

PAPAYA PRESS

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Revolutionising Papaya Farming with PCR: Three Creek Estate’s Story

Located at the base of Queensland’s highest mountain, Bartle Frere, Three Creek Estate is a mixed papaya, sugarcane, and nursery operation.

Having faced over 7000mm of rain in the past twelve months, farming papaya here has its challenges.

Last year, Kate and Gene Kubala took over the farm from Gene’s parents,

aiming to balance tradition with innovation. They currently farm 10 hectares of RB1 papaya.

“We don’t want a big papaya farm, we just want to produce high quality fruit as efficiently as possible.” Says Kate.

This year, Kate & Gene took a bold step by establishing an on-farm PCR lab – a decision that has already transformed their operation.

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The Decision to Use PCR

The concept of PCR for papaya sexing arose during a conversation with Emily Pattison, an extension officer with the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) funded through PP20000 (Papaya extensions and communications project).

“Emily explained how PCR could identify hermaphrodite papaya seedlings,” said Kate.

“

I saw it as a game-changer. Instead of planting quads, we could plant single hermaphrodites, maximizing efficiency and profitability.

”



Kate has established an on-farm papaya sexing PCR lab and is pleased with the results.



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Hort Innovation is the grower-owned, not-for-profit research and development corporation for Australian horticulture.

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Hort Innovation **PAPAYA FUND**

See your levy at work!

Get an update on all new, current and recently completed levy funded activity on the Hort Innovation Papaya Fund page at www.horticulture.com.au/papaya.

You can access easy-to-read project updates, a snapshot of the Papaya Fund, research reports and resources, key industry contacts and more. Don't miss the Hort Innovation 'Growers' section to keep informed on your levy investments, upcoming events, scholarship opportunities and other handy info!

Stay in the loop with your levy by becoming a member of Hort Innovation, the grower-owned, not-for-profit research and development corporation for Australian horticulture. Paying a levy doesn't automatically make you a member but signing up is free at www.horticulture.com.au/membership.

From the Chair

GERARD KATH

Welcome to another edition of Papaya Press.

This edition may seem similar to previous editions, however, it is now being produced locally by a team in Far North Queensland.



Sherri Soncin, Secretary of Papaya Australia, will be coordinating the productions, along with assistance from Journalist Andrea Flanagan, Emily Pattison and others. The theme will be similar, however if anyone would like to have input for content or ideas that could be incorporated, please touch base with Sherri or myself. We would love to keep the editions interesting and fresh.

The last 12 months have been somewhat of a mixed outcome for various growers. Some growers were hit hard by Tropical Cyclone Jasper and the significant wet that followed. This has resulted in crop and tree losses, which can take up to 12 months to recover from. Other growers have still had good production and have benefited from reasonable prices. I noted at a recent SIAP meeting that there seems to be a polarising difference as to how the year has panned out for individual growers.

We are again at the cusp of the next wet season. Most of us are wanting rain, however, be careful what you wish for. This time last year was the same, and I recall only having received 15mm when

Tropical Jasper had crossed the coast, then receiving 900mm in the next four days, and a total of about three meters in the next three months. I hope that the upcoming wet season treats all growers kindly.

At a recent SIAP meeting we made a conscious effort to get new participants to the table. This was very successful, with about five new grower guests joining the meeting. The guest growers were all from a younger generation, who will likely take the industry through to the future. We were pleased with their input and ideas and hope that it will lead to greater outcomes in the future.

I know that most industries are getting bigger with a push from corporate investment and therefore the input to all of industry direction is less important to the big corporates. I'm confident that our industry will mainly be driven by family-owned businesses who have their own investment in the industry and therefore, are more hands-on in their outcome. I would suggest that there will be a transition to new industry leadership and input in the coming years ahead. I would like encourage anyone who has an interest in contributing in the SIAP meeting to fill out the expression of interest that Sherri sent out via email on 18th November.

