- Ensuring that Hort Innovation acknowledgement & branding guidelines are followed
- Note – during 2024, Dried Fruits Australia made changes which required the prune & dried tree fruits industries to share articles for the Vine magazine. As a result, APIA produced articles for every second edition of the Vine, from late 2024.

- **Ausprunes e-news**

For each edition of the Ausprunes e-news, the project activities included:

- Preparing a minimum of 2 e-news editions per month
- Identifying topics suitable for use in an e-news including research updates, industry development information, reminders, warnings or other relevant information
- Liaising with Paula Smith (freelance journalist) regarding content for each edition
- Liaising with the Project Reference Group as required for feedback on possible topics \
- Finalising content with Paula Smith and arrange for e-news distribution
- Distributing each e-news edition to the prune grower database held by APIA.

- **Grower field days/field walks & grower forum**

- Conducting field days/field walks for prune growers and 1 grower forum, on relevant topics
- Liaising with the Field Co-ordinator (APIA or sub-contract Yenda Producers) to identify potential topics for prune grower and consult with the members of the Project Reference Group as required to obtain feedback on topics for field events & grower forum
- Field co-ordinator arranging each field day/field walk, including arranging venues, speakers, refreshments etc in consultation with APIA.
- Field co-ordinator liaising with the national secretary, Phil Chidgzy and Paula Smith (sub-contract journalist) regarding promotion of field day/field walk & grower forum
- Field co-ordinator preparing evaluation sheets for grower feedback at each field event

- **Overseas Expert Visit**

- Co-ordinating visit to Australia in Spring 2025 (early November) by Ms Jaime Ott, a University of California (Agriculture & Natural Resources) Orchard Systems Advisor for several Counties in California Her primary crop responsibilities include walnuts, prunes, almonds, and olives.
- Activities included doing a presentation at the APIA Annual Conference in early November 2025, as well as undertaking a number of farm visits & hosting a field event with growers.

- **Project Reference Group (PRG)**

- Establishing a Project Reference Group that included the Hort Innovation project manager and growers
- The PRG provided input as required as well as monitoring the delivery of project activities and outcomes.

- **Liaison with Hort Innovation Project Manager**

- Liaison with the project manager and other relevant staff to ensure appropriate communication of project outputs to industry via industry communications and Hort Innovation Corporate Comms channels

- **Project Reporting**

- Project update provided at the APIA Annual Conference
- Prepared milestone reports and final project report

Outputs

Table 1. Output summary

Output	Description	Detail
Prune articles for the Vine magazine	Appropriate articles submitted on time for the Vine magazine during the 3 year project period	Refer Appendix 1 which lists the 9 articles prepared and published in the Vine magazine during the project period. From mid-2024, the prune & dried tree fruits industries were required to share access to the Vine – with each industry preparing articles for every 2 nd edition.
E-newsletters	A total of 85 e-news editions were prepared and circulated during the 3 year project period	Refer Appendix 1 which lists the 85 e-news editions that were prepared during the project period.
Field days & grower forums	There were 4 field events & 3 grower forums held during the 3 year project period.	Refer Appendix 1 which lists the 4 field events & 3 forums that were held during the project period.
International prune expert visit	Ms Jaime Ott, a University of California Orchard Systems Advisor, visited Australia in early November 2026	Refer Appendix 1, which details her presentation at the APIA Annual Conference in early November 2025 & involvement at a number of farm visits & grower field event.
Project strategy including M&E Plan	Prepared & included with milestone 102 report.	Monitoring efforts included reports on e-news editions published & articles published in <i>Vine magazine</i> , number of field events & grower forums held, annual survey of grower opinion and field event/grower forum participant feedback
Project Reference Group	PRG members were consulted on project activities, including topics for articles in Vine and e-news editions.	No formal meetings held, with verbal & email consultation with PRG members managed by the APIA National Secretary (Phil Chidgzey)
Milestone reports	Milestone reports submitted on time	Milestone reports 102 – 107 prepared, submitted & approved
Liaison with processors & Hort Innovation	Regular liaison with prune processors & Hort Innovation undertaken	Regular liaison involved APIA Secretary, Phil Chidgzey as well as APIA Executive members.
Project reporting to grower meetings	Project reports prepared as required	Project reports delivered to prune growers and industry stakeholders each year at APIA Growers' Forum.

