

Syngenta's Head Capsicum Breeder visits Australia to share insights

Vegetables

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Last October, Syngenta Australasia hosted Dr. Kevin Cook, Syngenta's head capsicum breeder from Naples, Florida who has been making the long trip down under for almost 10 years, all in the name of capsicum immortality.

Kevin's trip this year was one of his most rewarding both in terms of the progress of the program and the quality of the trials coordinated by Adam Thomas, Syngenta Field Biology Manager, and Rachel Archbald, Syngenta Field Biologist.

What initially began as a program to develop varieties to take on local competition has, over time, expanded into a wider-reaching collaboration with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries Queensland (DAF), with Kevin working with the DAF breeders to incorporate certain resistance traits - specifically Capsicum Chlorosis Virus, or CaCV - into Syngenta's own varieties and sold into other markets, such as The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Across two days, Syngenta staff, Kevin, Adam, Rachel and Leith met with growers, agronomists, a marketing agent from Melbourne and the DAF breeders viewing trials in Bowen and Gumlu, just south of Townsville.

As well as the main product in focus - large "blocky" green/red capsicum - the trial also included a few novel products, including a specialty capsicum suitable for branded fresh produce, and Kevin's main interest, the over-green capsicum. Varieties from this program contain twice the amount of chlorophyll than regular capsicum, meaning they have a much deeper, darker green skin. This is especially a big deal for the US market, where green capsicum varieties are the highest selling varieties.

Bringing Kevin's knowledge and experience to the local market to share with local growers and marketers was invaluable.