



Nursery & Garden Industry  
Australia

## Grower case study

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### Data revolutionising R&D decisions for Jong's Nursery

A quiet revolution has occurred in Australia's nursery industry. Long gone are the days of growers producing plants in their backyard or running a greenhouse as something 'on the side'.

Today's production nurseries are highly professional and sophisticated enterprises, that together employ over 19,000 people nationwide and produce over \$2.29 billion worth of plants every year.



It's a view echoed by South Australian grower Peter Jong who, together with his father Nico, operates a successful production nursery that specialises in ornamental plants, based at Mt Compass, near Adelaide.

Peter, like many other growers, has a philosophy of continuous improvement and regularly seeks out and trials new research, to improve the business's overall productivity.

"Recently, we trialled LED lighting over the winter. We will use the data and observations from these trials to make a final decision on whether to invest in the technology crop-wide," Peter said.

"We're really starting to see ourselves as a professional business, not just a farming one – and having access to better and more reliable data is helping to validate R&D investments."

Peter cites the *Nursery Industry Statistics* (NY17008) project as a prime example of how industry is raising the bar on better data. Now in its second year, the project is run by independent agencies, Down to Earth Research and ACIL Allen.

The project is funded by the nursery levy with funds from the Australian Government. It seeks to survey 300 production nurseries to provide an accurate snapshot of the industry's social, economic and environmental contribution.

Peter was one of many growers approached to provide anonymous and confidential data in 2017. The survey is underway again in 2018, with calls happening this November, and Peter is encouraging others to participate.



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“The more information we have, the better the result. The more detail we can extract, particularly from the smaller or medium sized nurseries, the more accurate the representation too,” he said.

“When I participated in 2017, I didn’t find the process too onerous. We were asked to provide various figures such as total number of plants produced, annual turnover, how many staff we employ, wages, amongst other things.

“It was very professional and I didn’t need to worry about privacy or competitors – the data is aggregated to provide an accurate snapshot of our industry,” he said.

For Peter, a key attraction to the survey was the related data tool: a resource provided to participants following completion of the survey and the announcement of industry statistics.

The tool enables nurseries to benchmark performance against other businesses of a similar size or production focus, comparing key areas such as profits and costs, wages and training.

Peter said one of the business’s key barriers is its heavy reliance on key staff during peak times of the year. He is keen to refine their training procedures to ensure new or younger staff can hit the ground running.

“We used the tool to measure how we stacked up against other businesses and discovered that we could invest more in staff training and development, as well as new machinery to promote upskilling and greater efficiency,” he said.

“Overall, I was quite impressed with the data tool – it looked professional and gave you a clear overview of how your business compares to other nurseries of a similar size or focus.”

Peter is looking forward to the second version of data tool, which will be unveiled to industry early 2019.

“There’s certainly a positive feeling in the industry right now, and we should all be trying to grow the pie, especially as populations increase and awareness about the benefits of plants become better known,” he said.

“I encourage growers to see the value in this project, and to take the time to contribute, for the betterment of our businesses and our industry.”

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