Recovery & Resilience: A Berries Australia & Hort360 Project

John Hay, Industry Recovery & Resilience Officer, Berries Australia

It is no secret that we live in a volatile and changing climate, and that the last few years have been challenging for the horticulture sector seeing both extreme drought and flooding events. At an industry level we can't stop these events from occurring, although we can ensure that our growers have the tools and well-developed resilience to deal with the resulting challenges when they occur.

Resilience can be defined as '*the psychological capacity to adapt to stressful circumstances and to recover from adverse events*'. In that sense, the best way to develop resilience is unfortunately through experiencing and surviving hardship, as difficulties can strengthen the mind provided it coincides with the right support.

A key focus for Berries Australia is to build industry capacity to enable better preparedness, and to foster the ability to recover quickly, and so empower growers to become more resilient in the face of future events.

The Recovery & Resilience project has a broad remit, but two areas where significant gains can be made are through practice change in on-farm efficiency and diversification to reduce risk.

Efficiency gains can increase the profit available for investment into projects that aid recovery and boost resilience. Through the delivery of project information that meets the changing regulatory space, we hope to inform growers so they can adapt to change and at the same time improve the triple bottom line looking after profit, people and the planet.

Diversification on farm can offer additional income streams at times where the main enterprise might suffer. In some cases, it is hard to value diversification projects but they can provide a resilience buffer against issues such as drought, erosion and run-off, and help to improve biodiversity. Through practice change, we can help growers to move away from 'path dependence'; an economic and social science phenomenon whereby history matters i.e. what has occurred in the past persists because of the resistance to change (Figure 1).

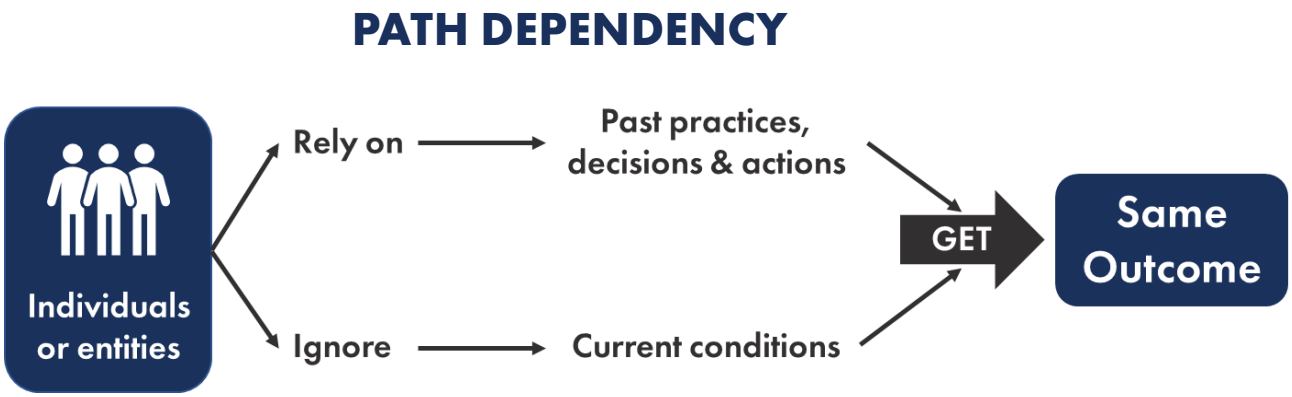

Photo credit: wallstreetmojo.com

To begin this process, Berry growers in the NSW regions of Northern NSW and Coffs Harbour will have the opportunity to undertake a facilitated on-farm assessment using the Hort360 tool to identify areas of their business that might benefit from improvement. Once a module has been completed a report is provided showing actions to take with links to information and resources. Although all modules will be available to growers, the focus will be to complete these five modules:

1. Better Business
2. Energy
3. Irrigation
4. Run-Off
5. Pesticide

With the focused modules in mind there could be opportunities to improve business planning, energy efficiency and technology adoption, spray applications and biodiversity, drainage plans and nutrient capture, and water use efficiency.

The project has employed two Recovery and Resilience Officers, John Hay based in Coffs Harbour and Steve Norman in Wollongbar to help facilitate the process. John is a qualified Distribution electrician and has a degree in Horticulture. After working in mining, gas and renewables as an electrician he was a natural fit with the Queensland Farmers Federation working on projects in Energy, Digital Smart Farms, Soil and Carbon for Agriculture, writing many technical case studies and news stories on these topics. He has experience in Macadamia production working as an agronomist's assistant undertaking soil sampling, writing nutrition plans and monitoring for insects and disease.

Steve's goals are to improve social, economic and environmental aspects of Agriculture and currently works as the Subtropical Horticulture Industry Development Officer for the Department of Primary Industries. He has experience in Winemaking and Viticulture and as an Extension Agronomist researching alternate plant varieties within sugarcane fallow crops, multispecies interrow companion planting, and investigations into different ways to capture and measure sediment runoff. Further research initiatives include testing the efficacy of silicon amendments' to increase Lady Finger Banana's tolerance to *Fusarium oxysporum*.

What is Hort360?

Hort360 is a computer based, risk assessment tool, which is designed to give you a 360 degree view of your farm business operations. Hort360 assists you to identify potential risks, capitalise on business opportunities and highlight unnecessary farm expenses. It is a whole of farm business approach.

Hort360 allows the industry to be guided by science to make decisions that work for farms and businesses. It also allows the horticulture industry to demonstrate our stewardship of the environment and willingness to protect the very land we farm on.

The program is entirely voluntary. Through a one-on-one facilitated process, you will be asked a series of questions relevant to your business. As you answer each question, the system tells you if you are 'below', 'at', or 'above' the industry standard for each practice. If any practice is below the industry standard, you will be advised on what necessary actions are required to reach the right level.

By participating in Hort360 you will have the opportunity to access technical support, on-farm training, and professional networks. All this will enable you to increase efficiencies, reduce costs, improve productivity and product quality.

Find out more at www.hort360.com.au

To find out more information or to register for Hort360 contact us at:

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