



AGRIBUSINESS

Nature's abundance—arable land, plentiful rain, groundwater reserves and ample sunlight—supports a thriving agribusiness sector in the Top End of the Northern Territory.

The Territory is known around the world for its production of clean, safe, high-quality food and animal products.

Well-established agricultural and horticultural ventures produce beef cattle and other livestock, seafood, fruit and vegetables, crops and forestry products. Aquaculture is also a core market, dominated by barramundi, crocodile and pearl farming.

The sector is dominated by **beef cattle production**, with around 220 pastoral leases covering 602 000 square kilometres of prime grazing land.

Most cattle are exported live to Asia—to Indonesia as the primary market, as well as Vietnam and Malaysia. Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines and China are emerging markets.

Live cattle exports set a record in 2014, with more than 490,000 cattle exported through the Port of Darwin, Australia's largest live cattle port. This sector is valued at more than AUD \$280 million a year. An AUD \$91 million beef processing facility 50km south of Darwin opened in 2015 to service cattle stations across the Top End. It can process 1,000 head of cattle a day.

The prominence of the industry has seen the Northern Territory become a preferred destination for pastoral-related conferences. These include the Australian Livestock Export Corporation LIVEXchange Conference (2015), the Australian Trucking Association Conference (2017), Nuffield Australia (2017) and the annual NT Cattlemen's Association Conference.

The Territory's **horticulture** offering is mainly mango, melon and vegetables, and this sector has more than doubled in 10 years to a value of an estimated AUD \$200 million per year. Around 50% of Australia's mangoes are produced in the NT, and annual production is about 30,000 tonnes of high-quality fruit valued at A\$70–80 million. Of mangoes exported annually from Australia, about 60% is NT fruit.

Crocodile farming is also an important part of the Top End's agribusiness sector, with a value of over AUD\$54 million. Expertise in the science and management of crocodiles, whether for production or in visitor safety management, is one of the key strengths of the Northern Territory. The NT industry leads the world in the production of high-quality saltwater crocodile skins, which supply high-end fashion markets in the USA, Europe and Asia. Six farms operate using sustainable practices in the Top End, creating jobs for Indigenous people in their communities.

Aquaculture is also a key sector, with pearls from the silver lipped pearl oyster currently the most significant aquaculture contributor to the NT economy, with an estimated annual value of more than AUD \$10 million.

The Paspaley Group boasts a 75 year pioneering heritage in the pearling industry and is internationally renowned as a producer. They are also a world leader in the research and development of the fragile pinctada maxima oyster, as well as sustainable aquaculture practices. A visit to The Pearl Room at Paspaley headquarters is frequently a highlight for conference attendees, enabling them to undertake a behind-the-scenes tour to learn more about the Australian South Sea Pearl and the story of the family behind the international brand. By arrangement, tours for small private groups are also available to the company's pearl farms.

The iconic barramundi fish is the Territory's next most valuable aquaculture commodity, with the NT's **Humpty Doo Barramundi Farm** winning the Large Business Seafood Award at the National Seafood Industry Awards in 2017.

The Sea Farms Group, **Project Sea Dragon**, is an AUD \$1.5 billion large-scale aquaculture project in development in the Territory, which aims to produce more than 100,000 tonnes of black tiger prawns per year. The largest aquaculture development ever proposed in Australia and one of the largest ventures of its type in the world, 'Project Sea Dragon' aims to develop 10,000 hectares of world-scale, land-based aquaculture on a cattle station in the Territory's Keep River region.

The Territory's forestry industry is small by world standards, but the NT has the largest hardwood timber development in Australia: an African mahogany hardwood plantation, a plantation of acacia manguem on the Tiwi Islands that will supply the Asian woodchip market, and Indian Sandalwood in the Katherine area, which will be harvested to meet international demand for aromatic oils and high-value timber. Premium Territory-grown orchids and heliconias are sold from florists in Australia's capital cities.

The importance of **biosecurity** to the future of Northern Australia's agricultural industry will be safeguarded by a AUD \$8 million investment in a biosecurity hub being established in Darwin. The facility is a joint project between the Australian and Northern Territory Governments and aims to protect Australia's agricultural industries from foreign pests and diseases.

The Northern Territory is already being recognised for its ground-breaking research into **Cucumber Green Mottle Mosaic Virus**, winning an AUD \$1.2 million research contract with Horticulture Innovation Australia. The virus affects cucurbit plants, such as squash, pumpkin and zucchini, making them unsaleable. Outcomes from the research project are being shared across Australia and internationally.