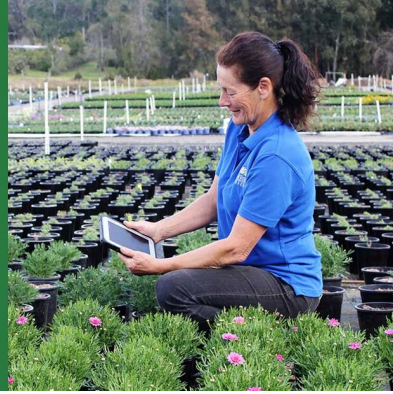


# Your Levy At Work



**Greenlife**  
INDUSTRY AUSTRALIA

SEPTEMBER 2025

## ***Fir real – from 20% to 90% saleable trees – with levy-funded support***

### **At a glance**

- Disrupter to the Australian Christmas Tree market, Spruced Christmas Trees grow a diverse range of conifers from traditionally cold climates, such as Europe.
- By engaging a GIA Extension Officer for support, they increased their saleable conifers from 20% to 90%.
- Taking operations to the next level Spruced Christmas Trees is looking to gain their Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme, Australia (NIASA) to help them break into big box retail with the support of their GIA Extension Officer.

***By engaging a GIA's levy-funded Extension Officer, Spruced Christmas Trees lifted its saleable conifers from 20% to 90%.***

*That's a huge shift for a small nursery – and a great example of how GIA's Extension Officers help businesses apply research-backed practices to see real results.*

To some people looking in on the greenlife sector, the difference between a background in forestry and a background in horticulture is interchangeable when it comes to establishing a nursery.

At least, that's what Lawrence Ranson was telling himself when starting a Christmas tree nursery in the Blue Mountains with wife, Heather, back in 2017.

Backed with a Bachelor's degree in Forestry and Plant Ecology, Genetics, and more than a decade in forestry, Lawrence wanted to take his passion for conifers and disrupt the Christmas tree industry in Australia.

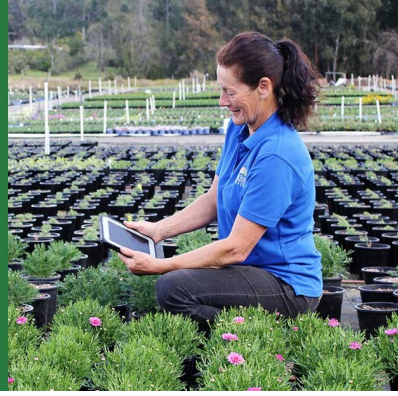
Where traditionally the conifers are Californian in origin to match the hot, dry Australian growing conditions, Lawrence wanted to test the limits at his Blue Mountains sites, selecting seed samples from more than 20 countries to push the envelope on what could be grown locally.

"When starting out there certainly were a lot of naysayers who pointed out, and rightfully so, that the conditions in Australia are much more challenging than Europe and the Americas where our seeds were coming from," Lawrence said.

"But stubbornness paid off. In the right location and accessing the right help through industry organisations, we have matured as a business and maintain an expanding product range for our customers."



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Today, Spruced Christmas Trees (Spruced) sells a selection of premium and unique conifer varieties to wholesale customers, landscapers, retail nurseries and Christmas tree growers. What has taken Spruced to the next level, Lawrence shared, was accessing support from his local GIA Extension Officer.

## Connecting with industry support

For the first couple of years of Spruced, the approach to managing and growing saleable plants was 'reactionary'.

"We would monitor our seedlings and trees and respond to their needs when they showed visual signs of hunger, for example, rather than anticipating what was needed for sustainable growth," Lawrence said.

This approach meant that there was a general lack of consistency in Spruced's products, with under a quarter being saleable at the end of the growing period.

Understanding this was unsustainable for growing at scale production, Lawrence and Heather looked into joining greenlife industry groups to see what support was available.

"I hadn't realised how strong the levy model was in Australia. Particularly the support that exists within the nursery sector," he said.

"We hadn't thought we were a serious or established enough business to access support. But we put ourselves out there and joined NGINA (Nursery & Garden Industry, NSW & ACT).

"We were exhibiting at one of their events when a levy-funded GIA Extension Officer came over and showed an interest in our business. Striking up that conversation changed the course of our production."

