

Chapter 6

Australia: Advancing Health and Sustainability: The Case of Plant Doctor

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Introduction

Plant Doctor is a leading family-based company on the Gold Coast that promotes plant, animal and human health through an expanding range of products and services. The family business continues to develop and market eco-friendly products and deliver ethical, economical and effective health and well-being solutions. Plant Doctor's clientele includes garden and lawn enthusiasts, organic and sustainability-focused people and pet owners and health-conscious individuals seeking alternative health supplements. The owner of the family business is Adam Fitzhenry. Plant Doctor is the legacy of the late Daniel Fitzhenry whose vision was to combine the best of both traditional and organic ingredients to formulate premium products that were ahead of their time. His vision saw him combining the best of both traditional and organic ingredients to formulate premium products that were ahead of their time and have since become the benchmark. The case aims to outline how the Plant Doctor provides products and services that contribute to Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG#3) Health and Well-being through delivering economical and effective environmental natural products to promote plant, human and animal health. [Fig. 1](#) shows the owner and staff of Plant Doctor.

The Mission of Plant Doctor

Plant Doctor's original focus was manufacturing and supplying an exceptional range of environmentally friendly fertilisers and soil conditioners designed to suit Australian conditions. However, the family-based company has shifted its focus

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Fig. 1. The Owner Adam Fitzhenry (Centred) and the Staff of Plant Doctor.

towards plant, animal and human health. The mission of Plant Doctor is to develop and market eco-friendly products that deliver ethical, economical and effective health and well-being solutions.

Products and Services Offered by Plant Doctor

Plant Doctor's loyal customers include garden and lawn enthusiasts, organic and sustainability-focused people and pet owners and health-conscious individuals

seeking alternative health supplements. Plant Doctor has developed a range of products for:

- Agriculture, horticulture and hydroponics;
- Turf and landscaping;
- Home garden;
- Animal health;
- Human health;
- Indoor gardening.

(Plant Doctor, 2023)

Specialising in plant, animal and human health, Plant Doctor delivers economical and effective environmental solutions and has created many natural products to help rectify problems with poor soils and promote plant, human and animal health.

Background to Plant Doctor

Plant Doctor is the legacy of the late Daniel Fitzhenry who had worked in the agricultural and horticultural industries for over 30 years. His vision saw him combining the best of both traditional and organic ingredients to formulate premium products that were ahead of their time and have since become the benchmark. Daniel gained his knowledge from some of Australia's largest companies, learning how to source the best products from locally, nationally and overseas. Daniel's eldest son Adam took over the company in 2015 and has continued his father's legacy. Adam's fresh set of eyes and ideas saw the company introduce new retail products to complement the commercial and farming products Daniel had focused on.

In 2017, Adam took over as Managing Director of his father's small company, Agtech Natural Resources. At the same time, Adam decided to further develop the Plant Doctor online store www.plantdoctor.com.au. The company previously had online sales starting in 2009, but under the new leadership of Adam, there was a greater focus on the online side of the business.

The initial focus was to transfer the offering of earth-friendly agricultural fertiliser products into the retail and commercial markets. The business also developed niche organic food products that had small market demand. The business' success in recent years has enabled Adam to bring onboard family members including his sister, eldest daughter, son and two of their partners, to continue his father's legacy.

In 2022, the company decided to split the food manufacturing business from their fertiliser manufacturing to allow the expansion of the group businesses. The companies that are the Agtech Global Group of Companies include:

- Agtech Natural Resources – Imports, fertiliser production/manufacturing/packaging with a focus on prioritising naturally resourced or organic and organic-based (hybridised) products.

- Agtech Food Manufacturing – encapsulation and packaging of nourishing food-based products to improve health outcomes for users.
- Agtech Freeze Drying – freeze dries, mills and packages, lesser used food stream products (animal offal and undesired fruit and vegetable) providing a value-added product to resell into the market, reducing waste.
- Plant Doctor retails a collection of products our other companies produce or package under their brands or resells some of their client’s products as a showcase of works.

The fertiliser company is now known as Agtech Food Manufacturing Pty Ltd. Also in October 2022, the company opened a Freeze Drying business (Agtech Freeze Drying Pty Ltd) to process and supply clients with various long-shelf-life food products. The food is mostly in powder form for their capsule production which is part of the food manufacturing business.

