



Greenlife Industry Australia

YOUR LEVY @ WORK

Friday, 13 August 2021

Industry benchmarking tool puts Engall's nursery on track for better business management

As a fourth-generation nurseryman and the third generation custodian of Engall's nursery in Dural NSW, it's safe to say Mark Engall knows how to run a nursery business. But in order to continue to grow, Mark is looking for ways to modernise business management, leading him to benchmarking his business using the Nursery Business and Data Benchmarking Tool developed in the levy-funded Nursery Industry Statistics 2016/17 to 2019/20 (NY17008) project.

Engall's Nursery has been a family run business since it was started in 1947 when Bill Engall returned home from the World War 2. Specialising in fruit trees and roses, the nursery has steadily grown over its 74 years of operation and is currently the largest it has ever been.

Mark Engall, Bill's grandson shares the traditional family passion for the nursery industry, dedicating time to sitting on the NGINA board, including a stint as vice-president. Mark has also been previously awarded a nursery industry Young Leader award and the nursery itself was named best "Small production nursery" back in 2010.

But looking ahead, Mark is committed to ensuring that the business continues to grow and in order to do that he recognised that he needs to spend more time thinking strategically about his business, not just growing more plants.

That's where the industry benchmarking tool came in. It helps nursery business owners and managers measure how their business compares, competes and 'benchmarks' against others in relation to revenue, volume, productivity, wages and business sentiment.

It was a chance conversation with his accountant and business coach that prompted Mark to consult the tool to help him plan for the future of the business. "Our business has been successful for three generations but I wanted to ensure that our plan for the future growth of the business

was based on data and that the decisions we were making were backed up by facts," said Mark.

Having been a contributor to the data collection component of this project for several years, Mark understood the kind of information he would be able to glean from the simple and easy to use tool. For example, Mark was able to track whether what he was spending on wages was in relative alignment with his peers in the industry.

"Without a tool like this it is very hard to tell whether we are spending too much on wages and therefore being inefficient, or not enough and therefore perhaps losing the opportunity to hire great talent.

"The tool also told me I have relatively fewer staff according to our turnover meaning my team are very productive and efficient."

Other than wages, Engall's nursery has found it very useful to be able to track the sentiment and business objectives of different segments of nurseries.

"Over the last few years there has been a continued trend upwards in the number of large businesses that are continuing to invest in things like education, infrastructure and technology," he said.

"That tells us that if we want to reach the next level we need to be investing in those activities. It also provides reassurance, both to myself and my accountant, that investment in the business is crucial to stay competitive and to grow."

The value and importance of the benchmarking tool is likely to increase even further in the next couple of years as it will provide an important sense check of where we are at following the upheaval surrounding COVID.

**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



Greenlife Industry Australia

YOUR LEVY @ WORK

“Even though our family has run this business for over 70 years, the uncertainty surrounding COVID means that we can virtually throw the playbook out the window,” he said.

“We know that the industry saw a massive uptick as a result of COVID, but by how much? Will that demand sustain? How have our peers and competitors reacted?

“We expect that this tool will go a long way to helping answer some of those questions and will be an invaluable sense check that our strategy for the business makes sense based on the data that is available to us.”

Having taken ownership of the Engall’s Nursery at the age of 21, when his father sadly passed away, Mark had little time to invest in his own education in business management and until now his focus has largely been on growing the best plants that he can possibly grow.

And that strategy has worked, but Mark has now acknowledged that one of the best thing he can do for the growth of the business is to spend more time managing the business from the office and less time spent with getting his ‘hands dirty’ with practical nursery production.

Working closely with his accountant over the last few years he has drastically increased his in-depth budgeting and forecasting skills, which pair nicely with the benchmarking tool. “I’m learning every day and becoming a better business manager. Real-world tools like the benchmarking application help add context to my business education and the success of Engall’s Nursery is all the better for it.

Mark truly believes in the importance of this project and encourages other growers to check out the tool to get a greater sense of where they sit as a business. “We are eagerly awaiting the next edition of the benchmarking tool. We are meticulous contributors to the survey component every year as we know that the more accurate the data is, the better it will be, not just for ourselves but for the entire industry.

“The insights we’ve gathered from the tool have been invaluable and we look forward to continuing to engage with the project.”

The next phase of the statistics project is about to commence with Hort Innovation releasing a Request for Proposals for NY21000: Nursery industry statistics 2020-21 to 2024-25. This is a five year project that will continue the longitudinal analysis of the nursery industry statistics

building on the two previous projects that have captured four years of stats from 2016 to 2020.

For a snapshot of the outcomes of the *Nursery Industry Statistics 2019-20* please refer to [Facts at a Glance](#)

To access the tool, 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