

# The Nursery Papers

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR AUSTRALIAN PROFESSIONAL NURSERY OPERATORS

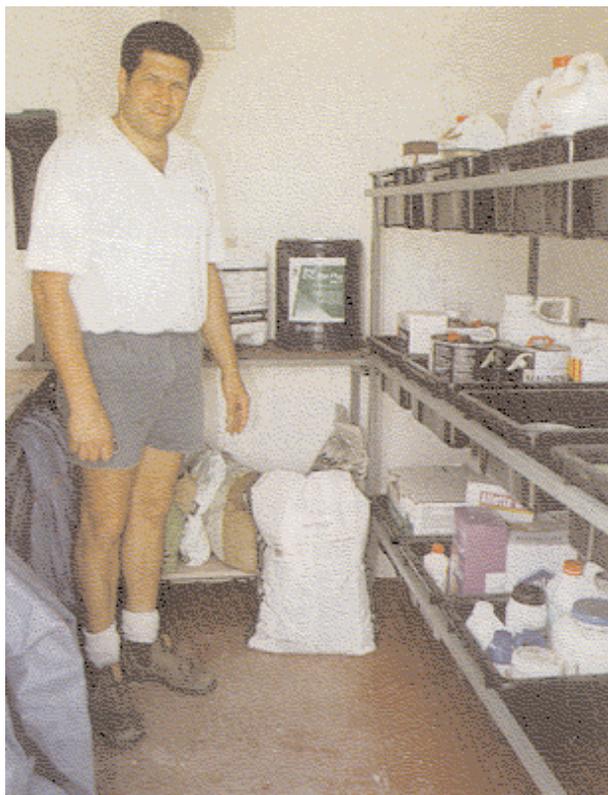
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## Grower success stories on the path to industry development

Who better to speak on the success that industry development can bring than the individual nurseries who are reaping the benefits? NIAA and HRDC know that industry development can only occur if individual business see and act on the benefits. One of the most powerful tools we are using to improve the profitability and professionalism of the production sector is NIASA, or the Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme, Australia. Here are some individual success stories from businesses, small and large, to whet your appetite.



*Barry Naylor of Naylor's Nursery in the new Manacon chemical storage shed; note the plastic bins to keep different chemicals completely separate*

### Naylor's Nursery

#### **Brisbane, Queensland**

A water treatment plant was installed as part of the process of working towards NIASA accreditation and Barry describes this as "the best capital expenditure and return on money ever". Waste from a 20 megalitre dam, which collects water run-off from the sloping site, is now treated by chloro-bromination. In the 15 months since installation the treated water has reduced the throw out rate in all lines; in certain lines the reduction is down to zero from a previous 8 - 10 per cent. What's more, Naylor says, it has reduced chemical use in the nursery.

His next project is to concrete the drains: although this was not required for NIASA accreditation, he sees it as practical for his particular situation. He is also planning to make improvements in production efficiency. It is this ongoing awareness of the need for improvement which Barry Naylor sees as one of the main benefits of NIASA. "The NIASA guidelines give you something to focus on", he says. "All the smaller components add up until the sum of the parts becomes greater than the whole. My goal is not necessarily to be the best nursery but to get better every day."



*Bob Moon of Blackbutt Ferns, who have just achieved NIASA accreditation*

## Blackbutt Ferns

### **Wagga Wagga, NSW**

Blackbutt Ferns owned by Therese and Bob Moon, has only recently achieved NIASA accreditation but already the benefits are becoming apparent.

“The most important aspect of becoming accredited has been the raising of our own standards,” Therese said. “We have gone through the process for our own benefit rather than for any market advantage, but we are seeing the results in better quality products. Seeking to become accredited has given us a reason to improve and to adopt and develop new and better techniques. If these are of value to others, then we’re happy to pass them on - after all, anything that improves the overall standards and professionalism of our industry should be shared,” she added.

“We feel very good about achieving accreditation. It has been a positive influence on our staff, helping them to ‘lift their game’ and improve their skill levels, with the result that they share our pride in our accomplishment. If your staff do not share

‘ownership’ of accreditation with you and they’re not prepared to adopt improved techniques and work standards, then you probably shouldn’t pursue it.”

While it is still early days for Blackbutt, Therese believes the process of accreditation has changed the overall performance of the business.

