



**Factsheet: preparing rural business for natural disaster**

# Using new media to boost morale

STEVE Lizzio was a reluctant volunteer when it came to using social media after Cyclone Yasi.

But he also knew there was an important job to be done to keep Australians consumers informed about the progress of the recovering banana crop.

That is what led the Mourilyan banana farmer to the world of smart phones, Facebook, and YouTube to take part in the 'Australian Bananas Fighting Back after Yasi' promotion. Soon after the cyclone, Australian Banana Promotions and the Australian Banana Growers Council devised a plan for Steve to work with a phone to record the progressive recovery of the crop. The videos spoke to a range of industry people through the recovery, tracked the progress of the crop, and sent the information out to a wide audience.

These videos became a hit across the country as banana consumers were able to track the progress of one of their staple fruits. For Steve, the use of social media and the videos was an easy and cost-effective means of getting the industry message to a wide audience, at a time when the cyclone had depleted funds for promotions. He believes the approach used has applications across most agricultural sectors.

"Times are changing," he said. "For me to get on Facebook and YouTube was a whole different ballgame, but any agricultural sector can certainly get a lot of benefit out of it."

"There are few things more important for us in agriculture than people power. The Australian banana community out there – the consumers – are so important to us. And to know that they appreciate what we try to make as Australia's number one fruit is

also really important to us."

The industry had to put its thinking caps on to come up with ideas to keep the videos interesting and entertaining. For Steve, this meant that the project kicked off with a call for consumers to name one of the first recovering trees on his farm.

The public chose Isay (Yasi spelt backwards) to mark one of the first recovering trees from the 40 hectare plantation at the Lizzio family's

**Key lessons**

- Social media is easier to use than farmers may realise.
- It is a cost-effective method of getting messages out to a diverse range of people.
- Consumers and the general public enjoy being kept informed first-hand from farmers.

Liverpool River Bananas. The projected documented the progress of the crop and Isay. This culminated in a public event and auction at Martin Place in the Sydney CBD. "It was a fantastic finale to it all and we had six growers attend. We also raised \$35,000 to breast cancer charity through the McGrath Foundation."

Steve has simple advice for anyone contemplating using social media. "As it first started out, I worried more about what the growers thought than anybody else, because at the end of the day that is who I am representing. But as time moved on I was able to visit growers and ask their views and put them on YouTube, and that made things a lot easier."

One of the growers that Steve spoke to was Graham Celledoni, who farms just to the north. "I think it was fantastic," Mr Celledoni said. "It was there for anybody who wanted to see it and he covered a range of topics."