All businesses are family-owned and operated. The companies including the Plant Doctor pride themselves on old-fashioned customer service and aim to make this their unique value proposition. In 2019, 2020 and 2022, Plant Doctor won the Gold Coast Excellence Award for Family Business (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Gold Coast Business Awards for Excellence – Family Business for Plant Doctor in 2019.

Since 2017, the business has increased turnover by a factor of 10 and now employs approximately 20 people. The business has 4 warehouses with 3 on the Gold Coast, Queensland and another fertiliser manufacturing warehouse in Alstonville, Northern New South Wales (NSW).

SDG#3 and the Plant Doctor

Plant Doctor can contribute to specific targets under SDG#3, which focuses on ensuring good health and well-being. The focus on well-being is directly visible when entering the website of Plant Doctor. Fig. 3 is a screenshot of the website of Plant Doctor and demonstrates the commitment to health and well-being through their products. It is also a signifier of the unique value proposition of the family company.



Fig. 3. Screenshot of the Main Page Banner of Plant Doctor Website.

Plant Doctor can contribute to SDG#3 targets in several ways:

Target 3.4 of SDG3# aims to reduce by one-third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being. The Plant Doctor raises awareness about the importance of healthy plants in preventing diseases and promoting the overall well-being of customers. Thus, they have an impact on health and well-being through the types of products they provide and the secondary benefits of healthy living environments. The activity of gardening itself also contributes to mental health and physical health outcomes.

Target 3.4 of SDG#3 focuses on promoting mental health and well-being. Plant Doctor has an indirect positive effect on mental well-being by encouraging people to engage in nature engagement and community gardening, all of which contribute to reduced stress and improved mental health. The food products also have a health focus in terms of organic ingredients that contribute to overall well-being.

Target 3.8: Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential healthcare services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all:

The Plant Doctor can promote access to safe and nutritious food, indirectly contributing to improved health outcomes and reducing the burden on healthcare systems.

Target 3.9 of SDG#3 aims to substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination by 2030. Plant Doctor through the choice of their products encourages organic and sustainable gardening practices that minimise the use of hazardous chemicals, contributing to cleaner air, water and soil.

Target 3.9 aims to substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination. Plant Doctor has undertaken education and outreach through their news feeds and blog promoting environmentally friendly and organic products. These activities educate communities about the harmful effects of chemical pesticides and encourage the adoption of organic and sustainable gardening practices.

By providing plant health advice, promoting sustainable gardening practices and engaging with communities, the Plant Doctor can have a positive impact on various SDG#3 targets, contributing to better health and well-being for individuals and communities on the Gold Coast. While Plant Doctors does not explicitly state the alignment of their business with SDG#3 health and well-being, they have the mission of SDG#3 at the heart of their business model. The business communicates its mission of the health and well-being of plants, animals and people through documentation of its news articles on its website and posting regular blogs outlining its mission. They also have an extensive social media presence where they not only market their products but also communicate their mission of health and well-being which underpin their business.

Key Activities of Plant Doctor and SDG#3 Health and Well-Being

The key activities of Plant Doctor include sales of products in the following areas:

- Plants and lawns;
- Health and food;
- Commercial;
- Animals;
- Manufacturing.

Plants and Lawns

Plant Doctor offers a variety of natural, organic and traditional products that help create healthier soils and plants. Their fertilisers are offered in liquid, soluble,

controlled release and granular formats and include seaweed extracts, and fulvic and humic acids. Plant Doctor offers a variety of natural, organic and traditional agriculture, horticulture and hydroponic products that help create healthier soils, plants and food. Their fertiliser range includes organic, liquid/soluble, controlled release, granular and mineral fertiliser. Importantly for the Plant Doctor's contribution to SDG#3, they offer a range of products that provide plants with insect control and protection through natural herbicide technologies and fertilisers and soil conditioners made from natural resources. This has a significant impact on the health of the people who use these products.

Health and Food

Plant Doctor also provides health and food products. Their Agtech Food Manufacturing products offer customers a variety of natural health products that can be used to improve day-to-day health. Their in-house brand, Nourished Nutrients, includes fossil shell flour (diatomaceous earth) which aims to improve gut health and better skin, hair and nails. It also has micronised zeolite to help remove heavy metals and toxins from the body and humic fulvic concentrate (HFC) to boost the immune system and for general overall well-being. They also stock well-known superfoods such as lemon myrtle, turmeric, moringa, MSM, magnesium oil and neem oil.

