

Your Levy At Work



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Large reduction in pest and disease related losses at Shamrock Plants through GrowConnex

At a glance

Who this is for

Nursery businesses looking to improve operational consistency, reduce production losses and strengthen team capability through practical, system-based processes.

Why it matters

GrowConnex helped Shamrock Plants translate operational improvements into measurable business outcomes through the Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme Australia (NIASA). By strengthening hygiene practices, improving traceability, enhancing water testing, and adopting digital record keeping, the business improved communication and accountability across teams while reducing plant losses and supporting more consistent production outcomes.

Shamrock Plants reduced growing-related plant losses (pest and disease) from almost 10,000 during Spring 2023 to about 2,200 during Spring 2024 after working with the GrowConnex team and adopting NIASA best-practice systems — a 78% reduction.

The gains were driven by improved hygiene practices, stronger water and chemical management, and more structured nursery operations. Crop monitoring and IPM improvements were also big factors.

Shamrock Plants is a medium-sized wholesale nursery growing potted colour crops for Bunnings, landscapers and independent nurseries. Beyond a compliance exercise, the accreditation process gave Shamrock Plants a practical framework to improve consistency, strengthen communication and create clearer accountability across the nursery.

"When you're growing short-term crops, little problems become big problems very quickly," said Shamrock Plants Business Improvement Coordinator, Callum.



Focusing on the areas causing losses

Before starting the accreditation process, Shamrock Plants was experiencing growing-related losses linked to pests, disease, hygiene and environmental conditions.

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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

"The main thing we wanted to reduce was plant losses," said Callum.

The nursery used NIASA as a framework to tighten operations and improve consistency across the business. One of the first priorities was nursery hygiene.

"We started with the basics — cleaning up the nursery floors, gravel areas and improving overall hygiene standards," Callum said.

The team then introduced:

- regular water quality testing, including laboratory testing
- improved chemical management and spray recording
- clearer production processes and accountability
- better traceability across the nursery.

The impact was immediate and measurable

Before accreditation, the nursery recorded almost 10,000 growing-related crop losses in the spring of 2023. Following the changes introduced through NIASA, those losses dropped by 78%, to around 2,200 during the same spring production period in 2024.

Rather than treating NIASA as paperwork, Shamrock Plants approached it as an operational system for the entire nursery.



"Before we did anything, I read the NIASA manual cover to cover," said Callum. "You need at least one person in the business who really understands the system."

Support from the GrowConnex Extension Officers helped translate the accreditation into practical actions for the team. Regular visits helped staff work through the checklist, identify gaps and build systems suited to the nursery's workflow.

Training was also tailored to individual staff roles, helping team members take ownership over different areas of the business.

"It wasn't just management involved — everyone had responsibilities," Callum said.

The process also helped identify staff ready to step into larger roles within the nursery. Several team members progressed into further training opportunities and apprenticeships during the accreditation process.

Cleaner systems, better communication

One of the biggest day-to-day improvements has been moving away from manual systems. Digital systems for chemical applications, spray records and job tracking have improved communication, reduced double handling and created clear traceability across the nursery.

Tasks can now be assigned, monitored and followed through properly.

"We would never go back to handwritten records," Callum said.

"If there's an issue like a fire ant nest, we can create a job task immediately, assign it and keep a record of it," Callum said.

The nursery has also seen visible improvements in presentation and organisation, something customers have noticed immediately.

"Customers now walk through and say, 'wow, this place looks awesome,'" Callum said.

Building confidence across the team

For management, one of the biggest benefits has been the confidence that comes from having systems in place and knowing staff understand their responsibilities.

The NIASA process also helped improve staff engagement and accountability. One casual staff member who took ownership during the process has since moved into an apprenticeship role and now manages several NIASA-related responsibilities, including media and water testing.

"Our staff are more enthusiastic because they have ownership over their tasks," Callum said.

A worthwhile investment

Looking back, Shamrock Plants says NIASA has improved far more than compliance.

"It reduced our losses, improved how the nursery operates and made the whole business look more professional," Callum said.

For other nurseries considering accreditation, their advice is to look beyond the audit itself and focus on the practical tools and systems available through the program.

"There's so much information in there that can genuinely help your business.

"Once you understand how to use the system properly, it changes the way you run your nursery."

For more information on accreditation and credentials, please contact the GrowConnex experts here: www.greenlifeindustry.org.au/talk-to-an-expert.



The 'Nursery sustainable plant production and biosecurity preparedness project' (BY24004), funded by Hort Innovation using the nursery levy and matched by the Australian Government, is a horticulture initiative designed to support nurseries in strengthening biosecurity and sustainable production practices.

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