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This report documents the observations of two final year undergraduate students from the University of Queensland who attended Fresh Summit 2009, that was held in Anaheim California, and who participated in the PMAEF Career Pathway Program.

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# Produce Marketing Association Foundation for Industry Talent and Fresh Summit International Convention & Exposition: a student's perspective.

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## **Media Summary**

Two final year students from the University of Queensland's Gatton Campus recently attended the Produce Marketing Association's Fresh Summit and Exposition held in Anaheim, California.

The two students, Khamla Mott and Emily Dawson participated in the PMA's Foundation for Industry Talent Program which is designed to expose students to the fresh produce industry and in particular the exciting careers which are available in horticulture. The Program involved student from six major US universities in addition to students from South Africa and Chile.

Over the four days of the Program, the students were involved in professional development activities that included discussions with young fresh produce industry professional concerning career opportunities, participation in industry seminars and walking the Fresh Summit Exhibition floor under the guidance of an individual industry mentor.

*"the exposure to so many facets of the fresh produce industry has cemented in my mind that this is the industry that I am truly passionate about",* said Ms Mott.

The experience and the insights gained from their involvement in the PMAFIT Program has also enabled the students to offer advice to PMA Australia/New Zealand on how to establish a similar program in Australasia in conjunction with its annual Fresh Connections conference.

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## **Introduction**

The Pack Family/PMA Career Pathways Program began in October 2004. Initially it provided scholarships for students and Faculty from six universities throughout the United States to attend the PMA Fresh Summit and participate in a program designed to attract young talent to careers in the fresh produce industry. Today the program has grown to include forty-five students, not only from the United States but also Australia, South Africa and Chile.

In 2007, the University of Queensland was included in the PMAFIT program, the first university in Australia to do so. Each year the University of Queensland in conjunction with the Pack Family, PMAFIT, OneHarvest, Perfection Fresh and Horticulture Australia Limited offer two scholarships for final year students undertaking study in horticulture or agribusiness. Students are selected based on their area of study, academic performance and ability to represent the university. This year, Emily Dawson (Bachelor of Agribusiness/Applied Science (Horticulture)) and Khamla Mott (Bachelor of Applied Science, Horticulture) were selected to participate in the Program.

This report was commissioned by OneHarvest, Perfection Fresh and Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) as part of their sponsorship. The report addresses three tasks identified by the sponsors prior to departure to PMA Fresh Summit:

1. Task 1 – Discuss the PMAFIT/Fresh Summit in terms of professional development;
2. Task 2 – Identify and discuss observations on Fresh Summit as a showcase for innovation and relevance to the Australian fresh produce industry;
3. Task 3 – Identify and discuss observations on the PMAFIT program as a model for attracting young talent to careers in the Australian fresh produce industry.

We would like to acknowledge the following people and companies whose support made this program possible: OneHarvest, Perfection Fresh, Horticulture Australia Limited, the Pack Family, PMAFIT, Associate Professor Tony Dunne, and our industry mentors Mr. Kevin Wilcox and Ms Felicity Robson.

## **TASK 1**

### **Professional Development**

#### **Emily Dawson**

To be involved in the PMAFIT Program via the PMA/Pack Family Scholarship with the assistance of members of the Australian horticultural industry was a fantastic opportunity for myself, a 4<sup>th</sup> year Agribusiness/Horticulture student who is about to commence my career in the industry. Prior to attending PMA Fresh Summit I was fortunate enough to have acquired employment, therefore my outlook on the PMAFIT program and the PMA Fresh Summit may have been different to my peers, especially those from US Universities, who saw their participation as a means to evaluate employment opportunities in the fresh produce industry.

My involvement in the PMAFIT program provided me with important networking opportunities by integrating the students with the general PMA Fresh Summit participants for receptions and the sessions held specifically for PMAFIT members. The opportunity to meet with members of the global horticultural industry increased my knowledge of the industry as a whole and provided professional contacts that can be accessed later in my career.

Walking the Exposition Floor with my mentor, Managing Director of A S Wilcox & Sons Ltd, Mr. Kevin Wilcox, was an unforgettable experience that allowed me to observe current innovations and trends in the fresh produce industry. The benefit of walking the floor with Mr. Wilcox was that I also gained knowledge about the New Zealand horticultural industry, particularly root vegetables including onions and potatoes, and new grading technologies. I also was provided the chance to view the exhibits through the eyes of an established industry participant, rather than as a novice.