As we are just around the corner from the end of another year, I would like to wish all in our industry a Merry Christmas and a safe and prosperous New Year.
Best Regards,

Gerard Kath
Papaya Australia Chairman

BUILDING A SKILLED WORKFORCE WITH QAWN + SMARTAG SUBSIDISED TRAINING

The Queensland Agricultural Workforce Network (QAWN) is a vital free service supporting agribusinesses in Far North Queensland to attract, train, and retain a sustainable workforce across all commodities.

Kelly Hodgkinson, FNQ's dedicated QAWN Officer, operates through FNQ Growers to connect growers with tailored workforce solutions and resources.

FNQ Growers QAWN Officer has partnered with the Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) to support the delivery of SmartAg Queensland.

SmartAg is an industry-led initiative providing QLD growers with access to subsidised training courses focused on

critical safety and compliance areas, such as Forklift Tickets, Truck Licensing, Chemical Accreditation, and First Aid.

These training opportunities are designed to equip your workforce with the skills they need to operate efficiently and safely, ensuring the continued growth and resilience of the QLD agricultural sector.

To learn more and express your interest to access training, scan the QR Code or contact Kelly Hodgkinson at 0404 900 364 or via email at wfdo@fnqgrowers.com.au. SmartAg Queensland is supported by the Queensland Government.



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Revolutionising Papaya Farming with PCR: Three Creek Estate's Story

The Decision to Use PCR

Being new to farming, Kate approached the opportunity with fresh eyes. "For us, it was a straightforward decision. The potential benefits in terms of planting success and operational cost savings were undeniable. The conditions here are difficult to farm papaya. We were sick of losing 20-60% of our plantings to weather and Phytophthora".

An initial trial plot of 25 hermaphrodite seedlings supplied by DPI confirmed PCR's promise. Despite many setbacks, including hormone spray damage and a late season rain event, the plants thrived. "These singles had everything thrown at them and they grew so well. I knew this technology was the way forward for us".



The first hermaphrodite single planting (left) compared to traditional quad style (right), both planted in May 2024

Advantages of Single Hermaphrodite Planting

Switching to hermaphrodite-only plantings offers several tangible benefits:

- **Stronger, straighter trunks:** Increased plant resilience to rain & wind stress
- **Picking efficiency:** Low set fruit allows the first few months of harvest from the ground
- **Healthier plants:** Greater plant resilience to stress factors and diseases, particularly Phytophthora.

- **Strong root structure:** Enhanced plant stability and longevity of the crop.

"For a small-scale operation like ours, prioritising healthier plants and higher yields with reduced labour costs is critical," says Kate.

Beyond its core advantages, the PCR process has delivered unexpected benefits. "Seedlings can stay in pots longer, giving us flexibility with planting times," Kate notes.

Additionally, Kate has found that seedlings develop stronger stems while in the nursery, better equipping

them for field conditions.

Understanding PCR in Papaya Farming

PCR (Polymerase chain reaction) is a scientific technique that makes copies of a specific part of DNA. For papaya sexing, the PCR process can detect & replicate the male part of an individual seedling's DNA. Replication of the male part is shown by a glowing band – like a covid test – and indicates the corresponding seedling is a hermaphrodite.



Small cuttings are taken from each seedling and processed in a set procedure to prepare for the PCR test

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Establishing the On-Farm Lab

Setting up the lab required careful planning. Over three months, Kate coordinated with equipment suppliers, scientists, and industry experts to develop a well-equipped lab capable of achieving the test protocol. The lab is housed in a dust-proof, air-conditioned demountable building under the existing machinery shed. The cost of lab equipment required to complete on farm PCR testing is approximately \$20,000.

“Designing a setup tailored to our farm’s size and goals was crucial,” Kate explains. “It takes us six hours to process a 96-plant plate, balancing efficiency with our operational needs.”

Lab work is now a shared responsibility among staff, equating to one full-time position. Kate emphasizes the value of this investment. “The wages spent on lab work are far better than the costs of culling, staking and maintenance in traditional quad-planted blocks. We are confident in recouping most of the lab setup costs within the first crop”, Kate said.