Operating over two sites in the Great Dividing Range, a misconception Lawrence had in seeking support for Spruced was that they were too isolated to ask for help and that the burden of running the business was something he had to go alone.

However, within a matter of weeks of meeting Colin Hunt, the GIA Extension Officer, was up on-site to offer a helping hand.

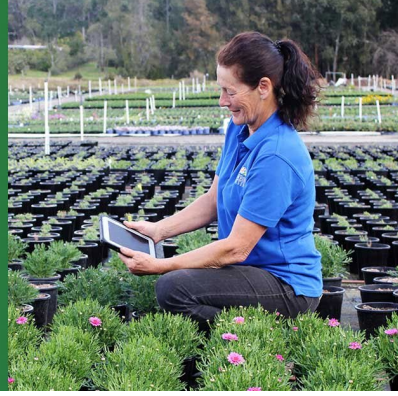
## Small changes, big impact

Since engaging Colin's expertise, Spruced now produces stock where almost 90% are of a saleable consistency and quality. An incredible jump from the previous 20%.





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The secret to this success? Asking the obvious questions.

From mentoring, to setting reading homework and simply asking why Spruced were doing things a certain way, Lawrence says that Colin has introduced a 'best practice' model to Spruced's operations that was missing previously.

This best practice procedures include:

- scheduled feeding
- introducing EC and pH levels measurement
- increased plant hygiene
- raised beds and benching for improved drainage
- documenting and formalising treatment procedures
- pest and disease management plans.

"It was the obvious things that we'd been putting off because we thought they would be laborious or time intensive. In reality, it couldn't be any further from the truth," Lawrence said.

*"I wish I'd reached out to GIA for extension support sooner, it would've saved me time, money, resources, and stress."*

"It takes about an hour a week and is easy to manage. The impact of these simple changes has meant more consistent and healthy plants in our nursery.

"I wish I'd reached out to GIA for extension support sooner, it would've saved me time, money, resources, and stress."

If any nursery levy payers are on the fence about seeking support, Lawrence encourages them to reach out.

## Sowing seeds of success

Entering its eighth year of operation, Spruced is maturing and being approached by big box retailers to supply them with Christmas trees.

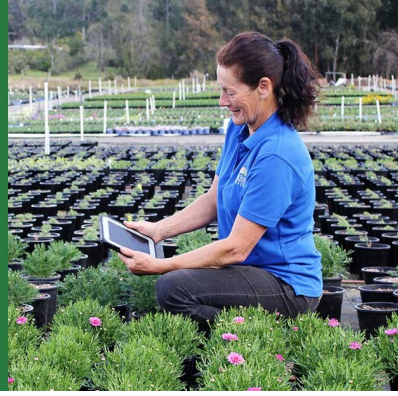
A year off from being able to fill their orders, Lawrence, Heather and the team see this as the perfect time to invest in their Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme Australia (NIASA) certification, to effectively take their operations to the next level.

NIASA provides a structured framework for best management practices, covering critical areas such as plant health, water management, and biosecurity.

"Colin has been encouraging us, and the time is right to look into it," Lawrence said.



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“NIASA is an industry standard and as we look to sell into some major brands it will amplify our credibility, recognising our commitment to quality, consistent, and beautiful plants.”

While Spruced continues on a successful trajectory, Lawrence is experimenting with growing endangered and native saplings. In doing so, he hopes to contribute to bringing back the environment’s natural beauty and ‘digging in’ for the climate.

So far, the results are promising, with opportunity on the horizon to make these plants available to nature reserves.

## **Ready to improve operational efficiency and raise nursery standards?**

Get in touch with your local GIA Extension Officer to explore how accreditation and best-practice systems like NIASA can benefit your business:

- QLD/Northern NSW: Barry Naylor [barry.naylor@greenlifeindustry.com.au](mailto:barry.naylor@greenlifeindustry.com.au)
- NSW/Northern Vic: Colin Hunt [colin.hunt@greenlifeindustry.com.au](mailto:colin.hunt@greenlifeindustry.com.au)
- Vic: Stuart Burns [stuart.burns@greenlifeindustry.com.au](mailto:stuart.burns@greenlifeindustry.com.au)
- WA/NT: Bill Hollingworth [bill.hollingworth@greenlifeindustry.com.au](mailto:bill.hollingworth@greenlifeindustry.com.au)
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**ENDS**

