

Spray whiz puts bugs to work

By Bridget Brady

DEVON Meadows vegetable grower Darren Schreurs' approach of letting the good bugs do the hard work has paid off.

The farmer won the top prize at Australia's inaugural SPRAY awards in New South Wales last week.

The Syngenta SPRAY awards, which stands for Sustainable, Productive and Responsible Applicator of the Year, was established to find the country's best farm spray operator.

Mr Schreurs, 40, said being Integrated Pest Management (IPM) accredited played a role in his success at the competition.

The IPM approach, which he said was not so commonly used, aims to not harm the beneficial insects in crops, meaning more pest specific products are used and not as often.

He described it as a more sustainable way of controlling pests.

"There are so many little insects out there that are helping us. We believe in a happy balance," he said.

Mr Schreurs works with his father and two brothers at their 160-hectare property – Peter Schreurs and Sons Vegetable Farm. The business produces mainly leeks and exports Australia-wide and overseas.

Judges of the awards said Mr Schreurs' knowledge of IPM, as well as safety and chemical storage facilities were impressive.



Devon Meadows vegetable grower Darren Schreurs won first prize in the national SPRAY awards last week. 35245
Picture: Bridget Brady

Judge Peter Hughes said Mr Schreurs' facilities stood out.

"Even though his property wasn't as big as some of the other entrants', Darren had a lot of complexity to deal with. Without a doubt, this was best practice at its best and I hope that many others will learn a lot from Darren's experiences," Mr Hughes said.

The prize for Mr Schreurs is a \$15,000 study tour grant to the United Kingdom to further his knowledge and share experiences with experts.

He said he looked forward to visiting the world's largest leek farm and talking to farmers about spraying. "It should be exciting. I'm looking forward to it."