“The adoption of better work practices has reduced our wastage and improved our productivity and quality quite noticeably. We have always tried to avoid using chemical pesticides and now, with the ongoing development of biological controls, we are determined to keep pesticide use to an absolute minimum. Our methods and high quality of product make this a very real goal,” she said.

In terms of the overall industry, Therese believes accreditation lifts the image and professionalism of what many still perceive to be a ‘backyard’ industry.

“Better quality products, produced more cost effectively, from nationally accredited growers suppliers will go a long way to improving the way in which the nursery industry is viewed by both the consumer and the business world in general.”

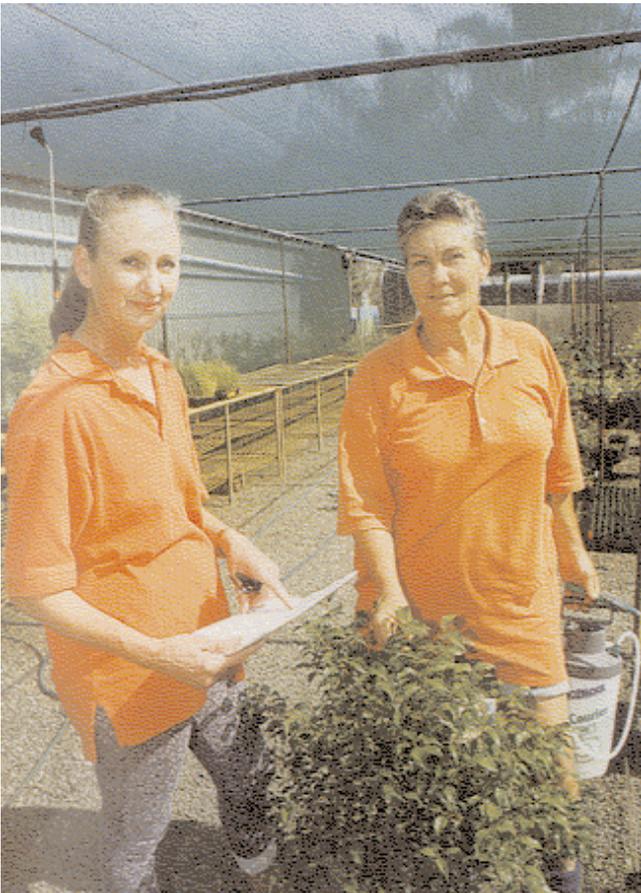
## Meridian Nursery

### Gold Coast, Queensland

Ian Heymink of Meridian Nursery (accredited) is an enthusiastic convert to NIASA because he sees it as “not just for the big boys” but very beneficial to the smaller operator. He and wife Meredith operate a small (less than 1 hectare under production) tube-stock nursery in Queensland where, besides introducing what he describes as “forced internal discipline” to all aspects of nursery operation, NIASA accreditation has highlighted the need for meticulous record keeping.

Ian has always been enthusiastic about computers, business plans and goal setting but says it took the Nursery Industry Development Officer (John McDonald) to point out inadequacies in the record keeping system. The Heyminks first installed

*Meredith Heymink (left) and production manager Val McDonald of Meridian Nursery, use spraying record sheets, introduced during the NIASA accreditation process, as a basis for planning the nursery's integrated pest management program.*



a spreadsheet suited to NIASA guidelines, capable of handling stock related records as well as those for water quality, media quality and spraying. Ian has also come to see the value of historical records in forecasting changes and planning future programs.

At Meridian Nursery NIASA accreditation has also resulted in a reduction in chemical application and usage, a significant reduction in dumpage (with the only dumpage now being due to below standard quality from propagative performance rather than from pest or disease problems), a measurable increase in productivity in both production and administration and increased safety through better work practices backed up with a buddy awareness program.

