



Nursery & Garden Industry  
Australia

# Case Study

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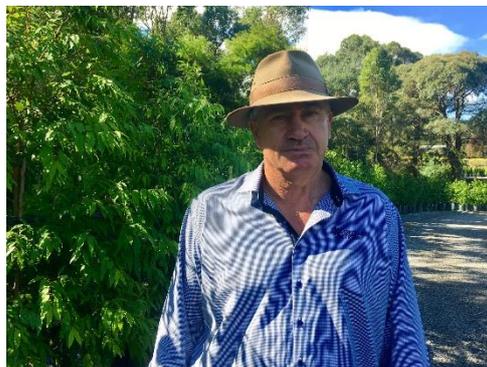
## Data the key to national industry voice

### Overview

The collection and use of data is critical to Hamish Mitchell's business of growing and selling premium-quality landscape trees in Narre Warren East, Victoria, and he believes it's also the key to the nursery industry being recognised as a major player in the national economy.

Speciality Trees employs 20 people over two 8-hectare sites and supplies landscapers, developers, councils, and high-end gardens with quality tree material.

Within the nursery, computerised systems collect data on more than 350 different varieties of trees ranging in size from five litres to 300 litres. This information is critical to stock control, sales, resource planning and tailored production plans for each variety.



*Hamish Mitchell, Speciality Trees*

Each tree has an individual identity number and can be tracked from entry, through the nursery, to planting by the end customer. The majority of Speciality Trees' stock is delivered direct to site, and can be monitored afterwards for performance and then evaluated to improve processes.

Data on the number of trees potted, what is sold and the amount of waste incurred in the process is regularly analysed to assist managers to make informed decisions on the needs for the following season and to maintain a process of continual improvement.

### The importance of nursery data

Speciality Trees has been growing at 10 per cent or greater per annum since Mr Mitchell and his wife Gaby took over 10 years ago, but he's not sure whether growth figures are similar for other operations, due to the lack of industry data.

Mr Mitchell strongly supports the recently commenced project *Nursery Industry Statistics and Research* (NY16004) because without it he is unable to benchmark the performance of his business against industry averages.

The project is being funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia using the research and development nursery levy and funds from the Australian Government.



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“We need to know who is buying what, when, and where the growth areas are, so we can analyse that data to make intelligent, future-based production nursery decisions. The same applies with the industry as a whole,” Mr Mitchell said.

As a former board member of Nursery & Garden Industry Australia (NGIA), he believes data collection at the national level is also the key to the industry collectively becoming a more powerful voice within the economy.

“It will assist our representation to Government, because although I think our industry employs 10,000+ people and adds a significant amount to the economy, we really don’t know how many businesses the industry represents, how many people we employ or whether we have a positive impact on society or not,” Mr Mitchell said.

### Current data gaps



*Speciality Trees, VIC.*

He is hopeful the project will deliver a raft of national and state ratios in areas that could include wages, productivity, average turnover and percentage of stock value sold, to enable nursery operators to benchmark their businesses.

Traditionally, nursery businesses have been reluctant to disclose confidential information, but he says the new project uses a professional data collection agency and analysts who are independent of industry.

Information will remain anonymous and confidential, and rather than being concerned with planning and performance around decisions made at a business level, the goal will simply be the collection of data for meaningful industry analysis.

“This agency will deliver a snapshot of our industry and it is this hard analysis that is so critical to planning strategies and goals for nurseries,” Mr Mitchell said.

“They will also be able to analyse the performance of marketing and industry programs such as the 202020 Vision campaign. It is critical for us to understand the impact being made by the investment of levy funds.”

### Benefits of nursery data

The benefits, Mr Mitchell says, are endless.

“If we can compare what’s happening in all states and look at what’s working best and where, we can develop strategies across the country that promote the industry and the value of what we do.



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“There will be many benefits in a higher national profile including assisted training and employment, and as we drive productivity, we drive profitability. If no-one knows what the average return on investment is, how can we measure whether we are being successful?”

Mr Mitchell sees data collection and analysis as a way to maximise benefits for the entire industry.

“We are at the forefront of change and opportunity.

“The next 50 years present an exciting opportunity for the industry to be recognised as a solution to a heating planet, with all its associated health and wellbeing issues, but we must define and communicate who we are, quantify what we do and establish how to work better together for the collective good.”



*Speciality Trees, VIC.*

And he says, the industry’s traditionally laconic nature need to change to one with more focus on business-oriented, long term performance.

“There’s a really positive feeling in the industry and massive opportunities. Too many nurseries start up and then they shut down, but with the support of solid, reliable, independent data we will be positioned to grow our businesses and attract genuine investment for long term performance and growth.”

A more detailed overview of the project *Nursery Industry Statistics and Research* (NY16004) can be found in the April 2017 Nursery Paper on the NGIA website at [http://www.ngia.com.au/Story?Action=View&Story\\_id=2334](http://www.ngia.com.au/Story?Action=View&Story_id=2334)

To watch the video, visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoDazK-NZAk&feature=youtu.be>

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