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EcoHort certification readies Amazon Plant Growers with green infrastructure credentials

Amazon Plant Growers recently undertook EcoHort certification to improve their business sustainability and shore up their natural resource management.

Amazon Plant Growers Owner, Anthony Mazzone, said it was a 'no-brainer' decision to develop the business' risk mitigation pathways in water and natural resource management, enabling them to increase their productivity and profitability.

The inception of Amazon Plant Growers

Anthony was inspired by his grandparents love of plants and horticulture, which saw him open Amazon Plant Growers in Beverley, South Australia in 1996.

The 1.2-hectare family run production nursery specialises in supplying local landscapers, government and garden maintenance contractors. Alongside his father Tony, Anthony has focused on growing landscape stock well suited to local conditions, and now employs seven staff members.

As a small production nursery, Amazon Plant Growers has found its niche in supplying local landscape gardeners. The business' mission is to provide high quality local plant stock while providing personable service to its customers.

"It's important for us to continually improve all aspects of the business. This includes accreditation and best management practice which has provided us with the tools to achieve this," said Anthony.

Road to EcoHort Certification

Amazon Plant Growers first received NIASA accreditation in 2017 and achieved EcoHort certification in mid-2023.

The business achieved the certification with the support of Extension Officers, funded by the nursery levy under the Hort Innovation project 'National biosecurity and sustainable plant production program' (NY20001).

"We started working towards NIASA accreditation before 2017 and saw EcoHort as a way to help us shift the business focus onto environmental issues and natural resource management," Anthony said.

"NIASA accreditation helped improve our business practices and provided an important steppingstone towards EcoHort certification.

"As we look towards a hotter and drier climate, water conservation will be critical to remaining productive. Hence the decision to become EcoHort certified."

Amazon's journey toward EcoHort certification began in 2023. With the help and guidance of Celeste Cook, the business' local Greenlife Industry Australia Extension Officer.

"GIA introduced us to the [EcoHort] program and, since then, Lex, Kimberley and Celeste (previous and current GIA Extension Officers), have all been a great source of technical support and insight. The certification has given us the confidence to embrace innovation and achieve the best outcomes possible," said Anthony.

Employing third party validated credentials through EcoHort certification has helped Amazon Plant Growers meet and continue to employ best management practices.

"Both our business and customers see the benefits, as it leads to higher quality stock due to the assessment and

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professionalism that accreditation requires,” Anthony said.

“The credentials increase efficiencies and makes us more productive and profitable. The process ensures we are meeting the requirements of government and industry, and that continual improvement practices are in place. This gives our customers confidence in us and helps us reduce risks. It is also a vehicle for us to continually educate our team to improve plant quality.”

The value of the GIA Extension Officer Network

“The GIA Extension Officer network has been a great source of technical support and feedback – they provide us with the confidence we are on the right track, helping us achieve the best outcomes possible,” said Anthony.

The EcoHort guidelines have been Amazon Plant Growers go-to for guidance.

“The NIASA Best management practice guidelines and related resources are great to refer to for all things relating to irrigation and drainage, and we have built our growing areas around the principles and guidelines contained within the texts.

“Space has always been our biggest stumbling block with regards to water storage, so it has made much more sense for us to invest in tech that helps us save water, while maintaining and increasing our stock’s hardiness and quality,” said Anthony.



Anthony Mazzone, Owner of Amazon Plant Growers

Implementing third party technology to assist with EcoHort certification

To assist with water efficiency and recording for EcoHort certification, Amazon Plant growers worked with ICT International which design and develop science-led instrument solutions.

“The instruments and technical support ICT provided to us have been invaluable in providing us with site-specific environmental data, which is continuously logged and recorded. We collect plant soil moisture and tree sap flow data measured using the heat ratio method (HRM). Through this collaboration we have been able to gain valuable insight into our soil and plant water relationships.

“The data is a key part of our record keeping. It demonstrates efficient water use as part of our EcoHort certification. Smart sensors provide us with alerts in the case of frost or extreme weather which assists us in mitigating stock damage from such events. Importantly, we use the data daily to schedule our irrigation system, ensuring judicious water use.

“EcoHort also stipulates ongoing irrigation performance monitoring. It’s vital to know we aren’t inadvertently wasting water, which could result in excessive leaching, increasing potential nutrient runoff which can reduce plant growth.

“With environmental sustainability becoming more and more relevant, certification in EcoHort is ensuring we are meeting government and community expectations, and that we have the right data to reflect our commitment to environmental sustainability and resource management. A bonus is that EcoHort certification is tax deductible.

“EcoHort is a complete system framework. Everything is independently verified and recognised nationally by government, our clients and the broader community,” said Anthony.

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Benefits of EcoHort Certification

Data collection reflects Amazon Plant Growers' ongoing compliance, enabling them to assess and employ efficient resource use. It also assists in enabling sound strategies to meet their environmental obligations, ensuring nothing is missed.

By being EcoHort certified, Amazon Plant Growers can respond appropriately and efficiently to changing circumstances, leading to cost savings and increased productivity, and allowing them to continue to grow their business sustainably.

"We value loyalty, and we view our customers and suppliers as partners. We strive to work together with them to deliver the best possible quality greenlife we can.

"To do this, we must remain relevant, competitive and productive. This is where certification and accreditation has been a great help, enabling us to operate in the best possible way.

"With emerging industries like green infrastructure, and greater emphasis on increased urban greening, we hope to further assist businesses involved in these initiatives and help create successful outcomes for all to enjoy. People love the outdoors and it's meaningful to know we help play a part in creating these spaces," Anthony said.

For more information about EcoHort certification, visit: nurseryproductionfms.com.au/ecohort-certification

Amazon Plant Growers is certified under NIASA BMP and accredited under EcoHort, programs administered by Greenlife Industry Australia's Australian Plant Production Standard.

ENDS

EcoHort certification is associated with the 'National biosecurity and sustainable plant production program' (NY20001) project which is funded by Hort Innovation using nursery research and development levy and funds from the Australian Government.

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This project has been funded by Hort Innovation using the nursery research and development levy and funds from the Australian Government. For more information on the fund and strategic levy investment visit horticulture.com.au