



Media Release

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Winner of 2008 RIRDC Rural Women's Award is true ambassador for horticulture

Peak horticulture organisation Growcom today congratulated Growcom member, and Chairman of Natures Fruit Company, Ros Smerdon, who last night was awarded the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) national Rural Women's Award.

Ms Smerdon was earlier this year awarded the Queensland Rural Women's Award.

Growcom Chief Executive Officer Jan Davis said that Ros Smerdon was a wonderful ambassador for the horticulture industry.

"Ros and I recently shared the podium at the recent Queensland Farmers' Federation's seminar in Brisbane," said Ms Davis.

"Ros is passionate about creating increased demand for avocados through value-adding and marketing. She spoke inspiringly about the benefits of growers working together to achieve greater market strength and cost savings through economies of scale.

"Natures Fruit Company is a grower owned cooperative which began on the Sunshine Coast 20 years ago and now has 300 grower shareholders spread across the country. This geographic diversity has meant the cooperative is able to supply avocado 12 months of the year, providing a real competitive advantage with major retailers such as Coles.

"Ros argues that the chain stores, independents and direct export are the industry's greatest opportunities. The days of growers delivering to the central markets and 'hoping for the best on price' in competition with their neighbours are numbered.

"By looking outside the square, Natures Fruit Company is now taking advantage of export markets in Asia and Dubai using their own branding – a distinctive and easily recognisable pink box.

"Ms Smerdon's \$10 000 bursary will enable her to travel to South Africa in order to benchmark with Westfalia, one of the largest avocado exporters in the world. She will also undertake the Australian Institute of Company Directors' course on her return.

"Ros's goal is to provide new and exciting healthy ways to eat a product that consumers are using to seeing on the shelves as whole fruit every day. By turning second grade fruit into oil and pulp for other products, her aim is also to boost the price for quality fresh whole fruit and grow the whole market for avocados," said Ms Davis.

“Ros’s findings will clearly not only benefit the avocado industry but a number of other commodities where the challenge is increasing input prices such as fertiliser, chemicals and labour, increasing supply but static domestic demand.”

Ms Smerdon is an avocado, custard apple and macadamia grower with husband Kerry at Glass House Mountains on the Sunshine Coast.

Issued by Chris Walker, Marketing Communications and Media Consultant on 07 3620 3864 or 0408 014 843 (ref: Ros Smerdon wins RIRDC Rural Women’s Award)

