

Your Levy At Work



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How Harts Nursery improved consistency, efficiency and wellbeing with mechanical pruning

At a glance

Who this is for

Nursery growers aiming to scale production, maintain consistent plant quality, reduce labour pressures, or adopt practical technology such as mechanical pruning to improve efficiency and crop uniformity.

Why it matters

Harts Nursery shows how investing in mechanical pruning and integrated production systems can streamline operations, enhance plant health, support staff wellbeing, and deliver a reliable, uniform product at scale - helping nurseries meet market demands and build customer confidence.

A few years ago, Harts Nursery relied on manual trimming — slow, labour-intensive and difficult to keep consistent at scale. With support from the levy-funded GrowConnex program, the business began looking at practical ways to improve efficiency and consistency, including how mechanical pruning could fit into existing workflows.

Harts Nursery, based in the Gold Coast hinterland, has a long history in wholesale plant production, growing a wide range of ornamental, hedging and berry plants. Producing hundreds of thousands of plants each year requires systems that can maintain consistency and quality across large volumes.

Before adopting mechanical pruning, staff had to pick up individual pots or trays, trim each plant by hand, and maintain strict hygiene to avoid spreading pests and disease. The process was physically demanding, inconsistent and time-consuming.

Owner Chris Hart recognised the need for a more reliable and efficient approach. Through the levy-funded GrowConnex program, the nursery was able to look closely at mechanical pruning, assess different options and connect with technical advice before investing in the first machine. After several seasons of trial and error, the nursery installed its first mechanical pruning machine, which delivered consistent results across a wide range of crops, including ornamentals, hedging stock and blueberries.

“That first machine was the turning point. Since it arrived, the consistency has been fantastic,” Chris said.

Reducing handling, improving plant growth

Building on this success, Harts Nursery worked with designers in the Netherlands to develop a second-generation machine that trims plants in place, eliminating the need for staff to handle each pot or tray.

GrowConnex support also helped the business think through workflow changes and how new equipment could fit into existing greenhouse layouts and production processes.

“Now it’s the machine touching the plants, not people,” Chris said.

“That reduces the risk of introducing pests and disease, and we can focus on sterilising the unit itself.”

Because trimming is faster and easier to schedule, plants can be trimmed more often, encouraging bushier, stronger growth. Staff operate the machine rather than spending hours on repetitive manual work, freeing time for higher-value tasks, while plants are handled less throughout the process.

Consistency at scale

Consistency is especially important for the nursery’s berry crops, where large volumes of plants need to look and perform the same.

“We want the first plant to look exactly the same as the 500,000th,” Chris said.

That level of consistency is critical at scale – and difficult to achieve manually.

Mechanical pruning helps ensure plants are uniform and ready for sale or transplanting. For berry growers, plants arrive pre-trimmed and ready for planting, reducing the work required on farm.

Mechanical pruning has led to:

- consistent plant size and shape at scale
- stronger, bushier plants from more regular trimming
- reduced handling lowers pest and disease risk
- faster turnaround during peak production periods
- plants delivered pre-trimmed and ready to plant.



Built into everyday workflows

The nursery now uses mechanical pruning in both propagation and production. In propagation, trays are trimmed before robotic transplanting so material is even before potting. In production, plants are trimmed in place within greenhouses.

“The plants don’t have to move. We take the machine to them,” Chris said.

This was an important design feature, as Australian greenhouse structures differ from larger European facilities, so equipment needed to work within existing layouts rather than the other way around. This made adoption practical, not disruptive.

Labour and workforce benefits

Mechanical pruning has significantly reduced the labour required for trimming while also making the job less physically demanding.

“It’s a lot easier on the team. They’re not bending over trimming all day – they’re operating equipment,” Chris said.

Staff now spend less time on repetitive manual trimming and more time on higher-value tasks across the nursery, and the consistency of the finished product is higher.

Looking ahead with GrowConnex

Harts Nursery continues to work with GrowConnex to identify further opportunities to improve workflow, automation and plant handling across the business.

“We’re always looking at the next step,” Chris said.

“Key areas like pruning, robotics and plant handling make a real difference, and GrowConnex support helps us assess new ideas, connect with the right people and work out what will actually work in our nursery.”



Want to improve efficiency and consistency in your nursery? GrowConnex is a levy-funded program that helps you identify opportunities, assess new technology and get practical support on site.

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