

# EYES ON POTATOES

A U S T R A L I A N P O T A T O I N D U S T R Y C O U N C I L N E W S L E T T E R

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## Technico brings new AGRICO varieties to Australia

Australian farmers will soon be able to access newly introduced varieties of fresh market and processing potatoes following the signing of an agreement between Technico Pty Limited and AGRICO, the largest single producer of seed and new varieties in Europe.

Technico has announced the signing of an exclusive representation agreement with AGRICO which produces in excess

of a million tonnes of seed and ware potatoes annually. The agreement licenses Technico to produce and distribute a number of fresh market and processing varieties throughout Australia.

These varieties include the high yielding, red variety *Kuroda*, as well as the popular varieties *Cunera*, *Maranca* and *Markies*.

Technico will now commence working with seed growers throughout Australia to introduce the new AGRICO varieties.

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### Centre Feature

Communication Plan Summary

## Seed potatoes subject to GST

The Potato Growers Association of Western Australia asked the Australian Tax Office for a ruling on the following question -

**Do seed growers charge GST on seed potatoes when they are selling the seed to ordinary potato growers?**

The private ruling given was -

**Seed potatoes are subject to GST as they are not considered food for human consumption.**

# Editorial

This year is throwing plenty of challenges our way. We've survived the Millenium Bug, the love bug, and next month it's the GST! For those who have hoped the GST will go away, have a look at the article on page 8 for some insight on how the GST might affect your potato business.

According to the Australian Tax Office, many farming businesses have still not registered for their ABN number, an oversight that *may prove very costly*.

And if the GST has prompted you to consider buying a computer to assist your farm accounting process, but you are not sure what you need, check out the article on page 10.

On a positive note, it seems the potato industry is hungry for a national conference. With two months to go before Potatoes 2000, over half the available places have been taken (see page 9). So if you want to go, dig out the registration package included in the March *Eyes on Potatoes* and book your place. Alternatively, you can register online at [www.sapro.com.au](http://www.sapro.com.au)

*Eyes on Potatoes* is produced by the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, Tasmania, on behalf of the Australian Potato Industry Council.

## EYES ON POTATOES



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*Eyes on Potatoes* is distributed free of charge to all participants of the Australian Potato Industry with assistance from the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation and the Potato Levy.



# APIC R&D Committee Update

## Breeding program review

The review of the breeding program entered the final stages with the commissioning of a project team to develop a plan and identify strategies for development and commercialisation of new potato varieties and to establish clear priorities for future R&D potato breeding projects.

Unfortunately the review has been a drawn out process but it is important that all the alternatives are explored and the committee satisfied with the direction being taken. As often occurs existing funding arrangements are no longer affordable so an acceptable compromise is needed to provide the best outcome for the industry.

Future plans for the breeding program will be discussed at the Potatoes 2000 conference in Adelaide in late July.

## GST implications

Advice given to HRDC is that all horticultural levies imposed under Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Act 1999 are exempt from paying a GST. This includes the Potato R&D levy. However, HRDC will have to pay GST for the R&D undertaken on its behalf but will be reimbursed as a tax credit.



CSIRO staff and the APIC R&D Committee outside the Container Test Facility at the CSIRO Division of Food Sciences and Technology laboratories in North Ryde, NSW. The facility enables shipping containers to be put through simulated voyages to test new approaches for transporting produce.

## Promoting the Australian potato industry

A proposal was supported to produce a brochure promoting the Australian potato industry at the World Potato Congress to be held in the Netherlands in September 2000.

## Max McKenna retires

Tasmanian representative Max McKenna indicated he would not be seeking reappointment to the committee.

As a founding member, Max has been an important contributor who has always strongly represented Tasmania and provided a depth of experience, which has been valued by others on the committee.

On behalf of the committee and the industry I would like to thank Max for his excellent contribution over many years.

## Communication Plan

A communication plan for the industry has been accepted by the committee and will provide a blueprint for activities over the next five years. The plan has a strong emphasis on improving awareness, access to and understanding of information generated from the research and development program.

## New Zealand connection

Following on from the APIC R&D Committee representatives visiting New Zealand in February, the Chair of the New Zealand Potato Research & Development Committee of VegFed, Doug Whitfield and Veg Fed Executive Officer, Ron Gall were observers at the March meeting in Sydney.

Both Committees have agreed to identify common R&D issues that will be developed into jointly funded projects and provide benefits to potato industries in both countries.

## Committee visits local facilities

As the meeting was held at HRDC headquarters at Gordon in northern Sydney the committee took the opportunity to visit the Snack Brands crisping factory at Smithfield and CSIRO Food Science laboratory at North Ryde.

The next APIC R&D Committee meeting will be held on the Sunday before the Potatoes 2000 conference in Adelaide.

