

# GROWING THE REGIONAL HORTICULTURE WORKFORCE

**Full course name:** Certificate III in Horticulture

**Project lead:** Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE

**Supporters:** Fruit Growers Victoria Ltd., Benalla Rural City Council

**Delivery location:** Shepparton and Wangaratta

## A BLOSSOMING SECTOR – THE CONTEXT

Horticulture exports from Victoria were valued at \$1.2 billion in 2017-18, an increase of \$47 million from the previous year. The Goulburn Valley and north-east region of the state is a heartland of the sector, home to growing operations of all sizes.

While it is expanding, the industry must contend with two main problems if it is to continue its strong performance: a large section of its workforce is nearing retirement age, and rapid advances in technology have created a demand for workers to learn new skills.

## A MODERNISED APPROACH – THE SOLUTION

Goulburn Ovens TAFE has designed a Certificate III in Horticulture course to meet the sector's needs. It decided to target new workers for the industry, whether they be under-employed youth or more mature people looking for a change.

The course runs over 18 months to ensure full seasonal exposure for participants.

Online resources are available but the focus is on applied learning through project-based activity. GOTAFE's industry partners identified teamwork as a key requirement, so participants work on the projects together.



## STATE-OF-THE-ART TECHNOLOGY – THE EQUIPMENT

For students to be job-ready when they complete the course, it was vital that they work on machines similar to those in use in the industry. GOTAFE successfully applied for grant funding of more than \$122,000 from the Regional and Specialist Training Fund to buy the required equipment.

This included \$43,000 for a Kanga Digger that students use for on-campus landscape projects. Another example of equipment the funding provided is a potting bench hopper that dramatically improves output rates.

GOTAFE chief executive Travis Heeney says the grant money was pivotal to preparing participants to enter the workforce.

*"Equipment such as the Kanga Digger allows our students to use the latest equipment to apply the skills that industry requires in real-life working projects,"* he says.

The project also benefits from a higher subsidy from the Regional and Specialist Training Fund to ensure the course is well resourced and sustainable.



## MEETING TARGETS – THE FIRST COHORTS

- In 2018, GOTAFE ran a marketing campaign and collaborated with its industry partners and job and support agencies to source participants. Targeted social media activity promoted the hands-on training and broad exposure to a variety of areas within the horticulture sector.
- These activities were a success, with 19 students enrolled across the first two groups, in Shepparton and Wangaratta. These groups were due to complete the course in November 2019.
- To complement the practical focus of the course, participants also learned about the business of horticulture, to prepare them to enter the workforce.
- Practical projects included a collaboration with the group Friends of Botanic Gardens Shepparton. Participants worked to design a “show-stopping” part of the Gardens through the creative use of native plants. This project gained local media attention, building the course’s profile.

## GOOD CONDITIONS FOR GROWTH – WHAT’S NEXT

GOTAFE has planned a series of student, trainer and industry profile stories to promote the success of the course. These will highlight employment outcomes for the cohort.

As well as having good employment prospects, students can choose to move on to further study in the Certificate IV in Horticulture or the Certificate IV in Parks and Gardens.

The Regional and Specialist Training Fund is a targeted *Skills First* funding stream that supports training for specific skills in regional and specialist areas that are not being met by the current training market. Training providers who hold a current *Skills First* VET funding contract are eligible to apply for higher subsidies and one-off grant payments for selected courses in specific regions to meet local industry demand or specialised occupations. Funding will be considered where there is a strong connection between industry, training and job outcomes.

To find out more visit: [www.education.vic.gov.au/training/providers/funding/Pages/rst.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/training/providers/funding/Pages/rst.aspx) or email the RSTF team at: [rstf@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:rstf@edumail.vic.gov.au)