

More yield, fewer inputs a focus for local growers



- **Supporting Australian growers through specific seed development**
- **Climate change, sustainability, labour on global radar**
- **Energy a priority for local growers.**

Greenhouse vegetable growers are looking for ways to produce more from less and global seed developer Bayer Crop Science is using science and tech to meet the challenge.

Anne Williams, global head of Bayer's protected cropping business, was recently in Australia to gain an understanding of the local value chain, fresh produce markets, and "what growers are looking to grow". She says as a business, Bayer is putting local listening at the heart of its global vegetable seeds strategy.

"The world is at something of a tipping point in terms of climate – Australia in particular has been at the mercy of a lot of weather this year – and everyone is really looking hard

at life, jobs, incomes, sustainable production and food security," Ms Williams said.

"From Bayer's point of view, we're thinking about how we continue to support growers to consistently produce great quality, fresh produce in the face of these challenges.

"Everyone has issues with climate change, sustainability and labour. Regions are approaching these challenges differently but if we apply

lessons from across the world, there are some really innovative solutions out there."

She said with their understanding of the challenges and experience around the world Bayer Crop Science is able to support sustainable agriculture at the local level – helping growers produce more yield from fewer inputs.

"A universal challenge, and one I've been hearing a lot while in Australia, is energy. With prices on a long-term upward trajectory, we're working on breeding and selecting tomato varieties that perform better under lower light intensity and in colder conditions – essentially, they need less electricity."

Ms Williams said input from local teams about what's going on in their own markets, directs the Bayer Crop Science seed development pipeline. And while there are some common themes, regions have different points of focus at any one time.

"Take for example packaging. While it's on everyone's radar, it is a significant concern in the United Kingdom and Netherlands. To combat the issue, we're working with our local teams on supplying cherry tomatoes on the vine.

"We've found that with the truss in they have better transportability, and there is no wound, so the shelf life is improved. They're also better to manage at home, you find less are wasted, and they taste and look good."

By comparison, Ms Williams said the production of 'pesticide-free' vegetables is what is on everyone's mind in France.

"There has been a lot of public discussion around this issue and as a business we're working hard to provide growers with options that mean consumers have a choice. It is important that growers have the ability to access any market sector.

"We breed to the highest market standard within a pipeline, then when we go to the trialling phase, we include high density pest and disease environments managed across a range of agronomic systems; including those using chemicals and biological products as well as certified organic growers."

In America, there is a particular focus on 'mini' varieties.

"Mini-vegetables are seen as being a lot more fun. Globally – but especially in the US – we're seeing a lot more snacking ranges across cucumbers, tomatoes and of course berries, and it is trend that looks like continuing. Beyond breeding the mini-varieties, quality and shelf-life is a big challenge in the snacking category. Bayer has been working with industry on solutions for some time," Ms Williams said.

Above. Anne Williams Head of Protected, Bayer Vegetable Seeds at Bayer Crop Science.

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