



AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION INQUIRY

Submission to the Standing Committee on
Agriculture & Innovation

Mr Chris Wilkins - CEO PodPlants





Dear Sir/Madam

Concerning the Agricultural Innovation Inquiry:

I was pleased to hear that the Parliaments Standing Committee on Agriculture and Innovation will be conducting an inquiry into a report on Agricultural Innovation. I am writing to express concern that there is a gap in support for technology startup companies innovating in areas of agricultural research, development and commercialisation.

Australia's emerging technology startup industry has seen an empowerment of individuals to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. As someone deeply involved both as an entrepreneur and educator in the field of technology innovation, it has been exciting to see our government embrace and support Australian innovation.

Traditionally startups have comprised of computer science and software engineering endeavors, however in recent times the application of lean startup methodology to new hardware businesses has seen increasing opportunities for Australia's technology and innovation industry.

Agriculture is certainly and industry dependent on physical processes and hardware solutions to technical problems. There is undoubtedly available support for farmers and large suppliers to the industry but to my knowledge very little exists to support agtech innovation by new business entrepreneurs.



Australia has a long and proud history of 'backyard innovators' becoming internationally recognised icons of Australian ingenuity. With the tools and technology that have recently and increasingly been developed by software startups, there has never been more opportunity for hardware entrepreneurs to launch and scale their invention internationally.

As many young people face decisions around study and employment, there is now a third option, to startup a new business focused on commercialising a novel idea, or dedicated to solving a big problem. I have seen this take the form of both young academic scientists and engineers considering commercialising their research and business students looking for great technologies to solve what they see as burning problems for society.

Industry wide there exists a problem, the step from idea to having a sale-able prototype is often a critical barrier to innovation making it to the Australian marketplace, and too many good ideas by passionate and enthusiastic entrepreneurs are lost at this early stage. Private investment, venture capital and commercialisation grants are the traditional source of funding in this space, but they are usually only a reality for businesses once multiple sales of their product have already been made. For hardware startups getting a saleable product ready for market without support is too often an insurmountable challenge worthy of due consideration.



It is my strong opinion that great benefit to the Australian economy and agriculture industry can be created via a relatively small investment in new startup agtech ventures. Students of agriculture are intrinsically passionate about their field and motivated to make meaningful contributions. There are huge numbers of great ideas, ready to become great businesses supporting the industry, and there are many great entrepreneurs ready to take on the world stage representing Australia as a leader in agricultural innovation.

I would suggest that the government open a dialogue with Australia's universities peak collaborative body on innovation, ATP Innovations, and that support for early stage agtech startups be seen as a priority in the committee's report.

Attached is an example of the type of new business opportunity this submission is suggesting should be supported.

Regards

Chris Wilkins

Startup Entrepreneur





Title: Urban Agricultural Innovation

Problem / Opportunity: Modern cities consume huge volumes of agricultural produce yet produce very little of their own - despite the availability of huge amounts of agricultural land being located on the flat concrete roofs of our cities.

Solution: Using hydroponic technology and robust greenhouse design, any traffic-able rooftop can be converted into a highly efficient food producing greenhouse for the inhabitants of the building.

Technology: Advanced aeroponics (a new type of hydroponics) allows for lightweight and cost effective systems to be constructed without soil and with a minimum of power and water in any location. These systems not only provide accelerated growth rates and increased yields but are disease resistant and higher in nutritional value.

Business Plan: This new venture (Horticultural Innovations Pty Ltd) will obtain lease agreements for building rooftop spaces. It will erect secure, yet freestanding innovative greenhouses for the cultivation of edible produce. The company will derive revenue from the sale of fresh produce to the occupants of the building.

Team: Chris Wilkins, a winner of The Australian Innovation Challenge, has a proven track record of developing ground breaking technology and new businesses in the horticulture space and he has the full support of Australia's peak business incubator ATP Innovations and The University of Sydney.

Requirement: The project requires a \$75,000 grant to establish a minimum viable product in order to demonstrate commercial viability and to be ready to scaling up the operation.