



WILDFLOWERS AUSTRALIA

SECRETARIAT: 360 CURRAMORE RD, MALENY QLD 4552

WILDFLOWERS
AUSTRALIA
MEMBER
GROUPS:

FLOWER
ASSOCIATION
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GRANDIFLORA
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President's report August 2010.

A recent review of strategies for new and emerging industries highlights the value of Research, Development and Extension (RD&E) in primary industries as a key factor for increasing business productivity and ensuring industry sustainability (Bird, in press). The major funding supporting the Australian Wildflower industry comes from Rural Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), a federal agency which funds this valuable research, development and extension.

RIRDC defined five priority areas for research for the wildflower industry through consultation with the entire value chain, including growers, marketers and researchers. In the five-year plan from 2008-2013 funding is provided for: developing profitable and sustainable production and management systems; improving product quality through postharvest care and quality standards; extending domestic and export market opportunities; expanding the product range; and promoting research knowledge and adoption.

Through the past year WildFlowers Australia Ltd has assisted RIRDC and the industry in accomplishing these goals. In its simplest form this assistance is seen in the communication role that WildFlowers Australia has played in alerting members to funding opportunities. WFA board has assisted in writing and submitting research proposals, and offers financial administrative support in collecting and managing industry contributions. We are working with RIRDC to improve the distribution of information from completed research projects.

WFA was pleased to host the 8th National Wildflower Conference in Victoria in May. This was an excellent forum to communicate R&D successes and share practical information. The programme was varied, and participants came from many industry sectors. We look forward to this becoming a popular regular event hosted in all states in succession.

In assessing and educating export markets WFA has been on the alert for opportunities, and has organised business trips and study tours for interested members to China and various centres in Japan. The role WFA played was in administration to communicate and coordinate these trips. All people who travelled attended in their private capacity as wildflower businesses. To promote the knowledge and use of flowers in the domestic market WFA has again run the floristry competition. This year's competition attracted 132 entries: photographs are posted on the website. A selection of these photographs has been used, with permission, on the front cover of the latest International Protea Association research publication, Acta Horticulturae 869, bringing international attention to this competition. Furthering exposure to our products through educating Australian florists, WFA supports the design and distribution of a resource manual describing

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what wildflower and foliage products exist, when they are available, how they are used/cared for, and what the quality standards are for these products. This project links in well with the Quality Standards Manual that is being developed in another RIRDC project.

Projects started last year which assist businesses to improve productivity and profitability continue to be supported by WFA. In addition to promoting and supporting research projects WFA members and the board contribute in other ways to ensure all members have extensive representation. All members of the RIRDC research advisory committee are members of WFA, thus providing effective 2-way feedback between this important funding agency and our industry. Other broader industry organisations to which WFA board members contribute are the newly formed alliance, New Rural Industries Australia (NRIA), and the International Protea Association.

The profile of our industry received a tremendous boost with Lana Mitchell winning the NSW Rural Woman of the Year award. The media attention was significant, and Lana took every opportunity to speak with interested public, politicians and decision makers alike. WFA and the industry thank Lana for her energy and selfless efforts in bringing attention to the Wildflower industry. With the award Lana received a scholarship and we look forward to hearing her feedback on this learning experience.

Moving into the future we have to be aware of changes in our R&D environment. In the past the main research providers have been state departments of agriculture. Recently many of these agencies have downsized and restricted their focus to mainstream crops, with a concomitant reduction in research capability and funding. The wildflower industry has suffered as a result, as we all are well aware. This new direction, or misdirection, strongly contradicts the Primary Industries Ministerial Council who, in 2005, endorsed the concept of 'National R with Regional D&E'. This concept proposes that both basic and strategic research (R) can be provided nationally from a distance, while adoption and adaption occur on a regional level (D), supported by local extension (E) which are both required to improve the uptake of innovation by industry. Who better to work on a local and regional level than state agriculture departments? The industry is fortunate to have continued state support in Queensland and Western Australia. However, in the other states, this gap must be filled, and the responsibility can, and should, be taken up by regional and product-focussed grower groups. While WFA will support any developments where we can, the interest and enthusiasm must be locally generated, and groups must be autonomous.

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A further implication of reduced state support for our industry is that we must expand our concept of research providers. Universities are well structured for 2 and 3 year student projects, which is the duration favoured by RIRDC. Our position is complicated, however, by the level of research currently needed by the industry. Many products are in the immature stage of development, and fairly basic research is required. Universities characteristically undertake highly advanced and technical research, commonly perceived by growers as lacking practical application. This obstacle vanishes when growers work in tandem with universities, where technical research and practical trials occur in parallel. To achieve this, universities need to be comfortable with embracing a degree of extension, and growers need to be prepared to contribute real time and resources, facilitated by an industry organisation, such as WFA. One such project is currently under discussion.

I thank all on the board and the many members who have contributed to the successes described. I am encouraged by the higher level of interest and involvement from our members. I hope WFA will continue to be seen to be leading the industry forward.

Audrey Gerber

WFA President 2009-2010

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