Industry Implications

The PCR technique was developed by Griffith University’s Dr. Chat Kanchana-udomkan for breeding trials and later adapted for commercial farming with support from Dimbulah grower Chris Maisel and Emily Pattison.

Kate believes the technology has significant potential for the broader papaya industry. “This is going to make farms like ours more sustainable. I would absolutely recommend it to others,” she says. However, she acknowledges that scaling PCR for larger operations remains a challenge.



Lab building and seedling benches are set up under the existing farm shed

KATE’S TIPS FOR SETTING UP A PCR LAB

- **Expect trial and error:** Troubleshooting is part of the process.
- **Learn from experts:** Tap into the knowledge of scientists and industry leaders.
- **Give yourself time:** A gentle three-month setup period is realistic.
- **Dedicate resources:** A new staff position dedicated to the lab will ensure smooth operations.
- **Factor in costs:** While initial expenses may seem high, the return on investment is worth it.



Quality is key for Three Creeks Estate



A Sustainable Future

“This technology has completely changed how we approach papaya farming,” Kate says. “We’re not just improving profitability – we’re making our farm more resilient and sustainable.”

Growers interested in adopting this technology can contact Emily Pattison for advice. This work is supported by project PP23003 Supporting Innovation in the Australian Papaya Industry, using papaya industry levies and Australian government funds.

**Story by Ebony Faichney,
Farmour**

INDUSTRY NEWS

PAPAYA MEALYBUG DETECTED IN TOWNSVILLE

The invasive papaya mealybug (*Paracoccus marginatus*) has been confirmed in Townsville, posing a significant biosecurity concern and bringing the threat closer to Queensland’s primary papaya-growing regions.

Previously this pest has only been recorded in the Northern Territory and Brisbane metropolitan areas.

Papaya mealybug is a sap-sucking insect that weakens plants by feeding on their sap, causing leaf yellowing, premature fruit drop, and stunted growth. It also excretes a sticky substance known as honeydew, encouraging the growth of sooty mould, which further reduces plant health and fruit marketability. Severe infestations can lead to significant crop losses.

The mealybug was detected on municipal frangipani trees in Townsville’s North Ward area. Queensland’s Department of Primary (DPI) have confirmed the pest through a molecular test.

“We are urging growers to closely monitor for the pest in major papaya-growing regions,” said Emily Pattison, Papaya Extension Officer with the DPI. “The pest is deemed ineradicable, meaning no trade restrictions will apply if detected on properties. However, early detection is critical to managing its spread into commercial growing areas.”

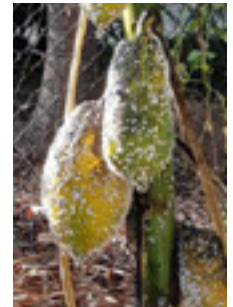
Frangipani trees appear to be a strong host for the pest, with most detections reported on this plant. “I’ve been inspecting frangipani trees weekly near Mareeba’s visitor centre to monitor for any signs of infestation,” Emily added.



Thick white wax secreted by papaya mealybug on papaya plant.



Papaya mealybug infestation on frangipani leaf underside.



Papaya mealybug on a backyard papaya plant.

(Source: Northern Territory Government)

Papaya mealybugs are small (2–3mm), oval-shaped insects with a pale yellow body covered in a white, waxy coating. Infestations are often accompanied by clusters of fluffy white masses on leaves, stems, and fruit. If you suspect the presence of papaya mealybug, you can report it by contacting Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or via the DPI website.

The detection of papaya mealybug underscores the importance of maintaining strong biosecurity practices. Growers are advised to regularly inspect their crops, clean equipment, and avoid moving plant material between properties.

For more information on identifying and managing papaya mealybug, visit the DPI website or contact Emily Pattison at 0491379771 or Emily.pattison@daf.qld.gov.au



QR code to take you to: [Papaya mealybug alert - QLD DPI](#)

The ‘Papaya market supply data capture and analysis’ (PP20003) project, led by Papaya Australia.

Queensland demonstrates a strong performance across both red and yellow categories, with the red tablelands leading the overall total with 2,724 entries.