Commercial Fertiliser

Plant Doctor offers a wide range of bulk commercial fertilisers and farm supply needs. Their products significantly support plant growth and improve soil and turf conditions, providing sustained nutrition and revitalisation. Importantly for this case, the materials used are naturally based and thus have health and well-being secondary impacts on the people who use the products and the horticultural location where the products are applied. Plant Doctor prides itself on its world-leading technology to produce farm agriculture liquid fertiliser and animal feed and supplements.

Animal Health

Plant Doctor also offers a variety of natural health supplements for a range of animal needs. Plant Doctors state that 'just like humans, animals have varying dietary deficiencies, and we've seen the evidence and the many benefits from our customer's pets and livestock over the years by them adding specially sourced premium organic components into their feeds' (Plant Doctor, 2023). While not directly contributing to SDG#3, the focus on health and well-being in the environments in which people live including their animals (pets and livestock) is important in the mission of the family business.

Plant Doctor supplies exceptional earth-friendly products to help you grow – whether your plants, your animals, or even yourself. Our products give you direct access to the science and technology driving the agriculture and horticultural revolution that’s delivering ethical, economical and effective health and well-being solutions. Plant Doctor has developed a range of products using Mother Earth’s natural resources such as botanical extracts, humates and silicates.

(Plant Doctor, 2023)

The Plant Doctor positions SDG#3 as a central part of their business model. Thus, their return on investment is derived from the positioning of health and well-being in all products they supply, whether that is related to human health or plant health.

SDG#3 and the Plant Doctor Stakeholders

The Plant Doctor and associated group of companies do not have many stakeholders because they are small to medium enterprises and very much client-focused. The main stakeholders are customers, staff, key companies in the supply chain and industry advisory groups. The owner of the family business, Adam, says that the main influence directing the business model of the company is customer demand. The demand for organic or environmentally friendly products is growing and the products and services offered by the company reflect changes in the demand for individual products, but all are contained within the overall trend towards healthier products for plants, animals and people. Although organic products are still more expensive, Adam says the opportunities in transition to fully organic products as an important ideal for society. This is reflected in the range of products that are not fully organic, but their environmentally based reducing harmful and toxic substances from the living and work environments where the products are eventually used. The suppliers are therefore vital for the business model of the company. Supplies are also vital for the company as one of the unique value propositions of the company is excellent customer service and timely delivery. To ensure this business model is intact, the suppliers of the company of vital and good relations with these organisations allow for the Plant Doctor to be successful. As the trend for more healthy products continues, the transition from environmentally friendly products to fully organic products will continue. The company is very attuned to changes in market demand for environmental products that align with the continued trend towards healthy people, plants and animals.

Reporting Impact of the Plant Doctor Focus on Health and Well-Being

The main way that Plant Doctor measures impact is through testimonials and feedback from customers. The value proposition of health and well-being has resonated with the customers, and the diverse and increasing range of natural-based and organic products offered exemplifies a positive impact in the community they serve. Also, the awards that Plant Doctor received are a testament to the impact and success of the business. In 2019, Plant Doctor was selected as Best Family Business for August. Also in 2020, Plant Doctor received another award from the Gold Coast Business Awards for Best Family Business for the year, followed in May 2022 as Business of the Month for the category of Manufacturing (shown in Fig. 4).

Troy (Production and Technical) and Jami (Corporate Manager) from the team at Plant Doctor said, ‘Our good old fashioned service assists us with being able to respond to customer’s needs, we try to have open avenues of contact for our customers to have direct access to us through, a manned phone line, social media and a well watched emails serviced by staff who care and want to help find the best solution for people making contact with us. Some days during COVID-19 lockdowns the phonenumber was the only access some of our customers had to a conversation out of their homes, especially some of our elderly customers, and it was great to be the friendly voice of light to a dark time’.



Fig. 4. Current Employees of Plant Doctor Receive Awards.

Plant Doctor believes healthy living and eating is a right. They find an open mind is needed to fulfil their clients diverse needs. One the one hand their clients want to control of their food chain by growing food at home whereas others want supplements to top up their food supply with missing key nutrition or elements. Keeping active in online spaces where their customers interact with each other allows Plant Doctor to keep ahead of the competition and gives insight into gaps in the market to focus their product development and innovation. Essentially being a small to medium enterprise gives them the ability to steer the ship in a new direction when required. They claim to listen and more importantly they claim to listen:

At Plant Doctor we recognise that not all people can afford to go organic or renewable at every part of their life, but may be able to introduce it in smaller areas, as our suppliers have more products available we are working towards implementing and updating our products to include healthier and environmentally friendlier options at an affordable price. These changes are small but do have impacts beyond our own space, we all need to start somewhere.