My time at PMA Fresh Summit 2009 provided me with a greater understanding of the fresh produce industry as a whole as well as an appreciation of Australia's place in the industry internationally. The PMAFIT program also reaffirmed that the fresh produce industry was the correct choice for my future career.

#### **Khamla Mott**

Attending the Fresh Summit Convention in Anaheim and participating in the PMAFIT Program allowed me to develop both personally and professionally. It has allowed me to increase my networking skills by improving my contacts, knowledge and access to others, particularly my peers in the industry. In addition, I was given an opportunity to

gain an understanding of international networking and glimpse an insight into the role and relevance of this from an Australian and New Zealand perspective.

My attendance at Fresh Summit provided many opportunities for informal and intensive learning, all of which I found rewarding. The mentoring program also increased my professional development through observation and reflection. Witnessing the interaction between my mentor, One Harvest's Felicity Robson, and other Fresh Summit attendees, from fellow students to exhibitors, to CEO's, was an invaluable learning experience.

My perceptions and knowledge of the fresh produce industry as a whole were improved as a result of attending PMA Fresh Summit. By observing the various sectors within the industry I was able to appreciate some of the challenges that the industry is facing, both internally and externally. These observations have enhanced my system thinking and problem solving skills.

The exposure to so many facets of the fresh produce industry has cemented in my mind that this is the industry I am truly passionate about. The enhanced leadership skills attained by participating in the PMAFIT Program and attending the Fresh Summit Convention will serve me well in my future career as a horticulturalist.

## **TASK 2**

### **Observations of Key Trends**

Prior to attending the Exposition, we discussed with our Industry Mentors and our Faculty Advisor Associate Professor Tony Dunne, the difference in market size and demographics between the United States, Australia and New Zealand. Based on this discussion we formed an understanding that not all products or trends showcased at the Fresh Summit would be immediately relevant to the Australian and New Zealand markets. With this in mind, we have identified the following products and services exhibited at Fresh Summit as innovative and relevant:

#### **Healthy Snacks**

A key trend observed at the PMA Fresh Summit was the extensive range of healthy snacks including, fresh fruit, processed fruit, fresh fruit drinks and mixed snacks. The United States has the highest level of obesity in the world and therefore there is a potential for healthy snacks that can replace the highly processed, high carbohydrate snacks that currently dominate the US market.

One product in particular, with the ability to increase the accessibility of fresh fruit to the population was Del Monte's Banana in a Bag. This product is designed to be sold via the Del Monte Vending machine along with other fruit products including fruit chunks in natural fruit juice. The bananas are bagged in a perforated plastic bag to lower respiration rates thus extending the shelf life of the individual banana up to 5 days longer than the normal shelf life. The vending machines and bagged bananas were officially released at PMA Fresh Summit. Vending machines are now available in certain locations in America, with the number to increase markedly over the next 12 months. A challenge for Del Monte is the perishable nature of the bananas. While the bag does extend shelf life, the vending machines will have to be serviced more frequently than standard vending machines.

Apart from attempting to tap into the healthy snack market, Del Monte is aiming to increase the current consumption of bananas by attracting new consumers rather than attempting to change the purchasing behavior of current consumers.



Figure 1: Del Monte Vending Machine

Another product currently in development by Del Monte is the Smoothie Starter. This product is a refrigerated base of fruit puree and syrup that, when combined with ice in a blender, creates a fresh fruit smoothie. The product is yet to be released however; it was the only one of its kind on show at PMA Fresh Summit. Healthy drinks, especially those containing Acai (pronounced a-ss ay-ee), a berry originating from South America, were on show at the Exposition. Multiple companies, including Sambazon, were displaying chilled drinks containing Acai, a berry with high antioxidant levels and 'healthy' omegas.

Chiquita was showcasing pineapple strips in coconut juice. A refrigerated fresh product, it aims to be available at supermarkets and other retail outlets.

Waymouth Farms showcased Snack n Veggies, vegetable crisps including honeyed carrot and mixed bags with beans, carrot and zucchini. It is assumed that these snacks will be attempting to enter the potato crisp market. While these products appeared to be a healthier alternate to potato crisps, they were covered in salt, indicating they may be of the same nutritional value as standard crisps.