The yellow coast and tablelands combined for a solid 1,419, contributing to a total of 5,018.

New South Wales shows a balanced distribution between red and yellow categories. The red total of 2,794 is primarily driven by the red coast (1,226) and red tablelands (1,568). Yellow entries are significantly lower but still contribute 538 to the overall total of 3,332.

Victoria’s performance highlights a strong showing in the red category,

particularly in the red coast with 1,267. Yellow entries are minimal, contributing only 92, leading to an overall total of 1,990.

South Australia’s numbers are lower overall, with red tablelands accounting for the majority (230) and

a total of 256 across the red category. No yellow entries were recorded. In total, the red category leads with 8,547 entries across all regions. The yellow category, while contributing less, adds 2,049, bringing the overall total to 10,596.

PAPAYA/PAW PAW CONSIGNMENTS – PALLETES SENT FROM NORTH QUEENSLAND (From 1st July 2024 to 1st December 2024)

	Red Coast	Red Tablelands	REDS TOTAL	Yellow Coast	Yellow Tablelands	YELLOWS TOTAL	OVERALL TOTAL
QLD	875	2724	3599	527	892	1419	5018
NSW	1226	1568	2794	326	212	538	3332
VIC	1267	631	1898	13	79	92	1990
SA	26	230	256	0	0	0	256
TOTALS	3394	5153	8547	866	1183	2049	10596

LEVY FUNDED PROJECT UPDATES

NEW R&D PROJECT: PP23001 – BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF PHYTOPHTHORA ROOT ROT

The Australian papaya industry is taking a decisive step toward addressing one of its most critical challenges: Phytophthora root rot.

With funding support from Hort Innovation using grower levy contributions, a new research and development project, PP23001: Better understanding of Phytophthora root rot, has been launched. We are pleased to announce that the successful applicant for this project is the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), led by Professor Nitin Mantri in collaboration with Dr. Josekutty Puthiyaparambil from Skybury Farms.

Phytophthora root rot has been identified by papaya growers as their number one concern, with losses ranging from 10% to as high as 80%, depending on growing conditions. Despite previous efforts to manage the disease, it remains a persistent and significant issue.

“Phytophthora is a water mould that thrives in wet and humid conditions, making it a constant threat in Australia’s papaya-growing regions,” explains Prof. Mantri. “We believe addressing this issue



requires a collaborative approach tailored to the unique Australian growing conditions”

Prof. Mantri brings extensive experience to the project. Since 2018, he has worked closely with Dr. Puthiyaparambil to address papaya diseases. Their efforts led to the development of a dipstick method for detecting Papaya Meleira Virus (PMeV) in field samples, which helped Skybury Farms breed PMeV-free papaya strains. This innovation has already improved crop resilience and productivity.

The project aims to build on existing industry knowledge about Phytophthora root rot by actively engaging with growers and researchers.

“We recognize there is already a wealth of knowledge in the industry,” says Prof. Mantri. “Our first step will be to consult with growers and researchers to identify knowledge gaps. This will allow us to focus our research where it can have the greatest impact.”

Next, the team will develop a high-throughput method to quantify soil fungal loads and conduct genomic analyses to uncover potential targets for disease control. These insights will form the foundation of an integrated management strategy that is both effective and environmentally sustainable.

Stay Informed

For more information about PP23001: Better Understanding of Phytophthora Root Rot, please contact Prof. Nitin Mantri at nitin.mantri@rmit.edu.au.

PROJECT LEADS

Nitin Mantri

School of Science, RMIT University,
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The UWA Institute of Agriculture,
The University of Western Australia,
Crawley WA 6009

Josekutty Puthiyaparambil

Skybury Farms, 136 Ivicevic Rd, Paddys
Green QLD 4880

EXTENSION EFFORTS CONTINUE FOR THE AUSTRALIAN PAPAYA INDUSTRY

The Australian papaya industry is set to benefit from a new five-year extension project, PP23003: Supporting Innovation in the Australian Papaya Industry, following the successful completion of PP20000 in August 2024.

