

## THE HYDROPONIC FARMERS FEDERATION CONFERENCE



Presented by the Hydroponic Farmers Federation Inc.  
4 - 6 May 2026  
Pullman Melbourne Albert Park, VIC



**THEME: Protected Crops - Doing More with less**

### DRAFT PROGRAM

*Presenters, timings and session allocations are subject to change*

MONDAY, 4 MAY 2026		
Time	Topic	Location
4.00pm – 5.30pm	Registration Desk Open	Exhibition Area, Grand Ballroom Lobby
4.00pm – 7.00pm	Trade Exhibition Open	Exhibition Area, Grand Ballroom Lobby
5.00pm – 7.00pm	<p><b>WELCOME FUNCTION</b> Canapes and drinks provided</p> <p>Sponsored by:</p>  <p><b>VAN DER HOEVEN</b> Horticultural projects</p> <p><i>Sponsor Address by Merijn Kuiper, Regional Manager, Van der Hoeven Australia</i></p>	Exhibition Area, Grand Ballroom Lobby

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TUESDAY, 5 MAY 2026		
Time	Topic	Location
8.00am – 5.00pm	Registration Desk Open	Exhibition Area, Grand Ballroom Lobby
8.00am – 5.00pm	Trade Exhibition Open	Exhibition Area, Grand Ballroom Lobby
8.30am – 8.50am	<b>Official Opening and Welcome</b>  <b>Herman van der Gulik</b> Conference MC  <b>Dougal Purcell</b> Executive Director, Agriculture Victoria	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2
8.50am – 9.20am	<b>SESSION 1</b> <i>Regional Development, Aus Veg. Strategy for Future Incursions</i>  <b>Daniel Bosveld</b> Regional Development Officer, AUSVEG VIC	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2
9.20am – 9.50am	<b>SESSION 2</b> <i>Advancing IPM in Protected Cropping: Early Insights from the Trap Eye™ trial and Key Industry Updates</i>  <b>Dr Stephanus Malherbe</b> IPM Product Specialist, Biological Services	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2
9.50am – 10.20am	<b>SESSION 3</b> <i>Seeding, Scaling &amp; Sustaining Talent in Controlled Environment Ag</i>  <b>Kelli McDougall</b> Managing Director, Agri Talent and Global People Solutions	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2

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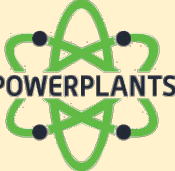
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10.20am – 11.00am	<b>MORNING TEA</b>	Exhibition Area, Grand Ballroom Lobby
11.00am – 11.30am	<b>SESSION 4</b> <i>Innovation From EU. Does it work in Australia? Investing in High Tech</i>  <b>Alastair Delooze</b> Oceania Regional BDM, DENSO Automotive Systems Australia	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2
11.30am – 12.00pm	<b>SESSION 5</b> <i>How to maximise access to Government incentives</i>  <b>Jonathan Zimet</b> Senior Director, Alvarez & Marsal Australia	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2
12:00pm – 12.10pm	Sponsor Address by <b>Alastair McLean</b> , Commercial Director, Powerplants	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2
12.10pm – 1.30pm	<b>LUNCH</b>  Sponsored by:  	Exhibition Area, Grand Ballroom Lobby
1.30pm - 2.00pm	<b>SESSION 6</b> <i>Building a High-Performance Workforce Under the PALM Scheme</i>  <b>Nicky Mann</b> Manager, Family Fresh Farms	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2

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2.00pm – 2.30pm	<b>SESSION 7</b> <i>Sundrop Grower Story</i>  <b>Steve Marafiote</b> Chief Executive Officer, Sundrop Farms	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2
2.30pm – 3.00pm	<b>SESSION 8</b> <i>Beyond the Scissor Lift: Automating the Future of Pollination</i>  <b>James Currie</b> Co-founder, FTEK	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2
3.00pm – 3.30pm	<b>AFTERNOON TEA</b>	Exhibition Area, Grand Ballroom Lobby
3.30pm – 5.00pm	<b>SESSION 9</b> <i>Aspects of Protecting Your Crops Grower Panel</i>  Hosted by <b>Chris Millis</b> Chief Operating Officer, Flavorite Group  Panellists: <b>Rick Butler</b> , Owner, Butler Market Gardens <b>Steve Marafiote</b> , Chief Executive Officer, Sundrop Farms <b>Will Millis</b> , Greenlife Growing	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2

