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Data-driven decisions guide growth for Living Colour Nursery

To effectively plan for the future, you need to understand the present and the levy-funded project Nursery Industry Statistics (NY17008), is helping the Living Colour Nursery in South Australia do just that.

Living Colour Nursery was the first nursery in South Australia to specialise in potted annuals and perennials, but the business has continued to innovate its offerings, stocking seedlings and landscape plants as the market evolved.

Today, Living Colour is one of the leading bedding plant nurseries in the state, with a reputation built on understanding the customer and the market they operate in. The main aim of the business is to deliver reliable, quality plants whilst providing excellent customer service.

With a stated aim to produce a reliable and accurate snapshot of the size, value, production and employment in Australia's thriving nursery industry, the Nursery Industry Statistics project is a perfect fit for the business. Managed by independent research agency, Down To Earth Research, a sample size of around 300 nurseries is surveyed each year.

The results of these surveys are tabulated and analysed and a benchmarking tool is made available for levy-payers which helps them understand the state of the industry and their contribution as a business.



Living Colour Nurseries, one of South Australia's leading nurseries

Living Colour has been leveraging the benchmarking tool for two years and according to Ashley Burns, Growing and Production Manager at Living Colour Nursery, the insights garnered from the tool are invaluable for the direction of the business.

"Whilst we might not base our entire business strategy on what the tool turns up, it does reassure us that our medium and long-term strategy is based on fact and not 'gut feel'.

"Like everything we do at the nursery, we are trying to move away from doing things on instinct and basing our decisions on science instead. Whether it be waste percentage, germination percentages, or labour tracking, we're trying to remove guesswork out of our business as much as possible."

Earlier this year, Greenlife Industry Australia published some of the headline findings from the project which indicate a very healthy nursery industry, with over 25,000 people employed across 1,651 businesses and \$2.4 billion in farm gate value.

For Ashley, who is a relative newcomer to the nursery industry, these holistic insights into the growth trajectory of the industry not only provide useful context but encourage collaboration between nurseries.

"Although we may compete with other nurseries at a base-level, most businesses are more focused on growing the market together. We love to knowledge-share with other nurseries, and this project, and the findings drawn from it are critical for tracking the success of our entire industry."

Living Colour Nursery has been in operation since 1988 and is a true success story of the South Australian horticulture industry. Its success is the result of an historical focus on business strategy to complement its production process.

As Ashley points out, the data from the statistics project, which is a strategic levy investment under the Hort Innovation Nursery Fund, is being used to make both short-term operational changes and guide long-term strategy.

"One specific example of how we use the tool is in relation to managing our investments, whether that be in technology, labour or any other inputs. Through a quick analysis of how nurseries of similar sizes are structuring



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these investments, we can sense-check that our approach is aligned to the industry standard, and if required tweak



Pictured: Ashley Burns from Living Colour Nurseries

our business strategy. In circumstances like this, we expect the tool to provide a real return on the investment of our time.

“As a business we think long-term and over the next few months we will be building our five and ten year plans. Our leadership team will sit down and identify trends and opportunities and allocate resources accordingly. We expect that when the results of this project are released in 2020, they will be used to help inform our long-term strategic direction, and the insights will be invaluable to our business.”

Having gained such valuable insights from the benchmarking tool, Ashley has committed to participating in the survey component of the project this year.

“The process to participate is incredibly straightforward, and we believe by participating we are providing some value back to the industry as a whole.” time.”

For a snapshot of the outcomes of the Nursery Industry Statistics 2017-18 please refer to [Facts at a Glance](#)

For more information, please contact Greenlife Industry Australia at: info@greenlifeindustry.com.au or on 02 8861 5100.

ENDS.

**Hort
Innovation**
Strategic levy investment

**NURSERY
FUND**

This project has been funded by Hort Innovation using the nursery research and development levy and funds from the Australian Government. For more information on the fund and strategic levy investment visit horticulture.com.au