

## **Final Report**

# **Transforming leadership in Australian horticulture through the Hort Connections partnership**

**Project leader:**

Nathan McIntyre

**Report authors:**

Nathan McIntyre

**Delivery partner:**

AUSVEG

**Project code:**

LP22000

**Project:**

Transforming leadership in Australian horticulture through the Hort Connections partnership (LP22000)

**Disclaimer:**

Horticulture Innovation Australia Limited (Hort Innovation) makes no representations and expressly disclaims all warranties (to the extent permitted by law) about the accuracy, completeness, or currency of information in this Final Report.

Users of this Final Report should take independent action to confirm any information in this Final Report before relying on that information in any way.

Reliance on any information provided by Hort Innovation is entirely at your own risk. Hort Innovation is not responsible for, and will not be liable for, any loss, damage, claim, expense, cost (including legal costs) or other liability arising in any way (including from Hort Innovation or any other person's negligence or otherwise) from your use or non-use of the Final Report or from reliance on information contained in the Final Report or that Hort Innovation provides to you by any other means.

**Funding statement:**

Transforming leadership in Australian horticulture through the Hort Connections partnership is funded through Frontiers developed by Hort Innovation, with co-investment from AUSVEG and contributions from the Australian Government.

**Publishing details:**

Published and distributed by: Hort Innovation

Level 7  
141 Walker Street  
North Sydney NSW 2060

Telephone: (02) 8295 2300

[www.horticulture.com.au](http://www.horticulture.com.au)

© Copyright 2024 Horticulture Innovation Australia Limited

## Content

Summary	3
Outcomes	4
Sponsorship entitlements	5
Evaluation	6
Appendices	7

## Summary

Hort Connections was successfully held from 3-5 June 2024 at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre. The event attracted a record attendance with 4,214 delegates attending across the three days including 1,200 growers. Hort Connections is held to provide growers and the broader horticulture industry with a valuable opportunity to network, engage and educate across a three-day program. The theme of “Grow. Connect. Thrive.” aimed to align content with key areas that will help growers thrive into the future.

Hort Connections remains one of the most valuable industry events in the horticulture calendar and this is evidenced by achieving both record overall attendance, record trade show attendance and record grower attendance. Year on year grower attendance increased by 20% from 992 to 1,00 with excellent representation from Victoria, interstate and New Zealand.

The event was well supported by the supply chain with the largest Trade Show produced to-date with a 20% year-on-year increase. The momentum generated from the event and the business opportunities provided to growers will see Hort Connections continue to be positioned as a must attend event well into the future.

Hort Connections is already in the planning process for 2025 and has identified several event improvements to ensure that the event remains contemporary for all growers and supply chain members.

## Outcomes

Hort Innovations sponsorship of Hort Connections assisted in the following event sponsorship objectives:

- **Engaging and communicating directly with growers and industry stakeholders**

Hort Connections has provided Hort Innovation with an unrivalled opportunity to engage and communicate with the largest group of growers in Australian horticulture and the broader horticulture industry. By providing Hort Innovation with content within the official program, an opportunity for a large number of Hort Innovation to attend and interact along with the prominent Trade Show location, Hort Innovation have been provided every opportunity to leverage this objective.

- **Delivering research & development outcomes to growers to inform on-farm practices.**

Through the inclusion of 3 Hort Innovation presentations, along with being able to further discuss levy-funded projects on the Trade Show floor, this objective has been met.

- **Amplifying the profile of the horticulture industry in Australia**

Hort Connections has successfully established itself as the leading event in Australian horticulture. The event has an excellent media profile and is widely covered in both agricultural and mainstream media outlets.

In addition to this, Hort Connections is regarded as a must attend event by key decision makers throughout the entire fresh produce supply chain. This size and scale puts Hort Connections and the sponsorship provided by Hort Innovation in a strong position to amplify the profile of the industry.

### Number of attendees:

Hort Connections hosted a record 4,212 delegates at the 2024 event.

### Number of growers:

1,200 growers attended Hort Connections 2024 which represented a 20% increase from 2023.

### Hort Innovation speaker:

Jesse Reader – Head of Investment, Growth, and Commercial spoke on “Frontiers: Enabling Practical and Meaningful Investment Solutions for Australian Horticulture”. Jesse also hosted the “How Technology is Changing the Fresh Produce Industry Panel”.

Belinda Van Schaik – Head of Customer Marketing participated on the “Brands Influence on Produce Premiums and Consumption Panel”.

Andrew Francey – GM of Industry Service and Delivery along with Tom McCue – R&D Manager, Production, participated in the Agtech Innovation – Transforming Horticulture for Global Growth Session”

### Hort Innovation speaker feedback:

No feedback was directly reported regarding the Hort Innovation speaker. The topic of exporting was highly sought after and post-event feedback has indicated that more content of this nature will be beneficial in the future.

**Engagement with growers and stakeholders:**

The Hort Connections program was carefully curated to allow for ample networking and engagement opportunities with growers and industry stakeholders. The Trade Show is central to the success of the event and is a catalyst for engagement opportunities and as a result of this, Hort Connections has opted to allow for more dedicated Trade Show time in 2025. In addition to this, more networking events were added to the program with AUSVEG hosting a grower networking event on Tuesday 4 June that also included attendance from key industry supporters including Hort Innovation.

AUSVEG was also successful in obtaining federal government funding to assist growers with financial bursaries to attend Hort Connections. This additional engagement opportunity was much appreciated by growers especially during what has been exceptionally challenging times for industry.

