Applied case study — NY17008 Nursery industry statistics 2017/18 to 2019/20

Stakeholder	Ashley Burns (General Manager)
Nursery	Living Colour, Penfield, South Australia
Nursery details	South Australia's largest seedling wholesaler, employing about 40 staff, and distributing through a range of retailers

What was the research about

From 2018 to 2021, MY17008 *Nursery industry statistics 2017/18 to 2019/20* (delivered by Nursery & Garden Industry Australia) produced a detailed yearly snapshot of the size, value, production and employment of greenlife production in Australia. The project also delivered a political, economic, social, technological, legislative and environmental (PESTLE) scan of the greenlife industry operating environment, and an updated nursery benchmarking tool. Together these resources were aimed at supporting improved business and industry level decisions and outcomes.

What was your involvement in the Nursery Industry Statistics?

Living Colour nursery got involved with nursery industry statistics when it originally started in 2018 through NY16004 *Nursery industry statistics and research 2016/17* (the predecessor project to NY17008).
"We saw that it was providing feedback on metrics that we thought might have been useful. Our use of the benchmarking data has been growing and developing over the years" said Ashley. That involvement has continued into NY17008, "we submit our data each year and when it comes back we go over it as a leadership team to see where we register against our peers. Its been a great input from both a short term operational perspective and also for our long term strategy".

What benefits have you seen as a result of Nursery Industry Statistics?

Ashley thinks that the project filled a huge data gap for the business. "Any data you don't have to work too hard on and is well presented is of great value. It would be impossible to gather that ourselves, and it's a great source of information to benchmark against industry and help drive decisions".

In terms of how it is used, Ashley said it's all about supporting an objective and data driven approach to decisions. "Its one of the really good components that Hort Innovation has delivered from a business operations perspective. We get a lot of data about the technical aspects of production, but benchmarking ourselves against industry is not something that we would otherwise have as a business. So it gives the leadership team the confidence to make decisions. It backs up some of the thoughts and feelings that we've had and gives us the extra confidence to roll with the decisions we had in the pipeline. We are always trying to tweak our systems and processes to focus on consistency and quality. Having the industry data helps to fortify some of these decisions that we're making".

While the impact on the business has evolved over time, Ashley thinks the value of the data program is absolutely still there. "Particularly early on it made a big difference in our decision-making process as it addressed that data gap, and while the impact each year is not so profound now as those early years, its really important to keep monitoring where we are as an industry", said Ashley. "It's a really valuable tool and I'd hate to see it go".

A recent example highlighted by Ashley was the changing industry environment from the disruption of the COVID pandemic. "I was really interested to see what the data was like with the post-COVID thing. I knew what we were achieving, but it was great to see what the broader industry sentiment was".

Ashley also recognises the value that it is driving from at an industry level. "It had been assumed that we were a unique cottage industry run by family businesses, but from our perspective the industry is filled with serious production facilities that employ a lot of people. And now we have the data to back that up, which is of huge value when engaging with broader stakeholders".

What were the challenges?

Ashley doesn't see any challenges in contributing to the benchmarking project from a business standpoint. "From a data input perspective its pretty straightforward for us, the project team send through the information request and we'll fill it out to the best of our ability".

Continuously building on the dataset is something that Ashley does see as an opportunity to ensure the investment is generating value into the future. "The more that we can try and expand on the data points each year, and capture something new and different it will keep people's interest.".