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6.00pm – 7.00pm	Conference Dinner Pre Dinner Drinks	Grand Ballroom Lobby
7.00pm – 9.45pm	<p><b>CONFERENCE DINNER</b> <i>To be entertained by special guest Brian Nankervis from Rockwiz</i></p> <p>Sponsored by:</p>  <p><i>Sponsor Address by Julian Horsley, Systems Division A &amp; D Australasia Pty Ltd</i></p>	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2
9.45pm – 11.00pm	<p><b>AFTER PARTY CELEBRATIONS...</b> <i>"Hoe Down Throw Down"</i></p> <p>Sponsored by:</p>  <p><i>Sponsor Address by Enza Zaden Australia Pty Ltd</i></p>	Grand Ballroom Lobby

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<b>WEDNESDAY, 6 MAY 2026</b>		
<b>Time</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Location</b>
7.30am – 2.00pm	Registration Desk Open	Exhibition Area, Grand Ballroom Lobby
7.45am – 8.45am	<p><b>BREAKFAST</b></p> <p>Guest Speaker:  <b>Michael Simonetta</b>                      Director, Perfection Fresh Australia</p> <p>Sponsored by:</p> 	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2
8.45am – 2.00pm	Trade Exhibition Open	Exhibition Area, Grand Ballroom Lobby
9.00am – 10.00am	<p><b>SESSION 10</b>  <i>Integration of AI in Areas of Protected Crops</i></p> <p><i>What's in it for us? – Plant research and how it can impact your business.</i>  <b>Ricarda Jost</b>, Senior Scientific Advisor, La Trobe University</p> <p><i>Integration of Agtech and AI in Protected Cropping</i>  <b>Ben Hoodless</b>, Managing Director, Element Ag</p> <p><i>From Automation to Intelligence: The Future of Glasshouse Climate Management</i>  <b>Tony Bundock</b>, Director, Genesis Horticultural Solutions  <b>Marcus Van Heijst</b>, Account Manager, Priva Oceania</p> <p>Followed by Q&amp;A</p>	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2

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10.00am – 10.30am	<p><b>SESSION 11</b></p> <p><i>Growing more with less. Creating an 'active' growing climate at higher efficiency, and how to monitor it</i></p> <p><b>Ton Harbraken</b> Greenhouse Climate Expert, Ludvig Svensson BV</p>	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2
10.30am – 11.10am	<p><b>MORNING TEA</b></p>	Exhibition Area, Grand Ballroom Lobby
11.10am – 11.40am	<p><b>SESSION 12</b></p> <p><i>Calcium Absorption Under Stress Conditions: Mechanisms, Limitations and Practical Solutions</i></p> <p><b>Zenon (Zen) Kynigos</b> Crop Science Technologist, Prodoz International Pty Ltd</p>	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2
11.40am – 12.40pm	<p><b>SESSION 13</b></p> <p><i>Seed Industry Innovation Panel</i></p> <p>Panellists: <b>Steffen Kraushaar</b>, Business Development Manager, Bayer <b>James Bertram</b>, Account Manager, Rijk Zwaan Australia <b>Keimpe Veenstra</b>, Regional Sales Director, Enza Zaden <b>Bill Brown</b>, Mainfreight</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Graeme Smith</b>, Graeme Smith Consulting</p> <p>Session sponsored by:</p> <p> <b>Provenance</b> Propagation</p>	Grand Ballroom 1 / 2

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12.40pm – 12.50pm	<p><b>SESSION 14</b> <i>Crop Pollination, Quality and Efficiencies</i></p> <p><b>Steve Fuller</b> Chief Bee Officer, BeeSTAR</p> <p>Session sponsored by BeeSTAR</p>	
12.50pm – 1.40pm	<p><b>LUNCH</b> <i>including Award Judging for best trade booth</i></p>	Exhibition Area, Grand Ballroom Lobby
1.40pm – 2.00pm	<p><b>Conference Wrap-Up</b></p> <p>Platinum Sponsor address by Rijk Zwaan</p>  <p><b>RIJK ZWAAN</b></p> <p>Award Announcements</p> <p>Special thanks to the trade, speakers, delegates and organisers</p>	Exhibition Area, Grand Ballroom Lobby