

NURSERY PAPERS

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Sustainability in focus

If we are to maintain our quality of life as human beings, sustainability must be prioritised.

As the industry responsible for the production of the greenlife that sequesters carbon from the atmosphere, cools our urban spaces and encourages biodiversity, we are in an enviable position amongst industries.

Nevertheless, sustainable farming practices must be designed, implemented and adhered to in order to ensure that our industry is protecting the environment and our people and that we are being responsible custodians of the land.

This nursery paper provides an update on key global, national and industry-level sustainability plans and provides insights on how nursery business owners and managers can improve the sustainability outcomes at their nurseries today.

SUMMARY

- Sustainability is one of the most important global issues and presents challenges for every industry and broader society.
- Hort Innovation has recently launched its *Australian-Grown Horticulture Sustainability Framework* which outlines its strategic objectives and approach to nourish and nurture people, plants, workers and the planet whilst supporting a profitable industry.
- Greenlife Industry Australia has 'Sustainability' as one of its strategic imperatives as it aims to shore up industry to address climate change, biosecurity issues and the rising costs and scarcity of key natural resources.
- Several levy-funded projects are actively working to provide growers with the tools and resources to improve their own sustainability outcomes on-farm.

BACKGROUND

In 2015, all United Nations members adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At its heart is a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call to action across several issues affecting the current and future prosperity of the world.

Several of the goals are of significant interest to the horticulture industry, and in particular the greenlife, nursery and garden sectors including:

- **Goal 8** – Decent Work and Economic Growth
- **Goal 11** – Sustainable Cities
- **Goal 12** – Responsible Consumption and Production
- **Goal 13** – Climate Action

Those four goals closely align with the four pillars of the Hort Innovation *Australian-Grown Horticulture Sustainability Framework*: Nourish & Nurture, People & Enterprise, Plants & Resources and Less Waste.

But sustainability must begin with the individual. With frameworks and policies in place it is increasingly important for individual growers to look at their own production methods and business processes to ensure that they are doing business that is not just profitable and productive, but also sustainable.





HORT INNOVATION

Australian-Grown Sustainability Framework



Hort Innovation has released the *Australian-Grown Horticulture Sustainability Framework*, a guide to help the horticulture sector share its sustainable, ethical, and safe farming practice stories with stakeholders.

The initiative aims to help horticulture sectors share sustainability credentials and stories, as consumers, policy makers and governments are increasingly asking for evidence of ethical and sustainable practises from their suppliers. The initiative also provides guidelines for how to help focus on-farm sustainability.

This is a national project developed over more than 12 months and presents an opportunity for growers to take an active role in leading the sustainability narrative across horticulture.

The framework was developed with input from producers, employees, industry peak bodies (including Greenlife Industry Australia), service and input suppliers, and researchers. Financers and investors, marketers and exporters, retailers, governments, and consumers also had input.

Australian horticulture is continuously adopting environmentally responsible tools and systems. Soil health and water efficiency measures are already commonplace in industry and this project will build on these strengths.

The *Australian-Grown Horticulture Sustainability Framework* is complemented by a suite of

sustainability focussed projects that Hort Innovation is delivering for grower levy payers. These will contribute to the industry goal for Australian agriculture to reach a farm gate value of \$100 billion by 2030.

Why is this important?

In the globalised supply chain, consumers are showing an increasing interest in understanding more about where their greenlife products come from and how they are produced.

Similarly, supply chain companies and their shareholders and governments are seeking evidence of high standards of product safety, workplace ethics and environmental care.

Three quarters of Australian businesses have metrics to measure environmental sustainability and 27% intend to make their supply chain more environmentally sustainable in the next one to two years. So, not only is sustainability crucial for the environment, but it will also increasingly factor into customer purchasing behaviour.

Four pillars and 17 focus areas

The framework has identified four pillars with 17 topics significant to the sustainable production of horticulture in Australia. These focus areas are closely aligned to the UN SDGs and are also relevant to nursery production businesses.

Nourish & Nurture	People & Enterprise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food to nourish people • Plants to nurture communities • Safe, traceable, quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Productive, profitable growers • Safe & ethical work • Leadership & governance • Innovation • Thriving communities • Trade & economic value
Planet & Resources	Less waste
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water • Landscapes • Climate • Energy • Biosecurity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food waste • Packaging • Farm waste

Growers seeking more information on the Australian-Grown Horticulture Sustainability Framework should head to <https://www.horticulture.com.au/hort-innovation/our-work/horticulture-sustainability-framework/>



SUSTAINABILITY IN THE NURSERY INDUSTRY

Greenlife Industry Australia supports the Australian-Grown Hort Innovation Sustainability Framework and has made the decision to use it as the basis for the development of a nursery industry sustainability action plan. The action plan is in the process of being developed and will support the industry to manage environmental and production risks and ensure industry sustainability.