*Dr Jack Meagher*  
Chairman

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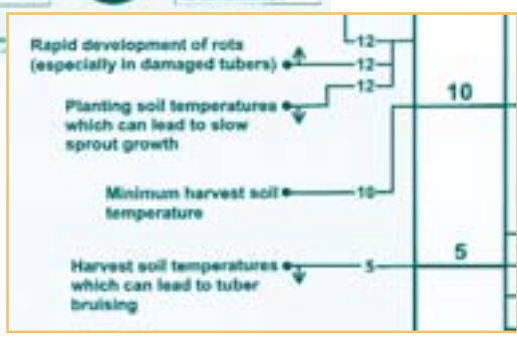
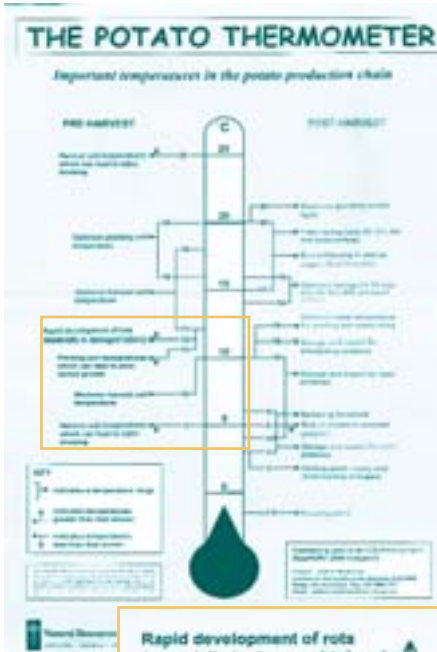
## Correction

In the March edition of *Eyes on Potatoes* on page 15 in the South Australian Round-up an outbreak of bacterial wilt was reported on the Northern Adelaide Plains.

After further laboratory testing it was found that the disease was not bacterial wilt and in early March all trade restrictions were lifted.

Unfortunately *Eyes on Potatoes* had already been printed and distribution was underway before the editors or the author of the article became aware of the changed situation.

*Leigh Walters*  
Assistant Editor - *Eyes on Potatoes*



# Chips

If you are interested in the South African potato industry, you could checkout *Chips* – the official publications of Potatoes South Africa.

*Chips* does have some interesting articles but be warned that only about one-third of the articles are in English. The remainder are in Afrikaans.

**Copies of Chips may be obtained by**

**☎ (0011) 012 323 1696**

**or fax (0011) 012 325 1677 or alternatively**

**check out their website at [www.potatoes.co.za](http://www.potatoes.co.za) as most of the content seems to be in English.**



## The Potato Thermometer

Agriculture Victoria has produced a new poster showing the important temperatures at various stages in the potato production chain. Entitled "The Potato Thermometer", the A3-sized poster covers both pre- and post-harvest stages and should be a handy reference, particularly in Quality Assurance programs.

The Thermometer is being distributed to Victorian growers, but is also available to others (free of charge) by contacting

**Andrew Henderson at Agriculture Victoria, Knoxfield**

**☎ (03) 9210 9222**

**Fax (03) 9800 3521**

**✉ [andrew.henderson@nre.vic.gov.au](mailto:andrew.henderson@nre.vic.gov.au)**

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# Prevent the spread of bacterial wilt with better waste management

Given recent outbreaks of bacterial wilt in several growing regions around Australia it is timely to review management practices for this disease to avoid major outbreaks and losses. Outbreaks of bacterial wilt disease could have devastating effects on all sectors of the industry and can prevent the export of fresh potatoes, especially seed.

Bacterial wilt (also known as sore eye, jammy eye and brown rot) is one of the most serious diseases of potatoes. It can be spread by infected tubers (seed), infested soil, contaminated water, plant debris, contaminated machinery, insect pests and nematodes, contact between roots, rain splash and in dust particles carried by wind.

## Hygiene

The main way bacterial wilt is spread from paddock to paddock and from season to season is by potato waste.

It is very common among potato growers to return waste (oversized, misshapen and diseased tubers) to the paddock during harvest. Although these tubers may be fed to livestock, there is a real danger of spreading potato diseases, including bacterial wilt, to other paddocks as the livestock are moved around.



Common sense suggests that growers should not release their livestock to feed on rejected tubers left on the paddock, then allow them to move to other paddocks where potatoes will be planted next season. A similar risk exists if contaminated bins and machinery are moved from paddock to paddock.

Hygiene measures will not be effective unless potato waste is managed carefully during harvest. Most potato harvesters used by growers are not designed to carry bins for potato waste. Growers are urged to consider modifying their machines to carry bins or bags on the harvesters to collect rejected tubers.



## Rotation

Bacterial wilt can survive in the soil for at least two years, so it is highly recommended to rotate potato crops with pastures and cereals. At least 2 years' rotation (preferably 5 years) will reduce the risk of a bacterial wilt outbreak. Growers are advised to control self-sown and solanaceous weed hosts in potato paddocks because they can be a source of bacterial wilt infection.