Figure 2 – Snack n Veggies

Snack Right were showcasing their range of snack packs; prepackaged snack with fresh fruit, vegetable sticks, pretzels or crackers and a dip such as humus.

### Meal Starters and Sides

Another key trend observed at PMA Fresh Summit was meal starters. Multiple companies showcase ready to bake potatoes. These whole potatoes were wrapped in a foil of microwaveable plastic wrap with how to cook instructions on the label. These products were aimed at consumers with limited time or limited cooking skills who still want to include fresh produce in their diet. These products will be competing with fast food, convenience foods such as frozen meals and traditional potatoes.



Figure 3 – Example of a ready to cook potato

Meat free snacks and soups were also on show at the Fresh Summit. These products incorporated multiple serves of vegetables and were microwavable. These products also were aimed at time or skill poor consumers desiring a convenient meal with health benefits.

## Packaging

The variety of innovative packaging products available as alternatives to polystyrene was very interesting. Packaging included bio-degradable products made from corn based resins, sugar cane pulp and palm fibre.

Companies such as Earthcycle Packaging Ltd, Pacific AgPak, G4 Packaging and Cool Pak LLC displayed new 'green' products that were being launched at Fresh Summit. These products included cardboards and cling wraps that came in a variety of sizes and thicknesses.



Figure 4 – Examples of G4 packaging and Pacific Blue potato recipe idea bags

Other ways to attract interest on packaging included the addition of serving suggestions and recipes. For example the Pacific Blue potatoes had a section of the packet devoted to a 'Pacific Gold Blue Gratin' recipe, complete with website link to gain access to more 'quick and easy' recipes.

The use of trademarked cartoon characters on packaged products was also in evidence. Unfortunately we were not able to witness the reaction of any children to these particular products, however it can be assumed that there is a very real pressure by the parents to purchase these particular 'kid friendly' products.

### **Food safety and Traceability**

Food safety and traceability was a major theme at the PMA seminars and the Exposition in 2009. The United States is currently in the process of improving their food safety legislation and regulations to increase the safety of fresh produce for consumers. The importance of this topic could be evidenced in the Traceability Learning Centre, a corner of the Exposition where industry members could visit to view the latest technologies and systems pertaining to traceability and food safety. It appeared at PMA that the industry was working hard to provide customers and consumers with confidence in American fresh produce.

Redline Field was showcasing their in-field data collection devices and programs. These products increase the amount of data collected in field including spray records, pest inspections and harvest information. The use of programs like Redline Field's can assist in the event of a product recall as they can provide data specific to the products that need to be recalled such as a particular row of fruit or batch of product. Escort Data Loggers presented a new product to collect in-field data and make its use and manipulation easier. Escort Data Loggers product are data loggers that don't require proprietary software to create reports instead using free software such as Adobe PDF. This product has the potential to reduce the cost of increasing and improving the traceability of fresh produce at the grower level.

Accu-Label was displaying bar-coded and branded stickers that can have individual numbers to further assist in traceability. Like Redline Field's product, this product can also assist in the event of a product recall by ensuring that only the produce that needs to be recalled is. This will reduce cost to the producer, as they often must pay for any product recalls.

## **TASK 3**

### **PMA Foundation for Industry Talent (FIT)**

The PMA Foundation for Industry Talent was established in 2004 to introduce and attract American agricultural students to the fresh produce industry. In 2007 students from Chile, South Africa and Australia were integrated into the program. In 2009, 45 students from 4 countries participated in the PMAFIT program including 4 students from South Africa, 2 from Australia and 4 from Chile. The focus of the PMAFIT program in 2009 was to introduce students to the horticulture industry, highlight career opportunities and provide advice to students on how to develop their interview skills and techniques.

### **Post Program Feedback Session**

At the completion of the PMAFIT Program, a feedback session was mediated by Alicia Calhoun, the Program Director which allowed students the opportunity to share their insights and opinions about the Program. The following topics were covered in this session and this feedback could assist the designers of the PMA Australia New Zealand in the development of their version of PMAFIT.

#### **Place of the PMAFIT within PMA**

Some students indicated that in general PMA Fresh Summit attendees were unaware of the FIT Program and suggested that the Program and its participant be introduced at a general session. It was also suggested that exhibitors be advised that there are students looking for employment at the Fresh Summit, including the PMAFIT members.