Led again by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and managed by Emily Pattison, the initiative aims to enhance grower

knowledge, practices, and profitability.

“We received excellent feedback on the previous project,” says Ms. Pattison.

“So we kept the core format but, we’re placing greater emphasis on one-on-one engagement to strengthen grower relationships and ensure a strong understanding of grower priorities, especially in the early stages of the project.”

Key activities like field days, on-farm trials, and the Papaya Press will

continue. The Papaya Press will have an exciting new development: Sherri Soncin of Papaya Australia will now lead the production and management of the publication. “Partnering with the peak industry body will bring added industry perspective to our communications,” Ms. Pattison notes.

For more information about PP23003, contact **Emily Pattison at 0491 379 771 or Emily.Pattison@daf.qld.gov.au**.

REGIONAL ROUND-UP

What's happening in the regions?

GERARD KATH – TABLELANDS REGION, FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND

For the last three months conditions have been very dry, with cool nights. As of the end of November, a few storms started further to the west of our region. I have heard of some good falls in Dimbulah and further west.

Fruit yields have been strong, yet not breaking records in general. Fruit quality has also been good for the last three months. But growers are noticing an increase of Spider mite and fruit spotting bugs of late. We are also noticing an increase of sticky disease.

There has been a strong planting program across the Tableland region following the big wet experienced about 10 to 12 months ago. Baring major weather events, production should be up for next year.

NICHOLAS MACKAY - TULLY REGION

We're just finishing up our planting for the year. Coming into the hot months we don't plant anymore from now on. Production wise we are busy, which is good.

We've had a good run since about June, which is normally a quieter period but we actually had quite a busy period all the way through. Before that it was a little bit quiet. So overall we've had a pretty good year.

Looking ahead, hopefully we don't get a wet season like last year. We surprisingly came out of it alright, but I know others weren't so lucky in other areas. We lost no more than a normal wet season – we're used to the Tully wet weather. We'll just see what the cyclone and wet season brings and go with it.

WILLIAM DARVENIZA – INNISFAIL REGION

Growers in the Innisfail area have been enjoying good weather, decent prices, and steady supply of fruit. Our young paddocks have definitely been benefiting from fine weather since August, and we have had a good opportunity to do some maintenance on our drains and headlands before the wet season begins.

It looks like a similar wet season is ahead for us, so we are building on our experiences from last year to make sure we continue to send good quality fruit to market.

Cockatoos continue to be a problem we will manage as we come into the wet season.

CHRIS AND DIANE ROBINSON - KUNUNARRA, WESTERN AUSTRALIA, REGION

Temperatures are very high at the moment, approaching the 40 degrees mark every day. The trees handle that quite well. Fruit quality is really good this time of year with the hot weather.

In Kununurra, we have a small number of growers and we supply almost exclusively to the Perth market. It's going quite well at the moment. We're getting better returns for your fruit than you'd be getting in your Eastern states, so our cost of production is probably somewhat higher.

Prices for Western Australian fruit into Perth have been consistently reasonable to good. At times they have been exceedingly high – at the moment they're good, definitely in the profitable range.

We have been getting rain fairly consistently, which is a bit unseasonal.



It's a bit early for our wet season, but it hasn't adversely affected the fruit – fruit quality has actually been quite good.

We do have a fruit-piercing moth problem throughout the wet season, so that's something to look out for coming up in the next month or so.

MATTHEW PHENNEY, COOLALINGA NORTHERN TERRITORY REGION

This is the hardest time of the year for us, just with the heat. We've got 40 degrees plus temperatures everyday out here in November so it's a bit hard to get good fruit set this time of year. Those temperatures day after day, I think it just stresses the paw paws a bit too much. We are having a bit of trouble setting fruit right now. Generally, once we get to about Christmas the weather cools off a bit.

Our main product of green paw paw, we don't do a lot of ripe. We specifically aim at the green paw paw market because the variety we grow is more suited to green.

