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Cultivating Success: How Data-Driven Insights Can Drive Nursery Sector Growth

Helping the nursery sector leverage data on farm was the driver for developing the Nursery Industry Benchmarking Tool.

That's according to Jan Paul van Moort, Executive Director of ACIL Allen. van Moort played a key role in developing the tool as part of the Nursery Industry Statistics 2020–21 to 2024–2025 project.

As part of the ongoing project, economics firm ACIL Allen is analysing industry performance data and sentiment to maintain the tool's currency.

The tool provides growers with accurate, reliable and user-friendly industry data, enabling them to develop more effective strategic plans, allocate resources more efficiently and track performance.

Growers are turning to the benchmarking tool for better business management, and van Moort says the tool will help businesses now and into the future.

"Firstly, it tells us about the total value of the industry – that has always been very hard in horticulture in general, but particularly in nurseries," van Moort said.

"They are selling everything from seedlings to enormous, fully grown trees and more in between.

"Now we have a breakdown of the key categories: What is the volume? How much value is moving through each channel? Who's buying what? The tool shows the structure of the market, the patterns and trends."

DIVERSE DATA FOR A DIVERSE INDUSTRY

To provide more targeted insights for different parts of the sector, the data is broken down by small, medium and large businesses.

This approach allows users to make comparisons on revenue and costs against similar-sized operations, rather than across the industry as a whole.

"The joy of the nursery sector is that it is so diverse. Businesses are selling into different channels and have found their niches," van Moort said.



JP van Moort, Executive Director of ACIL Allen

"They get as much via collaboration as they do through competing against each other, and that's very important."

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“What I really like about this project is that the tool works for individual businesses – and the entire sector. Because we have industry level data, we can generate insights to inform better policy settings for the whole industry.”

USING RESEARCH TO MANAGE RISKS

The research looks at different types of risks that could impact the industry, and aims to give the sector insight into how to deal with those risks.

“There are other dimensions to it, we’re not just measuring financial data we are also measuring sentiment, trends, use of resources and investment in technology, and innovation among other areas,” van Moort said.

“This upcoming collection will be the second year in a row that we have been looking at risks –this year we’ll focus on water.

“We’ll be asking people how they are seeing this risk and positioning against it, because to be successful in any business, you not only have to understand your costs and markets, but you also need to be thinking about potential risks.

“We see time and time again in briefings and discussions that this research helps people to make informed choices about what they grow and where they can take their businesses.”

‘THE CONSTANT GARDENER’

van Moort believes information is vital to help grow an industry and likens gathering and curating data to the nursery industry growing and curating plants.

“What is most valuable in developing industries is having a constant flow of accurate and relevant data at scale,” Van Moort said.

“It’s important for the industry to have multiple years of data. This project is now heading into its eighth year, so

we can begin to see patterns that show how this industry could thrive.”

A VALUABLE INVESTMENT FOR THE INDUSTRY, AND A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

van Moort believes having policy settings right is essential for the industry to flourish. Investment into research is valuable for the entire sector because it can inform and influence policy.

“We are about to release an estimate of the economic contribution of the nursery sector that will have a breakdown of the impact on employment and the economy by state and nationally,” van Moort said.

“We are updating the nursery environmental scan to see how trends that are shaping the future of the industry are changing. The scan will be released in early 2024

“There was a big growth spurt during COVID but the pandemic also created cost challenges.

“As we come out of COVID-19 and the world changes, it is going to be really interesting to see how the industry deals with these forces and finds opportunity in a changed buying environment.”

For more information on the Nursery Industry Statistics 2020–21 to 2024–25 (NY21000) project and the Nursery Industry Benchmarking Tool, email:

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