

39th AMGA Conference

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After hearing many stories about the special AMGA conference in Sydney last year, I decided to travel Down Under myself this year to experience the great Australian atmosphere. It was a wonderful experience, but unfortunately too short.

This year's edition took place in the renowned Adelaide, or more specifically Glenelg, an upscale town beautifully situated near the beach. It was a home game once again for Douglas Schirripa of Adelaide Mushrooms and Nick Femia of SA Mushrooms. My arrival at Adelaide didn't go as smoothly unfortunately. Being a young man from Holland in the mushroom industry apparently wasn't the most credible story. Fortunately, after a tough interrogation and showing my travel and residence papers, the Australian Border Security granted me entry to Australia.

The Stamford Grand Hotel where we stayed, could not be surpassed in the surrounding area. The accommodation was perfect, both our stay and the conference facilities. But what appealed to me most was the beautiful view from my room on the eleventh floor. I was told that stunning sunsets at sea only occurred at Western Australia, but I had the pleasure to admire them every day.



In the afternoon, before the opening dinner, there was an opportunity to visit a farm for

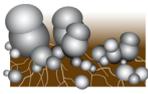
those who wanted. With a small group of curious mushroom fanatics we headed to the north of Adelaide to visit Nick Femia's farm, SA Mushrooms. After an hour on the bus, we were kindly welcomed by the employers of SA Mushrooms. After that, a very open and pleasant tour of the company followed.



We started our tour by visiting their homebuilt phase II tunnels where they process the purchased phase I compost. After watching the climate system and the machinery, ideas were exchanged by the composters to solve some problems with too short substrate. This was followed by a visit to the rooms where the incubation took place and of course all the subsequent phases were shown to us in which the white and a small portion of brown mushrooms were being cultivated.



The small group was able to ask all the questions they wanted to ask, and the team of SA Mushrooms were happy to answer every question about their 18 counting cells farm in a very candid manner. The Femia family then



proudly showed their best mushrooms, wrapped in the usual Australian 4 kg packages.

After seeing some other areas around the farm, we headed back to the hotel. The fatigue from traveling all day was noticeable during the silent ride back to the hotel. The opening dinner that evening was well organized. While enjoying delicious dishes, attention was drawn to breast cancer with the "Mushroom Go Pink" campaign. The conference was then officially opened by the Governor of South Australia and the rest of the evening was professionally hosted by the famous Australian TV chef: Fast Ed, who is also an ambassador of mushrooms in Australia.

Our second company visit, and also announced highlight of this conference, was the tour at Adelaide Mushrooms. With a group of 120 persons we left expectantly in 2 busses to the farm. On the way people were heavily speculating about how Douglas Schirripa would have addressed things. According to many, he would take every opportunity to leave a good impression.



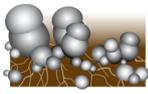
After one hour we drove into a lane and were welcomed by huge walls of straw bales with banners which indicated where the future business expansions would take place. It was grand addressed and it has certainly been not a small chore to place those bales there.



After Douglas's welcome speech, we started our tour in the compost yard. Once everyone had put on the famous jackets, hats and shoes, we were able to enter the enthal. Here were 9 phase II and III tunnels waiting for us, good for 370 ton incubated compost a week. This, to everyone's surprise, during spawning of a tunnel. Apparently, sometimes the image and a perfect Farm Walk is more important than a clinical hygiene.



After having seen the usual things such as the tunnel filler, conveyors, climate units and regulations, every group continued the tour towards pre-treatment and phase I, each group accompanied by one of the managers within the Adelaide Mushroom company. Erik de Groot, recently employed at Adelaide Mushrooms and already successful, showed its best side and explained everything in great detail to the curious Tolson family. We continued our tour along the brand new casing soil treatment hall, then walked along the outside of the farm and stopped at the entrance where we enjoyed a great lunch buffet.



After our lunch we thought we were going to continue our tour, but were called back for a delicious but somewhat heavy dessert. Fortunately we were able to digest our lunch with a fun and informative walk through the 32 cells of the farm, each measuring nearly 800 square meters. The impressive spectacle began with the appearance of the hallway, which of course was very neatly. The corridor is characterized by a long conveyor belt that leads all volle kistjes to the middle where all the other handlings take place.

Afterwards we followed the familiar pattern of climate units, refrigerator, newly filled rooms, afventileercellen and of course the first and second flights. Many people listened very closely to Erik's story and responses and were very interested in his approach. As a whole it looked good, although there is always room for improvement. Erik himself was also quite critical about the quality of the mushrooms. But in this industry it's of course essential to never be satisfied and always strive for the best.



After a nap in the bus and a quick refreshment in our room, we were ready to continue our way to our next fancy dinner. Like every evening, everything was discussed in the bar until late into the night, a well-known procedure for anyone who has ever attended these gatherings. On Saturday the conference ended in style during another good dinner. Besides the usual acknowledgements and closing words of Douglas, Murray Tonkin and Greg Seymour, whom I hereby would like to thank again for organizing this great conference, the evening ended by a performance of a mime player. I also would like to compliment Willem Derks, the new young employee of Patron AEM who was picked out of the audience by the mime player and had to play along. He really put on a great show. I personally think that this was one of the highlights of this final evening.

After a long night with the youngsters in this industry, this trip had come to an end for me. What I remember most about this trip, is that provided everything is in order, people don't have to complain in Australia. The credit for this goes entirely to the key players in this industry who, in terms of product placement and marketing of mushrooms, are acting very professional.