

Media Release 25/10/2016

## Future Agro Challenge 2016 – Future Farms Forum in conjunction with the



# Future Agro Challenge

### **Delivering Future Farms Forums to increase the conversation on innovation in horticulture**

The first free Future Farms Forum which will be held as part of StartUp Tablelands Future Agro Challenge National innovation competition. This will be in also in conjunction with the Malanda Small Farms Field Day on Saturday 12 November, at the Malanda Showgrounds. The Forum will run from 10.00 am – 1.00 pm.

The forums are the brainchild of Steve Tiley, Growcom's new Hort360 Innovation Coach, collaborating with Leanne Kruss, Far North Queensland's Agricultural Workforce Manager for the Queensland Agricultural Workforce Network (QAWN) and Future Agro Challenge Coordinator for Start-up Tablelands.

These forums in key horticultural areas will be delivered over the next few months to increase the conversation among growers about how to go about bringing innovation onto fruit and vegetable farms.

"The Hort360 Innovation Coach program was launched by Growcom this year in recognition that there is a wide range of new technologies and research outcomes that might improve growers' profits or sustainability - but that it is difficult for growers to implement these technologies into their current businesses without support," said Mr Tiley.

"Most growers are too busy running their farms, and don't often have the resources to investigate the free or co-contribution government and industry support they could be receiving for funding an innovation or change of management practice on farm," he said.

"This is where Growcom's Innovation Coach Program and QAWN can help. With our help, growers no longer need to spend hours on the phone or on Google, trying to find out if they are eligible for grants or other support."

A range of exciting speakers on the program will whet growers' appetites by describing the benefits which innovation has brought to farms:

- **Robert Watkins** will kick off the proceedings and set the scene. Robert Watkins is an innovative second generation farmer from the Walkamin area of the Atherton Tablelands. He is the innovative entrepreneur behind Mt Uncle's Green Banana Flour. Rob was the 2010 Young Farmer of the Year for his award winning Banana Blankey, a polypropylene material carton insert for packing bananas. He was also the master mind behind a banana harvester that eliminates 80 percent of the labour intensive activities in bunch picking. Entrepreneurs like Rob Watkins help Australia's regional economies to grow stronger and more diverse.
- **Steve Tiley, Growcom's Hort360 Innovation Coach**, will follow, talking about the range and number of diverse projects that can fall under the "innovation" banner and where growers can go to seek assistance and support with their ideas.
- **HiveXchange CEO, Tony Palanca** will talk about how growers can transform their businesses through a new way of trading their produce that is completely transparent, via Australia's first online horticultural marketplace for produce, HiveXchange.
- **Mario Martini, Innovation Facilitator for AusIndustry**, will talk about the Australian Government's Entrepreneurs' Programme, designed to provide advice and resources to improve business competitiveness and productivity.
- **Brett Wedding, from James Cook University** will talk about the University's Rapid Assessment Unit which is focussed on innovative scientific research and development for horticultural products.
- **Griffith University's Rudi Bartels** will discuss how research organisations can help growers with reference to a case study involving Sunray Strawberries on the Sunshine Coast.
- **New Nuffield Scholar, Matt Fealy**, from Blue Sky Produce Mareeba, will talk about the background to his project investigating whether robotics can revolutionise horticulture.
- **Industry Development Officer, Bowen Gumlu Growers Association, Anna McCowan** will discuss the National Vegetable Extension Network, a \$6 million national program that has been created to assist vegetable growers to access current research and development information and help them adopt best practice.
- **QAWN Far North Queensland and North Queensland Officers Leanne Kruss and Bianca Fullarton.** Workforce Development. Training and retaining your future workforce. Our workforce of the future needs a complement of diverse, new and evolving skills that will help enable the interpretation of vast amounts of data; operation of emerging and advanced technologies; adaption of changing farm practices; the disciplined adoption of food safety; understanding consumer markets; and the implementation of IPM. Learn about funding packages available for farms and the agricultural supply chain to reduce your costs and keep up to date with changing and emerging innovations.
- **Workplace Health and Safety Qld Fiona O'Sullivan (State Manager) and Adam Spinelli (Senior Inspector)** will discuss the new campaign to reduce deaths on farms, especially surrounding quad bikes and machinery, and overhead powerlines. A focus on innovative new ways workplace health and safety measures, plus local Malanda machinery and quad bike agricultural trainer Joe Nechwatal will be available alongside them to discuss your training and safety needs along with the QAWN officers.

This collaborative forum will give insight into new and innovative ideas including value adding produce by-products, packing shed technology, precision agriculture, digital marketing, setting up access to R&D tax concessions and integrated technology solutions.

This forum will allow growers to maximise their access to grants and support mechanisms to realise their plans to implement innovation on their farms.

Joe Moro, president of the Mareeba District Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association says, “Our association is happy to support the Future Agro Challenge Australia that Startup Tablelands has brought to this region and to Australia for the first time. This is a great competition to encourage innovation in the region and to continue our strong performance in this area.”

Leanne Kruss is thrilled to be one of the key drivers for innovation and entrepreneurialism in agriculture. “The Nation Farmers Federation predicts the value of Australia’s agriculture sector will almost double in the next 15 years, creating Australia’s next \$100 billion industry. This alone will create close to 540,000 jobs into the near future. Industries where innovation can provide significant value are needed to achieve that level of contribution. Australian agriculture is a high value core national industry with huge potential for innovative impact. Come along and learn ways to help your farm business enterprises, and join in the Future Agro Challenge Competition being held in the Pavilion. Troy Haines from The Space will also hold a workshop to explain what this means to you and how you can get involved, sharing with you the reality of this emerging opportunity and ways you can be a part of it. Join him after the Future Farms Forum in the Pavilion from 3:00 pm”

The service is a part of production horticulture’s first Best Management Practice program, Hort360, which is designed to give growers a 360 degree view of their farm business operations.

Growers who wish to attend should drop into the Future Farms Forum Marquee on Country Lane at the Malanda Small Farms Field Day from 10.00 am Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> Nov. There will be an opportunity at the end of the program to talk to the presenters.

Growcom and StartUp Tablelands gratefully thanks sponsors, HiveXchange and AustSafe Super in bringing about the Future Farms Forum at the home of the Future Agro Challenge Australia at Malanda Small Farms Field Day.

**For further comment on the Future Agro Challenge Australia, the competition and its corresponding innovative forums and events over the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> November: Leanne Kruss 0431 743633.**

**For further comment on the forum: Steve Tiley on 07 4722 5741 or 0417 743 614. Issued by Chris Walker, Communications Manager on 07 3620 3864 or 0408 014 843 (ref: Innovation Coach – Future Farms Forum).**

Hosted by ‘Startup Tablelands’  
<https://www.startuptablelands.org>  
<https://fac.startuptablelands.org>

**Media contact:** Leanne Kruss Future Agro Challenge Chair  
**Ph:** 0431 743 633  
**Email:** [rwdo.mdfvga.fnq@gmail.com](mailto:rwdo.mdfvga.fnq@gmail.com)



StartUp &  
Innovation  
Tablelands



**growcom**  
together we grow