Between January and April is our best time to plant, so we're putting seeds in the ground now in the shade house. They will go in the ground after Christmas. We're working on new varieties that we're developing ourselves and they've shown some really good promise in the market. We're on our third or fourth generation of that now, so another three or four years and we might have stable variety.

NEW: Australian Papaya “For Growers” Website

Hort Innovation and QLD DPI are proud to announce the launch of the Australian Papaya “For Growers” website, a dedicated platform designed to support papaya growers with up-to-date industry news, resources, and tools.

Accessible at www.australianpapaya.com.au/ growers, this site serves as a comprehensive hub for papaya production, offering essential information to boost productivity, manage pests and diseases, and stay informed about market trends and industry developments.

Key features include:

- **Industry News and Events:** Updates on industry developments and upcoming events.
- **Industry Overview:** Statistics and insights on papaya production, market value,



and trends.

- **Resources:** Access to best practice guides, papaya volumes project summaries, editions of Papaya Press, and levy-funded

project overviews.

Developed during the previous extension project (PP20000), the website will be expanded and maintained under the current papaya extension project (PP23003). This initiative underscores the industry's commitment to sustainability and profitability by providing growers with useful resources and insights.

Growers are encouraged to explore the site and use its features to improve their operations. Feedback is welcome to ensure the platform evolves to meet industry needs effectively.

Visit www.australianpapaya.com.au/ growers today and discover how this valuable resource can support your business!

HORT INNOVATION UPDATES

Social media and marketing update

GUIDE FOR GROWERS

This guide was created to inform growers on capturing content for social media and how these images are used to market papayas.

Grower content is very popular with the Facebook and Instagram audiences of fresh produce industries, as it helps the everyday consumer feel connected to the growers behind their favourite fruit and vegetables, especially papayas.

USE OF IMAGES & CREDIT

Images contributed by growers may be used for any of the following purposes:

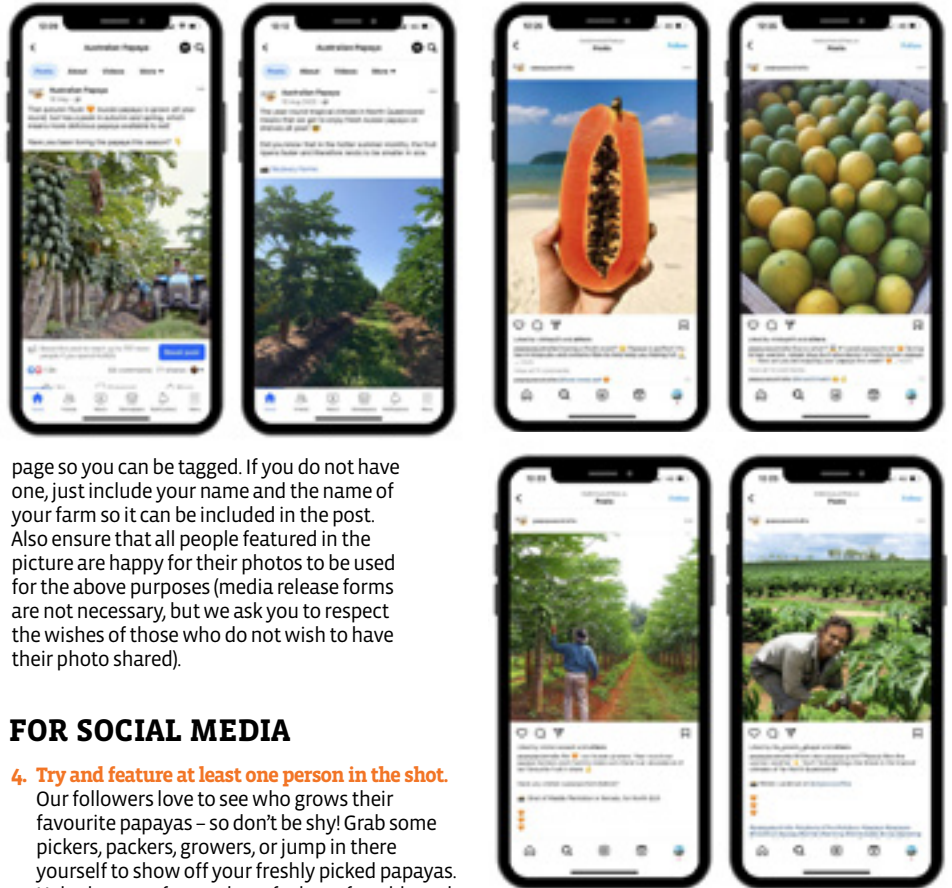
1. Sharing on the Australian Papaya Instagram or Facebook pages
2. Imagery on media materials (e.g. selection and storage tip sheet, health backgrounder)
3. General print and online media outreach (images to accompany articles and interviews)

