

# Fair Farms welcomes Australian horticulture to inaugural conference

Sachin Ayachit, Fair Farms National Program Manager

Given our current labour market, there has never been a better time to come together to discuss the state of workplace relations in Australian horticulture. In October we did just that with growers, retailers, auditors, politicians, and peak industry bodies coming together for the inaugural Fair Farms National Conference & Awards.

I never would have imagined that what started out as a small concept idea for celebrating the Fair Farms program with just our growers, would grow into something involving the greater horticulture industry. Several months of planning and engaging with the industry led to a stunning roster of 13 speakers, delegates from all around Australia and a conference program that delivered on getting vital information to members of the horticulture industry.

From the moment our wonderful MC Richard Shannon started off the conference with a bang, to our first lot of speakers which included The Honourable David Littleproud MP, Executive Director of Enforcement FWO Steve Ronson, Dr James Cockayne NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Rachel Mackenzie of Berries Australia – the conference room was abuzz with excitement at what was to be an informative and fun event. Special thanks to our incomparable keynote speaker Steven Bradbury for bringing energy and enthusiasm to a room full of delegates who were simultaneously amused with your humour and inspired by your story.

As topics such as audit fees, red tape, consumer demands, global pressures, lack of labour and compounded compliance were discussed, it was important to acknowledge that although we may have come from various viewpoints on the topic, fundamentally there were two things we could all agree on:

**Australia's horticultural industry must have a reliable workforce**



**The reputation of the horticultural industry must be improved**

A grower perspective from the conference was this: It is a shame that growers who do everything right have to prove their behaviour with a certificate of audit. It's an added burden and cost that we could all do without. But it's an even greater shame that the few growers who don't do things right, spoil the reputation of all those who do. These growers detract from our workforce and unfairly price their produce, it's not a level playing field. These growers forced us into this space, and they need to be forced out. We need to reboot the reputation of horticulture.

It was for these very reasons Fair Farms was developed by Queensland's peak industry body, Growcom. It is the only Australia-wide training and certification program for fair and ethical employment practices on farm.

Finally, a special congratulations to our inaugural award winners – Shane Stirling and Rachel Mackenzie who both received the first-ever Fair Farms Recognition Awards and Fair Farms Certified Growers Sunripe who took out the Fair Farmer of the Year Award. All our winners had contributed to the betterment of the program and industries approach to horticulture workplace relations and were, therefore, more than deserving of recognition.



**The Honourable David Littleproud MP**



**L-R Sachin Ayachit, Rachel Chambers & Steven Bradbury**



**L-R Sunripe owners Luke & Samara De Paoli, Growcom Chair Belinda Frentz, Steven Bradbury & Growcom CEO Rachel Chambers**



**L-R The Honourable David Littleproud MP, Executive Director of Enforcement FWO Steve Ronson & Dr James Cockayne NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner**

I would like to thank our sponsors for supporting the Fair Farms vision. Thank you to our Gold Sponsors AUSVEG and TĀTOU, our silver sponsors Holding Redlich and Agri Talent, and our Bronze Sponsors Southern Cross Certified, Integrity Compliance Solutions, Driscoll's, and Berries Australia.

I would like to thank our speakers – all of whom have taken time out of their day to deliver exceptional presentations and once again, thank you to our delegates for attending the event.

We look forward to welcoming everyone to the 2023 Fair Farms National Conference & Awards at a date and location to be announced soon.