#### **Sessions**

Students stated that informal sessions with industry members should be extended and that they preferred small group discussions with individual professionals rather than whole group discussions with a panel of professionals.

#### **Career Fair and Interviews**

Many students, predominantly those from the US, selected to interview with companies on the Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> October. Students were advised ahead of time of the companies that would be at the Career Fair on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> October and would interview the next day. Many of the students who contacted the interviewing companies to provide a resume and request an interview time indicated that they received little or no communication from some companies. The students also commented that they would have liked to have had more companies involved in the Careers Fair and interviews.

Students stated that they liked the physical design of the interview stalls on the Sunday, however they would have appreciated an interview schedule that listed who was being interviewed and at what time.

### **Industry Mentors**

Some students indicated that they would have appreciated Industry Mentors that were involved in their area of interest. Other students indicated that due to their mentors' commitments during PMA they were unable to spend extended periods of time with them. It was suggested that students have multiple mentors or be in groups with multiple mentors. The Australian students appreciated being paired with PMA members from Australia and New Zealand.

### **Communication**

Students indicated that they would have appreciated earlier information and communication with PMAFIT organizers and more extensive information regarding orientation and re-imburement. Some students also indicated that the use of walkie talkies to facilitate communication with members of the PMAFIT Program whilst on the Exposition floor would be beneficial.

### **Other**

Other topics brought up by students include the success of the LIVE FIT 5km fun run, though it was suggested that rebranding the event as a run and walk may increase participation. Students from the US indicated that if the travel costs were decreased more students, in general, could attend the PMA Fresh Summit. Students also indicated that they wanted the 'Facebook' page for students and young professionals improved. Students also stated that they would prefer polo shirts than t-shirts as they look more professional and they indicated they did not like the "I am the future" logo.

### **Observations of PMAFIT 2009**

During the program we had many thoughts and observations about ways that PMAFIT may be enhanced and adapted for Australian and New Zealand students. Due to time constraints these topics were not discussed at the feedback session with the PMAFIT group however, we still feel that these observations should be considered in the development of a PMAFIT Australia New Zealand.

### **Students**

The presence of international students should be used as an opportunity for US students to learn about the horticultural industry of another country. This may not have

to be as obvious as the international students making a presentation to the group as a whole, but may be as simple as increased time for students to integrate with those from other Universities and countries.

There may be a benefit in some activities, such as the PMA LIVE FIT 5km run, being compulsory. The nature of the program and the size of the content to be introduced over 4 days can limit the amount of time students have to interact with each other; the LIVE FIT run may be an opportunity for augmenting the time students have together.

The opportunity for students to attend conference workshops may be an opportunity for students to improve individually in their areas of interest. For example, *Fresh Perspective: Women's Leadership event*, *Produce Marketing Part 1: Marketing to the New Cost-Conscious Consumer* or *the Food Safety Innovations: What's New and What does it Really Mean?* The exposure to these seminars will allow students to gain experience in networking as well as an insight into the current issues that are impacting on the fresh produce industry.

#### **PMAFIT**

One topic discussed above was the seemingly lack of knowledge of the PMAFIT Program by many of the PMA Fresh Summit participants. We believe that further clarity could be provided to all participants if the Program was given a consistent name when reference was made to it - such as PMAFIT or Career Pathways.

## **Recommendations for PMAFIT Australia New Zealand**

To help the industry understand the concept of the PMAFIT program, it is suggested that clear guidelines, such as aims, goals, objectives and commitments be set to minimize confusion. The following recommendations are based on the observations made throughout the PMAFIT 2009 and pertain to the development and implementation of a PMA Australia New Zealand FIT program.

### **Recommendation 1: PMAFIT Australia New Zealand should include a Careers Fair**

Hosting a 'Careers Fair' is a fantastic opportunity for both industry representatives and students. It would be beneficial for both parties if a representative from the particular company presented a brief synopsis of their enterprise. An informal networking session afterwards where students could meet the company representatives would also be beneficial. The representatives could review student resumes, discuss interview techniques and make potential interview bookings. To help focus the overall structure of the students program, it is recommended that the Board decides whether student interviews will be conducted at PMAFIT or at a later date.