**Delivery of levy-funded research & development and/or marketing outcomes:**

In addition to the abovementioned sessions, the Trade Show floor also provided numerous opportunities to engage with members and discuss levy funded opportunities.

**Adoption of Hort Innovation resources or programs:**

The sponsorship entitlements provided Hort Innovation with every opportunity to showcase the latest in R&D and marketing outcomes to the industry. Through the several speaker sessions in the program and priority selection to space in the Trade Show, this has positioned Hort Innovation as a leader in the horticulture industry.

## Sponsorship entitlements

### Branding

- Hort Innovation will be recognised as Principal Convention Partner for Hort Connections 2024 – Hort Innovation were recognised as the Principal Convention Partner in all relevant print, digital and written formats. Example from website available [here](#).
- Media release recognising Hort Innovation as the Principal Convention Partner – A media release recognising Hort Innovation as the Principal convention Partner was sent. Link available [here](#).
- Lead branding on the delegate satchels – Refer to appendix A
- Promotional video to be played at the Gala Dinner as Principal Convention Partner – Video was played at Gala Dinner.
- Promotional video to be played in a loop beside the registration desk – Same video as the one played at the Gala Dinner was also included in the sponsor loop by the registration desk.
- Media release recognising Hort Innovation as the sponsor of the ‘Exporter of the Year’ Award, pre-approved by Hort Innovation – This was included in the media release recognising Hort Innovation as the Principal Convention Partner.

### Exclusive Sponsorship

- Sponsorship of the Plenary Sessions – Branding provided on the website, verbal acknowledgement from the MC and video played at the commencement of the sessions. Additionally, CEO Brett Fifield provided a speech to all attendees. Branding example available [here](#). Refer to appendix B.
- Sponsorship of ‘Exporter of the Year’ Award, with nomination criteria to be expanded to cover all horticultural exporters – Provided. Hort Innovation branding on the website, award certificates and trophies along with verbal recognition from event MC. Dital example available [here](#).
- Opportunity for Company Representative to present award and make brief speech at Hort Connections Gala Dinner – Provided, Hort Innovation Chair, Julie Bird provided a speech to attendees and helped present the award to the winner. Refer to appendix C.

### Engagement Opportunities

- Priority access to a minimum 12m x 12m space within the Trade Show. This larger space and will provide further exposure in a prominent location. – Provided. Hort Innovation occupied a premium 12m x 12m space in the Trade Show for 2024. Floor plan from 2024 can be viewed [here](#).
- Opportunity for company representative to be on the awards selection committee – Anthony Kachenko was a participant on the awards selection committee.
- Opportunity to host a networking event such as a Frontiers Leadership Forum for Hort Innovation stakeholders (time and date to be approved by Hort Connections). Hort Connections will cover a total of up to \$15,000 for this event. This can include venue hire, catering and AV. Any amount over the \$15,000 will be the responsibility of Hort Innovation. – Hort Innovation hosted a networking breakfast on Wednesday 5 June at MCEC. Hort Connections covered the expenses for this event in-line with this element. In addition to this, Hort Innovation also hosted the FASTA Forum on Monday 3 June.
- Opportunity to provide introductory speaker or have promotional video played at Plenary Sessions – As outlined above and per appendix B, Hort Innovation had both a video played at the plenary sessions and an introductory speech from Brett Fifield.
- Opportunity for company representative to moderate one concurrent session – Opportunity was provided but ultimately not taken up.
- Inclusion in the speaker session program. This session will take place within the Hort Connections concurrent sessions. – Program inclusions as outlined above.
- 90 all-access passes – All passes were utilised for 2024
- 2 x dedicated meeting room on-site for exclusive Hort Innovation use – Hort Innovation were provided

Hort Innovation – Post-event Report  
with sole use of Hospitality Suites 4 & 5 for the duration of the event.

- 20 Trade Show only passes - Provided and utilised by cooking staff and other contractors
- Post-event breakdown of delegate attendance e.g., grower sector, state etc – See appendix D
- 20 additional VIP all-access passes to be used to attract growers from non-aligned industry groups – All tickets provided to Hort Innovation as per the agreement
- Delegate list pre and post event, with email contact details – Both pre and post event lists have been sent.

## Evaluation

Hort Connections was the most successful event to-date with record grower attendance, exhibitor numbers and overall delegate attendance.

The changes made the program enables delegates to interact with exhibitors in the Trade Show and achieve the required level of networking and engagement while also provide the adequate amount of speaker content. A strong focus was made to increase the number of sessions in the Trade Show to keep delegates in there for longer and this is something that will be further increased moving into 2024.

Post-event survey results are still pending but the anecdotal feedback has been overwhelmingly positive to-date.

Hort Connections plans to build on the momentum generated from 2024 and will be working with all stakeholders to make the event an even bigger success. In addition to this, a number of process improvements have been slated to ensure that the program remains contemporary for all attendees.



## Appendices

### Appendix A – Satchel branding



### Appendix B – Plenary Sessions



Hort Innovation – Post-event Report  
**Appendix C – Award Presentation**



**Appendix D – Grower and Delegate attendance breakdown**

Breakdown	VIC	NSW	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	INT.
<b>Growers</b>	581	152	192	106	54	39	12	1	29

Breakdown	VIC	NSW	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	INT.
<b>Delegates</b>	1716	568	541	267	128	77	13	42	240