

## **Fresh Connections 2011 Wrap Up Report:**

Submitted by Margo Brain as part of the Career Pathways Scholarship

The 2011 Fresh Connections Conference saw representatives from all over the world come to Brisbane to learn from both experts and each other about the trends, challenges and solutions within the fresh produce industry.

The underlying theme of the conference was how increase consumption of fresh produce. After attending the conference, held at the Brisbane Exhibition Centre over June 8, 9 and 10, around 700 delegates left with their brains packed full of ideas on how to do just that.

From the tours of the Brisbane Market to the gatherings of the Young Professionals within the industry, the social events at the conference provided an opportunity to meet with old and new faces. Each day the delegates came together to hear keynote speakers who presented of a broad range of topics. This span of topics are no doubt a reflection on the breathe of activity within the fresh produce industry.

Topics for discussion included:

- The importance of independent retailers
- Market and consumer trends
- How to incorporate more fruits and vegetables into our diets
- How can retailers increase customers consumption of fresh produce
- Opportunities in food service
- Utilising 100% of the crop
- Opening doors to doing business in Asia
- Using fresh produce as a consumer billboard
- Increasing consumption of fruit and vegetables through cooking
- Future fruit and vegetable crops
- Promoting fresh produce through social media
- Attracting and retaining talent
- Dealing with risk and responding to disasters
- How critical is fresh produce to the retailer?
- Re imagining the consumer: position your business to meet the challenge

Finally, the trade show that concluded the formal proceedings for each day, and demonstrated the range of innovation and services that operates within the industry. New packaging ideas, new variety of fruits and new marketing initiatives were just a few of the things on display.

Overall the Fresh Connections Conference 2011 was a roaring success. The documents following from this report provide extra detail about key learning objectives that arose from the event.

## **Section 1: News Article**

### *Juicy Film sets ground for Fruit and Vegetable Week*

A new campaign to promote healthy eating within Australia has been announced at the recent 2011 Fresh Connections Conference.

Fruit and Vegetable Week was launched at the conference held in Brisbane. The week, which will run from November 14- 20 2011 was launched by Film Maker and Entrepreneur Joe Cross in conjunction with Produce Marketing Association Australia New Zealand (PMA ANZ). Overall, the week is designed to increase the general consumption of fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds and other plant matter.

Joe Cross, through his new movie, *Fat Sick and Nearly Dead* provides a working example of the impact a diet high in fruit and vegetable can have on the overall health and well being of an individual. It showed the transformation, both physically and mentally of him as he underwent a juice fast. At the beginning of his fast, at 40 years old, he was overweight, suffering from an autoimmune disease and in his own words, "I was a walking time bomb... I didn't want to end up dead". He only ate vegetables if they were on a hamburger or a pizza. Sixty days later, a trip across the United States and a purely liquid diet, things had changed. He had lost around 40 kilos, had significantly reduced his medication and had essentially rebooted his life through the power of fresh produce and micronutrients.

PMA- ANZ CEO Michael Worthington said at the conference, "we need to use some of the things Joe is saying (in his movie) to see whether we can spring board something beyond this,

which is where the idea of Fruit and Vegetable Week has come from. Fruit and Vegetable week will be one week of the year where the whole community is focusing upon the consumption of fruit and vegetable. They will be provided with information or tools that will help them to go”.

The week will tie together initiatives from different stakeholders including campaigns run by government departments.

“Stakeholders agree that there could be something happening to help the whole population. This is not about telling people to do anything, this is about inspiring and empowering,” Mr Worthington said.

“We believe it is something that will make the general population sit up. With the huge obesity problems we have in this country, now is the time to act.”

## **Section 2: Press Release**

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For Immediate Release:

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### **Fast and Unforgiving Online Media is Risk for Fresh Produce Industry**

The 2011 Fresh Connections Conference has highlighted the increased need for stringent risk management strategies around managing media risks in times of crisis, such as food safety scares and natural disasters. “The horticultural industry is an unpredictable one and has a history of ‘doing’ media badly,” it was said at the conference.

With the increase in online news and social media, these media and thus reputational risks have become higher. Although online news and social media are vital for an organisation within the fresh produce industry, they are fast and unforgiving as illustrated by the food safety scare in Europe.

“Australia hasn’t seen a food safety scare like that of the scale in Spain and Germany and the e-coli break out that has crippled both the cucumber and sprouts industries within these countries,” it was said at the conference.

“For that we are lucky but unfortunately does not make us immune. With around 60% of organisations using tools like Facebook to market their products, this (online news and social media) is an area that the fresh produce industry needs to understand. If it isn’t, then the industry puts itself at in a vulnerable position, and that is in itself, an exposure.”

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### **Section 3: News Article**

#### **Fresh Produce scholarship paves the way for New Graduates**

It has been assumed for many years that employment within the fresh produce industry requires an agricultural or horticultural background or degree, and this has at times made it difficult to attract talent from outside this specific arena.

To overcome this issue, PMA- Australia-New Zealand has formed the Foundation for Industry Talent (FIT) taskforce, with the aim of encouraging current students and recent graduates to consider a career within the fresh produce industry. The FIT taskforce has developed the Career Pathways Program, a scholarship program for 10 students and recent graduates from around Australia and New Zealand, to attend the 2011 Fresh Connections conference in Brisbane.

These students (chosen from universities in four states and New Zealand) came from a wide range of study areas including horticulture, agribusiness, economics, communications, environmental sciences and business management. On arrival at the conference, they were linked with an industry mentor who worked in their area of interest and attended the various conference presentations, events and the trade show with them, in order to enhance their knowledge about the industry and maximise their networking opportunities.

The program is modelled upon a similar scholarship program that PMA runs out of the United States, with a large number of US and overseas students having the opportunity to attend the annual Fresh Summit, one of the largest fresh produce expos in the world. By extending the program into Australia, it enables the professional networks for students within the fresh produce industry to grow beyond the Australasian region and give them a true global perspective of the opportunities that are available.

Coordinator of the Career Pathways program and student mentor, Emma Townsend said:

“The Career Pathways Scholarship is the ideal way in which we can connect graduates and students with potential employees and expose them to the many facets of the industry which encompasses business, supply chain, marketing, agriculture – even engineering.

Demonstrating the diversity and range in occupations and sectors that the fresh produce

industry has to offer opens the doors to more students, graduates and young professionals, and enables us to attract and retain the best talent available.”

Agribusiness student with the University of Queensland, scholarship recipient and spokesperson for the Career Pathways Program, Claire Wookey agrees.

“The Career Pathways Program is really important. I don’t know of any other industries that are so supportive of new professionals and are so engaged with our generation. The program is particularly good, as I know I’d rather apply for jobs with companies that really want to hire young people. It’s a vote of confidence which affects how young professionals will view the industry they are operating in” she said.

Mentors were a major aspect of the scholarship program and played a large part in introducing students into the different aspects the industry. Claire explained,

“I have been lucky enough to have two fantastic mentors. Both are fantastic inspiring women in the industry who introduced me to so many people in the areas of produce that I was interested in, I would not have got this far without them,” she said.

The learning went both ways for the mentors,

“Getting to understand the wants and needs of young graduates and professionals interested in the industry was invaluable for improving and building on the Career Pathways Programs of the future,” Emma said.

This year is the first year of the Career Pathways Program but it’s longevity looks certain. According to Claire, the scholarship is on the right path,

“The biggest challenge now is expanding it beyond Fresh Connections. I encourage everyone to get involved in any way they can. I can’t wait to see some of this years scholarship recipients in a few years, just to prove how valuable this program is to our industry.”