### **Recommendation 2: PMAFIT Australia New Zealand should include students in PMA functions**

It is recommended that students be invited to key functions as the inclusion of students in events attended by professionals will promote networking, awareness of the PMAFIT program and enhance the students' overall experience.

### **Recommendation 3: Mentors should be provided to all PMAFIT students**

As acknowledged previously in this report, mentors provided an unparalleled opportunity to view PMA through the eyes of a professional, increase general knowledge of the industry and network with peers. Industry mentor/advisor participation and interaction is an excellent way for students to learn about the industry. It is highly recommended that mentors be available for all students at PMAFIT Australia New Zealand.

### **Recommendation 4: PMAFIT students should be easily identifiable**

For the duration of the PMA conference, simple identification of PMAFIT students would be beneficial for other PMAFIT students, mentors, faculty members and general attendees. Having sponsored polo shirts is one such way to identify them. The shirts could also acknowledge the industry support for the program.

### **Recommendation 5: Applicants for the PMAFIT program should encompass all facets of Horticulture**

The selection of students for scholarships should be expanded to any institution that teaches Production Horticulture, Agronomy and/or Agribusiness. Initial numbers of students selected should be small, possibly no more than 20 domestic students. Amongst other selection criteria, these students should possess a genuine interest in horticulture. Prior to the conference, it is suggested that students indicate their areas of interest during the application process. This will also allow the informal group sessions run a little smoother and the organizers to select the appropriate number of guest speakers.

### **Conclusion**

Being awarded a Pack Family/PMA Career Pathways Scholarship was a fantastic opportunity to develop individually and professionally for University of Queensland students, Emily Dawson and Khamla Mott. Although the students had slightly different viewpoints prior to attending the Summit, both students increased their overall knowledge of the fresh produce industry and re-enforced their passion for careers in the horticulture industry.

The innovations unveiled and observed at the Fresh Summit were interesting, exciting and impressive. The innovations relevant to Australia and New Zealand's fresh produce industry are fascinating. The potential of releasing such products in Australia and New Zealand is a realistic aspiration for companies such as OneHarvest and Perfection Fresh.

Attracting young talent to careers in the Australian and New Zealand fresh produce industry is not an easy task. By modeling the Australia and New Zealand PMAFIT Program on the United States PMAFIT, it will allow students to be introduced to the fresh produce industry and the careers it offers. Developing and retaining young talent in the industry will need to be continually updated to ensure employment rates match growth within the industry.

## Appendix 1

### Pack Family/PMA Career Pathways Agenda October 1-5, 2009 Anaheim, CA USA

#### Thursday, October 1

4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Orientation and Reception

OCCC, Room 308 B

6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Dinner and Networking

TBA

#### Friday, October 2

7:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

5 K Walk and Run

OCCC, Room 310

9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Women's Fresh Perspective

OCCC, Room 312

11:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m.

Industry Overview

OCCC, Room 309 B

1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Lunch General Session and Goal Setting

OCCC, Valencia Ballroom

2:45 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.

Career Path Panel Discussion

OCCC, See reverse side for rooms

6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Welcoming Reception

Peabody Hotel, Plaza International Ballroom

#### Saturday, October 3

7:30 a.m. – 9:20 a.m.

Breakfast General Session

OCCC, Location Valencia Ballroom

9:35 a.m. – 10:50 a.m.

Brand Called You Seminar

OCCC, 308 A

11:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Exposition

OCCC, Halls A1 – A4 and B1 – B3

3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Chairman's Reception

OCCC, 208 C

5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

40 Under 40 Reception

OCCC, Room 203

#### Sunday, October 4

7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

PMA FIT Career Fair

OCCC, Rooms 305, 306, & 307 A

7:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Breakfast General Session

OCCC, Valencia Ballroom

9:15 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

Workshop Series III

OCCC, See reverse side for rooms

11:00 a.m. – 3:45 p.m.

Exposition

OCCC, Halls A1 – A4 and B1 – B3

4:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Recap Meeting

OCCC, Room 310

5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

International Partners Reception

Rosen Centre Hotel, Poolside

#### Monday, October 5

8:00 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.

Breakfast General Session

OCCC, Valencia Ballroom

10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Exposition

OCCC, Halls A1 – A4 and B1 – B3