



# MELON QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Mark Loeffen - Delytics

PROJECT CODE: VM23002



**On-Farm Monitoring Underway for New Melon Improvement Project. An exciting project is now underway to help growers meet the new minimum maturity standards that were set by the Australian melon industry last year.**

Led by Delytics Ltd in partnership with Melons Australia and Rudge Produce Systems, the Melon Quality Improvement Program VM23002 project is funded by Hort Innovation using the melon research and development levy and funds from the Australian Government. This new three-year project will build on the previous project VM21001 (Quality Improvements in the Melon Supply Chain), which developed minimum maturity standards for rock melons, watermelon and honeydew. One of the key objectives for this project is to develop tools and processes that will help growers and other key members of the Australian melon supply chain consistently meet the new standards.

On-farm monitoring started in April and will continue through the duration of the project.

Project Manager and Delytics Managing Director, Mark Loeffen says the on-farm monitoring will improve the project team's understanding of how melons mature on-farm and help them develop effective tools and processes that will help growers know when to pick to meet the new standards.



The intended outcome of this project is to improve the quality of melons available to consumers at wholesale and retail over the life of the project, with monitoring against the new standards showing increased consumer acceptability. This will lead to increased consumption and demand.

Mark says, "The phase one project, which we completed in February, was focused on benchmarking the quality of melons available to consumers and working out what minimum maturity standards were needed to ensure consumers will enjoy eating melons, and feel confident to buy more. The phase one project achieved its goal. This phase two project allows us to work with growers to help the industry improve the eating quality of melons and restore consumer confidence."

The Nielsen Harvest to Home results from May 2024 showed that melons are performing better than last year. In terms of dollar sales growth (\$), melons have grown by 11.6%, while rising fast in terms of volume at 17%. The average dollars spent rose from \$32.43 to \$35.33 and the annual amount purchased increased from 10.6kg to 12.10kg on the previous year. The number of melon-buying households rose from 56.3% in 2023, to 60% in May 2024..

Project Manager Mark Loeffen (left) with Mark Fulton, the farm manager of Rombola Family Farms in Mataranka NT. Mark and project partner Terry Rudge spent a week in Mataranka in late May to develop and trial an on-farm maturity measurement methodology, which they will provide to growers wanting to do their own monitoring.





Terry Rudge and his team at Rudge Produce Systems started on-farm monitoring in early April.

Mark says, “This project will help us to quickly and permanently improve these results, as we have done in previous projects for citrus and table grapes. We know that putting the right processes in place will improve and maintain the eating quality of Australian melons, which will increase consumer demand. In this first year of the project, we will be working with growers who are keen to help lead the industry by providing the on-farm data we need to identify what tool options will help them meet the standards. We will then work with them to co-design and trial the tools to make sure they are fit for purpose.”

The project team will support the growers who opt-in to do the monitoring. In return for the monitoring data, each grower will receive evidence-based reports generated from the data they supply, which will help with their own QA and maturity monitoring. Growers are invited to email the project manager to request to be involved: [mark.loeffen@delytics.com](mailto:mark.loeffen@delytics.com)



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