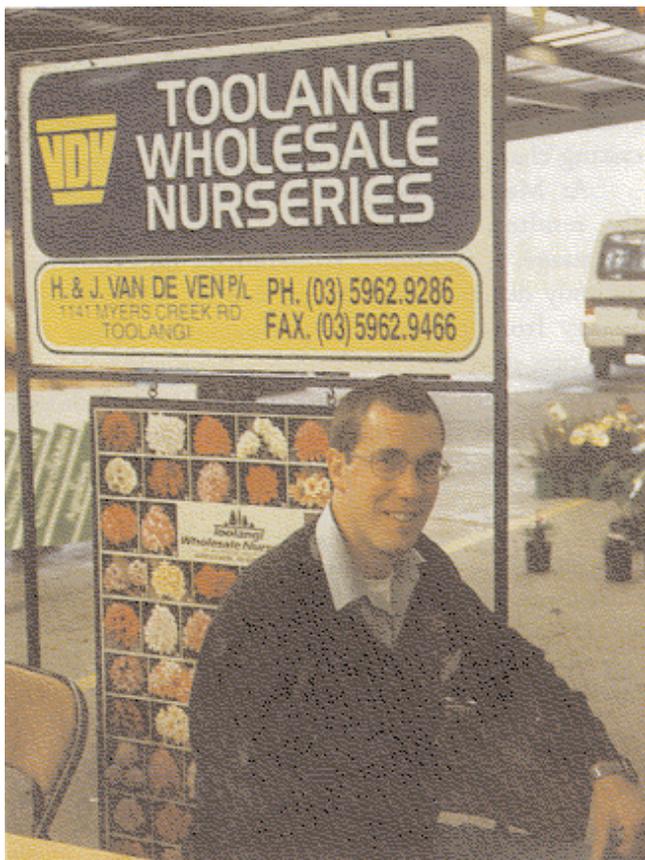


## Palm Park Wholesale Nursery

### Piggabeen, NSW

As far as Darryl Hall of Palm Park Wholesale Nursery (accredited) in New South Wales is concerned, NIASA is all about profitability. Since he bought the nursery in a rundown condition seven years ago, Hall and son Ian have used NIASA guidelines to upgrade all aspects of operation; three significant areas of improvement are in bay management and surfacing, water treatment and irrigation design.

Like many other growers, they thought their dam water was clean enough but the throw-out rate proved them wrong. “It all added up to root diseases which we didn’t know we had,” Hall says, adding that while today they are throwing out a quarter of the amount of stock they were before, the really interesting point is that those plants which they do throw away are better than their best plants of seven years ago. And because the palms and other long term growing plants in which the nursery specialises are no longer having to compete with fungus and other diseases they are growing better and faster: the result is that growing time has been reduced by 6 - 8 weeks. The Halls are not yet satisfied with this result and plan to keep raising their standards with ongoing NIASA guidance. “We’re still trying to get ourselves up where we should be,” Darryl Hall says. “I don’t see the challenge ever ending.”



*"It is important to keep abreast of the market and our competitors" says Paul van de Ven of Toolangi Wholesale Nurseries.*

## Toolangi Wholesale Nurseries

### Toolangi, Victoria

Toolangi Wholesale is not yet achieved NIASA accreditation, but is well on the way.

"We really only have one project left to complete before we are ready for our final inspection," Paul van de Ven said, "and that's to complete the installation of an underground irrigation system. We've had an extremely busy spring but we hope to be ready for our final inspection before the end of this year (1999).

"We are striving to become accredited because we see that as the direction in which the entire industry is headed, and we wish to ensure our position as a leading production nursery is maintained well into the future." It is important to keep abreast of the market and our competitors," Paul added.

While the family operated business does not see any huge net benefit in terms of sales deriving from NIASA accreditation, it is acknowledged that the process is important in developing new practices

and standards that are more economically viable and sustainable than those of the past.

"It is probably the best thing to do to retain our profile in an industry that is becoming more professional every year, as well as ensuring our ongoing profitability" he said.

### The Bottom Line

These businesses have identified the following Key Benefits of NIASA ;

- Improved profitability through less waste and improved management systems,
- Enhanced professionalism through peer recognition and staff involvement,
- Higher customer confidence through reliability and application of best practice.

### Further information

For more information locally phone:

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For information on national matters call Ian Atkinson, Industry Development Manager (02) 6260 5880 or Gary Gibson, Secretary National Accreditation Committee (02) 9876 5200. We are also on the internet at <http://www.niaa.org.au/niasa/index.html>

### Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the various businesses who agreed to speak out about their success. The interviews were conducted by Julie Lake from Brisbane and Noelle Weatherley of Melbourne.