Outcomes

Table 2. Outcome summary

Outcome	Alignment to fund outcome, strategy and KPI	Description	Evidence
Intermediate outcomes			
Increased engagement and awareness of growers and industry stakeholders of best practice, industry R&D investment portfolio and project outputs by communicating valuable information	Prune SIP Outcome 2: Improved capability and an innovative culture in the Australian prune industry maximises investments in productivity and demand.	The project activities undertaken ensured that APIA was providing prune growers and stakeholders with relevant research, industry, market & best practice information – so they were positioned to make more informed decisions in relation to their enterprises.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retained a strong readership list of about 50 growers & industry stakeholders for e-news and Vine magazine. Regularly 30-50% of growers attended APIA field events Between 65-75% of growers attended APIA grower forums
Enhanced communication and networking have led to greater sharing of knowledge & information on technical developments across the prune industry.	Prune SIP Outcome 4: The Australian prune industry has increased profitability, efficiency and sustainability through innovative R&D, sustainable BMPs & better pollination management	The project activities undertaken have provided readers with access to information about improved practices, new technologies & research results.	<p>Annual Survey highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% of respondents had received regular e-news, the Vine, or attended a field event 90% of respondents found amount of APIA communication was just right 90% of respondents read every Vine edition 60% of respondents found prune articles in the Vine to be useful 75% of respondents read all e-news editions 35% of respondents indicated they would change farm practices
End-of-project outcomes			
Increased engagement and awareness, knowledge and skills supporting the adoption of best practice in the growing, processing and marketing of Australian prunes with the aim of maximising the profitability of the Australian industry	Prune SIP Outcome 2: Improved capability and an innovative culture in the Australian prune industry maximises investments in productivity and demand. Prune SIP Outcome 4: The Australian prune industry has increased profitability, efficiency and sustainability through innovative R&D, sustainable BMPs & better pollination management	The communication & extension activities undertaken ensured that APIA was providing prune growers and stakeholders with relevant research, industry, market & best practice information – so they were positioned to make more informed decisions in relation to their enterprises.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retained a strong readership list of about 50 growers & industry stakeholders for e-news and Vine magazine. Regularly 30-50% of growers attended APIA field events Between 65-75% of growers attended APIA grower forums

Monitoring and evaluation

Table 3. Key Evaluation Questions

Key Evaluation Question	Project performance	Continuous improvement opportunities
< Refer to the M&E Plan >	< Identify aspects of project performance that address the Key Evaluation Questions >	< List opportunities for improvement and future development >
1. To what extent has the project achieved its expected outcomes?	Ongoing feedback suggests that the project increased grower awareness & understanding of industry best practice, the prune R&D investment portfolio & project outputs, including regular e-news editions, Vine articles, field events/forums & learnings from international prune expert visit.	APIA continues to seek improvements to its communication & extension activities, by adding new outputs such as regional visits & visits by international prune experts to its project activities
2. How relevant was the project to the needs of intended beneficiaries?	Major project outputs (e-news editions, Vine articles & field events/grower forum) continue to meet the needs of prune growers. APIA is aware of the need to improve the range of project outputs	
3. How well have intended beneficiaries been engaged in the project?	APIA observations confirm that strong target prune grower engagement levels continue to be met by this project.	
4. What efforts did the project make to improve efficiency?	APIA has successfully sought to improve its collaboration with prune industry organisations in major producing countries. Study tours & visits by overseas experts are building these relationships.	Further development of links with international prune industry members offers real opportunities for sourcing information about new practices & technologies.

Recommendations

APIA strongly recommends to Hort Innovation that a similar communications project should continue for the Australian prune industry with the aim of keeping growers and industry stakeholders updated with new technologies, research and changes to best practices, market intelligence and promotion activities.

Intellectual property

No project IP or commercialisation to report'

APPENDIX 1 - Outputs Summary

Articles prepared for the Vine

2023

Feb 2023 edition <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/orInf656qr7fxm9t7dsjs/>

May 2023 edition <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/2tq0gykcu9r5qso5vwfh1/>

Aug 2023 edition <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/cplf7lsx8pj8kwjelqa3n/>

Nov 2023 edition <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/u2077h6i4qrbzbhj0l3em/>

2024

Feb 2024 edition <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/weda0sj8x4a2whuiyra5z/>

May 2024 edition <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/7pyh4emhlp4m877va09zd/>

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/oa1ggp9vqabufur05rfc/>

Aug 2024 edition <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/1avk6ud9d4kya3fdt3np9/>

2025

February 2025 edition <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/auylo510w5z0iplg0qy5t/>

August 2025 edition <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/b2l3qo3hb68tifscoc6r8/>

E-news editions

2023

ausprunes_ene news vol 12 issue 1 <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/guqk1hnpztpydvhyquijly/>

ausprunes_ene news vol 12 issue 2 <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/glx6ude47026nflq0c522/>

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2024

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ausprunes_ enews vol 14 issue 5 <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/2hjphr5xb49i10rq3ux4u/>

Field Events & Growers' Forum held during the project period (2023-2025)

Field Events

ausprunes_eneews vol 12 issue 20 <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/p1thyl0y599fkz8uft4ra/>

ausprunes_eneews vol 13 issue 25 <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/txz4uzheafnie8qvnkjpw/>

ausprunes_eneews vol 14 issue 9 <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/mgi6mgi0ldigxayyyeapc/>

ausprunes_eneews vol 14 issue 24 <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/k7gblu54ubo0fimzcvaon/>

Growers' Forums

ausprunes_eneews vol 12 issue 18 APIA Conference 2023 <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/fiz1pksvndc45exw7rh44/>

ausprunes_eneews vol 13 issue 24 APIA Conference 2024 <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/veutv5guli37owcm6otoo/>

ausprunes_eneews vol 14 issue 20 APIA Conference 2025 <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/ss8eqm4y0558iswl8lzva/>

Annual Survey

2024 Evaluation Summary (annual survey) <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/02snu9iirbx7b7w6pesks/>

2025 Evaluation Summary (annual survey) <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/pasvsz3041of7k18f2lir/>