
**PROJECT: Alternative Growing Techniques Double
 Production of Bitter Melon**

Project Officers: M. Traynor and E. Crowson

Location: Minh Bang Nguyens' farm, Buckley Rd, Humpty Doo

Objective:

To demonstrate increased yields by adopting improved farming techniques.

A demonstration trial was planted on a growers' property at Humpty Doo to demonstrate the alternative production techniques developed by the Department over many years of vegetable production research. These alternative growing techniques included the use of a green manure crop, soil testing, pH adjustment and application of basal fertiliser, mounds covered with plastic mulch and irrigated with drip tape under the mulch and fertiliser injection (or fertigation). Pest and disease were also monitored and sprayed with soft chemicals when losses reached threshold levels.

Bitter melon grown using the plastic mulch and drip tape produced fruit 3.5 weeks earlier than bitter melon grown the traditional way. The total period of harvest for bitter melon grown using the method recommended by DPIF was 12 weeks, compared to 8.5 weeks when grown the traditional way.

Yields were also higher. From the four 50 m beds used in the trial, growing using the recommended method produced 2,120 kg of bitter melon, while the traditional method produced only 910 kg. This increase was greater than expected, and has huge potential to increase the profitability for Asian vegetable farmers in the region. A similar increase was noticed for zucchini. Costs incurred for controlling pests and diseases were also nearly halved with application of soft chemicals when pest or disease incidence reached threshold levels.

This production system means slightly higher establishment costs but the increase in harvesting period and yield, and potential savings from reduced chemical use should more than offset this expense.

PROJECT: Kabocha Variety Trial

Project Officers: S. McAlister, R. Renfree and M. Gosbee

Location: KRS

Objective:

To evaluate kabocha as a possible new crop for the Katherine region.

The prime aim of the RIRDC project 'Consolidating the Asian vegetable industry' is to determine what crops can be grown across a range of climates in Australia with a view to year round production for export. One of the most promising types of Asian vegetables is kabocha (*Cucurbita maxima* x *C. moschata*). Kabocha production in the Katherine region is out of season to the rest of Australia and would fill a useful timing slot in year round production.