The plan will focus on the following activities:

- Set ambitious waste reduction and emissions targets that will drive industry innovation and support the industry's environmental credentials.
- Adapt the Nursery Industry Farm Management System to an Australian Plant Production

Standard incorporating environment, plant protection/ biosecurity (including traceability and use of Property Identification Codes) and best management practices.

- Establish a nursery grower register, including professional businesses and "backyard" operations.
- Undertake surveillance of emerging issues and threats and communicate these to members and partners.

Putting sustainability into practice

There are several ways that growers can look to align themselves with the UN SDGs and the Australian-Grown Hort Innovation Sustainability Framework and improve their profitability efficiency and reputation in the process.

The projects and initiatives outlined below directly support key UN SDGs.

SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth – attract new talent to the nursery industry

The greenlife industry faces challenges in its ability to attract and retain both new and experienced people. In order to ensure a sustainable workforce, a fresh injection of talent is needed. A levy-funded project 'Developing Nursery Career Pathways' (NY19006), led by RMCG Consulting and Greenlife Industry Australia supports nurseries by providing resources to help attract talent and upskill the current workforce.

Growers looking to find out more information on how they can attract new talent to the nursery industry or upskill their current staff and grow them into leaders should consult the Greenlife Industry Careers Hub – <https://www.greenlifeindustry.com.au/greenlife-careers-hub/greenlife-careers>

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities – exploring the Green Cities Fund

Australia is one of the most urbanised countries on earth and our urban population is only increasing.





With the health benefits of green space becoming clearer, urban developers and governments are becoming increasingly interested in creating greener communities.

The Hort Frontiers Green Cities Fund brings together some of the world's best researchers in urban greening, from some of the country's top research institutes and universities as well as experts in horticulture and landscaping to put the non-food horticulture industry's best foot forward to make and keep our cities green.

It is imperative that growers stay abreast in the latest trends and research in urban greening and adjust their operations accordingly by growing and, marketing plants which help create healthier cities through urban greening projects.

Find out more about the Hort Frontiers Green Cities Fund here: <https://www.horticulture.com.au/hort-innovation/our-work/hort-frontiers-strategic-partnership-initiative/green-cities-fund/>

SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production – seek out efficiencies on farm with NIASA best management practices

Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme, Australia (NIASA) is the national nursery industry Best Management Practice (BMP) program for production nurseries, growing media manufacturers and greenlife markets. It underpins the Australian Plant Production Standard (APPS) – a holistic system designed to ensure a sustainable future for the Australian nursery industry.

The guidelines cover four key areas, all of which seek to improve on-farm efficiencies and ultimately improve sustainability outcomes.

The four key areas are:

- **Crop Hygiene** – by implementing strong crop hygiene protocols you can reduce the overuse of chemicals and ensure that plants moving along the supply chain are of the best quality possible.

- **Crop Management** – by reviewing water protocols, fertiliser intake and the efficiency of production areas, you can ensure you have the most productive output, with the least impact on the climate and environment.
- **General Site Management** – ensuring your staff are well trained and safe, and that quality is meeting client expectations, helps build a sustainable industry.
- **Water Management** – efficiencies in the way nurseries manage water are crucial for the regulation of nearby ecosystems.

Whether you want to go down the path of full NIASA accreditation or not, the guidelines are available for ALL nursery growers and should be followed in all circumstances to improve the efficiency of your farm, the quality of your products and your impact on the environment.

NIASA Best Management Practice is managed by Greenlife Industry Australia and is aligned and updated with outputs from the strategic levy-funded project National biosecurity and sustainable plant production program (NY20001).

SDG 13: Climate action – Become EcoHort certified

EcoHort is the national nursery industry Environmental Management System (EMS) for production nurseries, growing media manufacturers and greenlife markets.



The program is designed to assist NIASA accredited businesses further improve their business sustainability whilst addressing environmental and natural resource management responsibilities.

It supports production nurseries in the implementation of good sustainability practices to help position themselves and the broader industry as being committed to sound environmental and natural resource stewardship.

EcoHort is managed by Greenlife Industry Australia and is aligned and updated with outputs from the strategic levy-funded project National biosecurity and sustainable plant production program (NY20001).

LINKS TO RESOURCES

- Find out more about NIASA Best Management Practices and EcoHort certification: <https://nurseryproductionfms.com.au/>
- Find out more about the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- Find out more about the Hort Innovation Sustainability Framework: <https://www.horticulture.com.au/hort-innovation/our-work/horticulture-sustainability-framework/>
- Read the Hort Frontiers Green Cities Fund here: <https://hortfrontiers.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CSI-Green-Cities-Fund.pdf>
- PAST EDITIONS OF NURSERY PAPERS ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE on the Greenlife Industry Australia website: https://www.greenlifeindustry.com.au/Section?Action=View&Section_id=46