(Troy Edge, 2023)

The Plant Doctor has a philosophical position on the transition to deep sustainability. They believe most people, for example, can't drive an electric car right now or quit burning coal for electricity, but people can think about transition and business can assist in the transition. Companies like Plant Doctor can think of transition products and start to source products and services from like-minded sustainable-oriented businesses. Plant Doctor has renewable energy sources and extensive recycling. All their sites have solar power or purchase from renewable energy to reduce their need for fossil fuel electricity and assist with air pollution wherever possible. Plant Doctor utilised recycled cardboard and non-virgin plastics for packaging. They also have separated waste streams and have access to a farm where they dispose of any excess fertiliser to pasture, ensuring the business has all its waste recycled or utilised as much as possible before landfill is used as an option. As the Plant Doctor develops, they will identify more places to improve and adopt changes.

When the Plant Doctor first 'discovered' the SDGs, they didn't realise how much their business was already aligned with the SDGs. The family business did not need to change the business model and noted that having an alignment with the SDGs is just good business practice. The Plant Doctor has a natural desire to have a sustainable business, in an attempt to leave our world a better place and not just to pursue SDG#3 but to contribute to all SDGs.

Challenges of Working With SDG#3 Health and Well-Being

Plant Doctor faces several challenges. These challenges can impact its operations, growth and overall success. The first major challenge is the seasonal nature of the

horticultural industry. The demand for plant care services is seasonal, with peak periods during spring and summer. Managing workload fluctuations and maintaining consistent revenue throughout the year is offset by other elements of the business and also providing online services so local geography is less of an issue. A growing population also allows for increased demand for products, and this allows other plant care professionals an opportunity to become established. Focusing on the value proposition of health and well-being is a way to overcome this competition and retain customers. As part of this, Plant Doctor stays up to date with the latest horticultural practices and plant health trends, but this requires continuous learning and development.

Another challenge is educating customers about the importance of the health and well-being dimensions of the products they purchase. Organic products and general healthcare products tend to be more expensive, and thus, educating potential customers on the value perception of such products is a challenge. Marketing is important in establishing a strong brand presence to create and reach their target audience in a competitive market.

Plant Doctor is also scaling up operations, and this can be a challenge. As the business grows, maintaining quality standards while scaling operations to meet demand can be challenging, particularly in terms of hiring and training skilled staff. Also during this time-building and maintaining positive relationships with clients and stakeholders, understanding their needs and delivering satisfactory results are critical for long-term success. Training new staff is vital.

Lastly, the family business prides itself on customer satisfaction and displays customer reviews throughout its online presence. Plant Doctor has a continual challenge of ensuring a high level of customer satisfaction. Managing issues effectively is crucial for maintaining a positive reputation. To overcome these challenges, the Plant Doctor business needs a strategic approach to keep SDG#3 Health and Well-Being as a central value proposition if it wants to contribute to SDG#3.

Business and Greater Good

The market for organic products is steadily increasing in Australia and internationally. In Australia, the increase in demand for organic products has increased dramatically. In 2022, 56% of Australian shoppers have purchased organic in the last year, and of those people, 62% of shoppers cited personal health as a motivator for their initial organic purchase. There has been a 38% growth in organic certified operators between 2011 and 2022 ([Ausorganic, 2023](#)).

Plant Doctor has been a pioneer in health and well-being in the region and will continue to provide natural and organic products for people plants and animals. The family business contributes to the greater good through its value proposition. The rising consumer demand for organic products will see an increase in demand for Plant Doctor's 'normal' business activities, and thus, there will be greater environmental benefits arising from their business activities.

What Next for Plant Doctor and SDG#3?

The future development on the cards for Plant Doctor and associated companies in the group includes identifying new markets in horticultural products that are organic or organic-based. The capacity of the company to pivot to producing new products is high as a result of developing in-house packaging and labelling facilities as well as warehouse capacity for storage and dispatch. Expanding the range of products will overcome some of the challenges outlined above like seasonality and also price competitiveness. Plant Doctor and associated companies also have learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic and have strengthened relations with suppliers of products. In the future, Plant Doctor and the group will continue to place health and well-being as a core element of the business model and by doing so can advance the goal of SDG#3.

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