



Nursery & Garden Industry
Australia

Case Study

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Better data to remove guess work for Tall Trees Nursery

Tall Trees Nursery has come a long way since director David Vanderuit first planted a small plot of trees out the back of the family's quarter acre block at Balnarring, on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula.

The business now comprises 20 staff and grows green stock for landscapers, developers, councils and wholesalers throughout Victoria. It has supplied well-known state developments such as Rod Laver Arena and the RAAF base in Sale.

This year, Tall Trees celebrates its 30th anniversary, which second generation grower Joel Vanderuit believes is an opportune time to reflect on how far the business has come, and to look at what's next on the horizon.

"I have vivid memories of dad coming home from his day job and spending the majority of his weeknights and weekends maintaining the small nursery," Joel said.

"It all started to change once he and business partner Garry Evans secured their first round of large commercial customers and outgrew the original block, which led the business to lease additional land down the road.

"Like many nurseries operating in peri-urban areas, an ongoing challenge is running out of room to produce green life and having to decide 'where to next?'"

"Fast track to 2018 and our current setup is 25 acres of owned and leased land, with the most recent acquisition at Melton, about 90 minutes from our head office at Balnarring.

"To keep travel costs down, we produce large trees in 90L pots or above at the new site, in addition to deciduous and hedging lines that don't require day to day maintenance.

"While Melton is further away than we'd like, it has provided us with the scale to supply more green life into the booming residential market that we're seeing taking hold here in Victoria."

The business largely grows advanced trees for landscape developments but has expanded its offering in recent years to include indoor plants, exotics and shrubs due to the rise of green roofs and walls.

This type of exponential growth has been reflected in a recently completed research project, which sought to quantify the value of the nursery industry's contribution to the economy and provide a data tool to help growers plan for the future.



Image: Joel Vanderuit, General Manager, Tall Trees Nursery.



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The *Nursery Industry Statistics and Research* project (NY15006) surveyed more than 220 Australian production nurseries and found that the industry produced 1.6 billion plants to the value of \$2.29 billion in 2015-16.



Image: Balnarring site, Tall Trees Nursery.

Joel said the figures were interesting but not surprising given the diversity of nursery production and its impact, from micro greens on supermarket shelves to advanced trees in 1000L pots transplanted into the ground.

“In the past, it’s been difficult to make comparisons with our peers and between the different segments of the industry, but I think this project goes a long way to help overcome this challenge,” Joel said.

As part of the project, a nursery industry data tool was developed to give production nurseries the ability to compare key aspects of performance, including product share by type, market segmentation, employment and broader industry indicators.

“The data tool is an exciting development for the industry. We’ve previously struggled with inventory systems due to the complex nature of our business, especially on the brokerage side,” Joel said.

“We’re keen to implement the tool as a way of improving our productivity. From first impressions, it seems like an effective platform to plug in the numbers and to see how we’re tracking against others supplying into the building and construction sector.

The research project found that Australia’s 1,777 production nurseries, on average, spend 32 per cent of income derived from sales on wages. Joel hopes the data tool can assess areas like wages in relation to turnover, stock loss, and help to modernise the business.

“Was it the right species? Has consumer popularity declined? Could we have grown the plant differently? These are the types of questions we ask ourselves when looking at the balance sheet,” Joel said.

“Having something like the data tool would help take out some of the guess work for our staff, particularly those that are young or new to the team. We see our apprentices as a real investment in the business and encourage open communication.

“The world is changing and we, as owners, all have a responsibility to provide our staff with the latest tools and resources they need to operate in today’s data driven world.”

The data tool is part of project NY15006 and was developed by Nursery & Garden Industry Australia (NGIA) with Down to Research, a social and marketing research company, and ACIL Allen Consulting, an economic and policy consulting firm.

It was funded by Hort Innovation using nursery research and development levies and funds from the Australian Government. It’s aim was to collect national statistics in enough detail



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to track industry performance over time, monitor market trends and prioritise investment for the future.

To find out more about the *Nursery Industry Statistics & Research (NY16004)* project, visit: <https://horticulture.com.au/resource/nursery-industry-data-tool/>

The data tool is available on request to nursery levy payers by sending an email to communications@horticulture.com.au

****ENDS****

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**Hort
Innovation**
Strategic levy investment

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FUND**

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