When sending through images, please include the name of your Facebook and/or Instagram

KEY TIPS FOR TAKING PHOTOS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

You can use your smart phone to take images of your papayas being planted, picked, or growing on trees. Pictures of farm landscapes and the hardworking team are also great for sharing on social media.

1. **Capture interesting or unusual and interesting events.** Have you picked a particularly beautiful papaya? Take a snap and share it with us – social media fans love to see what goes on behind the scenes, especially if it's something a little out of the ordinary.
2. **Use natural lighting to your advantage.** The majority of your pictures will be taken in outdoor environments where the natural lighting is strong. Natural lighting gives images a soft brightness that enhances natural scenes like fruit trees. Use this to your advantage by shooting with the sun behind you so your image is bright (no need to use a flash!).
3. **Always shoot in portrait.** Pictures shot in portrait mode (taken with the phone upright) are better for publishing on social media, due to the specifications of the various apps.



page so you can be tagged. If you do not have one, just include your name and the name of your farm so it can be included in the post. Also ensure that all people featured in the picture are happy for their photos to be used for the above purposes (media release forms are not necessary, but we ask you to respect the wishes of those who do not wish to have their photo shared).

4. **Try and feature at least one person in the shot.** Our followers love to see who grows their favourite papayas – so don't be shy! Grab some pickers, packers, growers, or jump in there yourself to show off your freshly picked papayas. Help the star of your photo feel comfortable and encourage them to smile. Take a few shots so there's plenty to choose from.
5. **Move as close as you can to what you are capturing (never zoom).** Using the zoom feature can lower the quality of the image, making it appear unfocused. If you wish to capture something in more detail, move the camera closer.
6. **Remove objects that distract from the main feature.** By removing unnecessary objects that are in the shot we ensure that the audience will remain focused on the key messages within the image and caption. Items that seem out of place can quickly distract social media fans from the fresh produce we want to be the star of the show.
7. **Take a variety of shots.** By taking a few different shots at varying angles you are giving us a variety to choose from so we can select the image that will be most effective.



KEY TIPS FOR TAKING VIDEO FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

1. **Always shoot your video in portrait mode.** Make sure you keep your phone upright when shooting video, as most social platforms prefer this aspect for publishing.
2. **Keep your phone steady.** Keep your phone steady and use a tripod if possible. If you are shooting your video handheld, here are some tips to help stabilise your shot:
 - Keep your phone close to your body
 - Rest your elbows on a nearby object
 - Use your body to absorb bounces and shakes
3. **Don't use the zoom.** As with still photography, using the zoom feature can lower the quality of the image and can make the video appear pixelated. If you want to get a closer shot of your subject, move the phone closer.
4. **Light your video.** Your phone footage will look best when shot with lots of light. Take advantage of natural light where you can.
5. **Use the exposure lock.** Your phone will automatically focus and expose your shot. This is a great function for quick photos, but

when shooting video your phone tends to keep adjusting and refocusing, which can lead to jittery looking footage.

6. **Get the microphone close to your subject.** A general rule for clear audio is to get your microphone as close as possible, so that you can hear your subject clearly.

For more information contact:

Sherri Soncin, Secretary of Papaya Australia
Email: admin@australianpapaya.com.au
or Ph: 0499 045 979