

Annual ARC Food Safety in the Fresh Produce Industry Meeting

25 September 2018



Industry partners, students and academics met on 25 September and listened to research presentations by PhD students and postdoctoral associates, and workshopped future directions for research.

The ARC Centre commenced in 2017 and includes 18 industry partners, 8 PhD students, 9 academics and 3 postdoctoral associates. The Centre is funded for four years and aims to strengthen industry capability and innovation, provide opportunity to combine Universities and industry to solve current and emerging issues, and to train the next generation of researchers for industry.

International guest speaker, Suresh DeCosta (Director of Food Safety, Lipman Family Farms, USA), reported on new research initiatives which are translatable for use in the US industry such as water sanitisers, packhouse equipment design, mobile mapping of animal intrusions in the field and use of animal deterrents. He identified cleaning and sanitising as key issues. Too often, the job of sanitising equipment was performed as overtime by ordinary workers. For this to be done properly, it needed dedicated and properly trained staff, and paid a premium – a change only achieved with full management cooperation. Suresh DeCosta said that effective training was the key take-home message.

Professor Vitali Sintchenko (Director, Centre for Infectious Diseases and Microbiology, University of Sydney) outlined the value of whole genome sequencing in quickly identifying clusters of food borne illness. He estimated the cost of food borne disease in Australia is around \$1.2 billion per annum and that timely outbreak detection is of growing importance. Whole genome sequencing has led to fast recalls across the country and even from overseas, as seen in the recent *Listeria* rockmelon incident where seven people died in Australia.

The PhD students then presented their research, ranging from mapping water borne food pathogens in irrigation water, risk assessment modelling for food borne illness in salads and apples, safe use of fungicides and sanitisers, a meta-analysis of environmental factors affecting survival of *Salmonella* and pathogenic *E.coli*, tracking post farmgate risks during transport and storage and development of rapid diagnostic technology. A lively round table discussion followed where the projects were reviewed by industry.

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