

# THE COLLATION AND COLLECTION OF HEIRLOOM FRUIT AND VEGETABLE CULTIVARS



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# Executive Summary

The aim of this Fellowship was to obtain first hand practical experience of heritage fruit and vegetables, and their relevance in Australian horticultural production systems. The knowledge and skills obtained overseas can be shared with others who have an interest in the practical application of these processes and the subsequent lessons to be entrenched into future horticultural programs and research and development. There are lessons indicative of the new challenges for 21st century food production, climate change, and frameworks for sustainable options entrenched in this Fellowship.

The majority of cultivar related research and traditional production techniques have their foundation in the 'Victorian Era' (1838–1901) with a United Kingdom focus and the colonies of the British Empire located in temperate zones from that period. It specifically related to the temperate regions of Victoria.

Heritage vegetables also contain positive characteristics that are historically evident in heritage fruit and vegetable cultivars including resilience and resistances that may assist in the production of future food sources. This required resilience may be against drought, water-logging, pests and disease resistance – all of which are important in dramatic events predicted in climate change models.

Key areas of investigation included:

- determining the various stocks of heritage cultivars still in existence, still available and useful to the Australian production horticultural sector
- determining what sort of monitoring and classification for identification of heritage species is best practice in the British Isles
- Identifying the gaps in nomenclature and classification for heritage varieties in Australian horticultural production
- determining the best delivery of training and information for heritage varieties to be delivered to the market sectors and educational institutions.

Heritage cultivars and organic production methods are experiencing significant interest from the marketplace, and training (both initial training and further training) is essential to meet the increasing demand for grown fruit and vegetables. Education is the key to ensuring the survival of this valuable resource. Knowledge transfer is essential to establishing a collection of material available for both consumers, as well as professionals. Effective distribution of knowledge will assist cultivators to achieve the aim of not only preserving the horticultural heritage of Victoria, but also working towards an economically and environmentally sound society.

The demise in heritage fruit and vegetable stock has been underpinned by market forces and a lack of public awareness as to the importance of diversity in food security and supply. Furthermore, a trend in food-based horticulture involving the movement from cultivars deemed 'public inheritance' to those privately owned 'plant breeders' has impacted upon Australian production systems. In response to these factors, the collation and presentation of an 19th century horticultural archive of food-based plant material and production techniques must address opportunities for reducing society's footprint upon the planet and educate and reconnect the populace with its food production techniques.

The following report provides an overview of the Fellowship experience and detailed accounts of processes and practices. In addition, the report concludes with a series of recommendations for government, industry, the business sector, professional associations, education and training providers and the wider community.