## Chemical control

There are no effective chemical treatments for bacterial wilt. The disease must be controlled through the use of good cropping and hygiene practices.

## Further information

Following the recent bacterial wilt outbreaks, the potato team at Agriculture Victoria has taken the initiative to collect information about the disease by communicating with growers, industry people, packers and specialists in this field in Australia and overseas.

A pamphlet on managing bacterial wilt of potato has been developed by Agriculture Victoria and made available to the Victorian potato industry. The pamphlet includes preventive measures and hygiene practices that can be used to reduce the risk of spreading the disease.

*For further information on bacterial wilt or to obtain a copy of the pamphlet "Managing Bacterial Wilt of Potato" contact:*

*Dr Ghassan Al Soboh  
Agriculture Victoria*

*☎ 03 9210 9222*

*✉ Ghassan.Alsoboh@nre.vic.gov.au*

## Interesting internet site



[www.potatonews.com](http://www.potatonews.com)

This site features a wide range of potato information including news, contacts, research information, market information (Northern Hemisphere) and links. The site is run by consultancy group, Global Potato Focus, based in Canada.

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# Southern Choice – an integrated system

South Australian company, Southern Choice, is enjoying a period of rapid expansion both domestically and internationally and is well on the way to achieving its goal of international recognition as a successful supplier of quality early generation seed, fresh potatoes and potato products.

Formed in 1997, Southern Choice offers a fully integrated solution to the production of quality seed and fresh potatoes for both the processing and ware markets.

## Minituber technology

The company has developed and documented a system for the production of minitubers on a large scale. This system offers a number of advantages including increased yields and significant cost reductions.

## Seed production

Southern Choice has also developed a QA based system for the growing of seed and supply of fresh potatoes.

Seed sales in excess of 1000 tonnes have already been made, with waiting lists for most commercial varieties, including fresh and processing.



General Manager, Peter Fairchild, at the Southern Choice booth at "Food & Hotel Asia" in Singapore, March 2000.

## Fresh market exports

Southern Choice has actively developed a brand and reputation in South East Asia for the consistent supply of quality potatoes to niche markets.

Using a forward contract system, Southern Choice Moondrop<sup>®</sup> potatoes are now represented in most major supermarkets in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. Promotional backup through point of sales promotional materials, advice on storage systems and best positioning for sales, forms part of the approach.



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The company has been able to expand this work with assistance from both state and federal government grants, and is currently working with the Food and Fibre Chain program to further develop this marketing approach.

Subject to approval, case studies based on this approach will be progressively released to the industry over the next two years.

## Marketing

Southern Choice has lead in the development of new marketing initiatives, such as the introduction of a 15 kilogram display box and microwave browning of potatoes and vegetables (patents granted and pending in most major international countries). The latter is nearing completion for launching into the commercial market.

The company is currently finalising a new web site, providing international access to all products as well as the ability to order seed and fresh products "on-line". Seed and fresh customers will be able to "view" before they buy without having to wait for samples or undertake expensive trips to view growing crops. The new web site can be visited starting June 12, 2000. Simply type in [www.schoice.com.au](http://www.schoice.com.au).



*Dr Peter Fairchild*  
*General Manager*

☎ 08 8724 2460

✉ [PFairchild@schoice.com.au](mailto:PFairchild@schoice.com.au)



## Mark Heap now at Simplot

Mark Heap has taken up a new position as Senior Agronomist - Research & Development with Simplot Australia. Mark was previously Project Manager (Potatoes) based at Manjimup with Agriculture Western Australia.

He is now based at Simplot's Kensington Office in Melbourne, and is working on a broad range of vegetable agronomy issues for mainland and Tasmanian factories. Potatoes for French fry processing will be a major part of this work and Mark looks forward to this opportunity to continue his association with the potato industry.

Mark can be contacted at:

*Simplot Australia Pty Limited*  
*Private Bag 4, Flemington, Victoria, 3031.*

☎ 03 92799724

✉ [mark.heap@simplot.com.au](mailto:mark.heap@simplot.com.au)

# GST prod

Whether you like it or not, it is here and if you are not prepared, the GST will cost you money. Past experience in other countries has shown that some businesses go broke as a result of not coming to terms with the GST requirements. Hopefully you will not become one of the statistics!

If you have not already registered for the GST and requested an ABN (Australian Business Number) you are likely to be losing money very soon. If you do not have an ABN those buying goods from you are obliged to withhold 48.5% of the payment for tax. You will also not be able to claim back GST that has been charged on goods you purchase.

If that is not bad enough, you cannot backdate your tax credits prior to registering for the GST and the ABN if registration takes place after 1 July. So if you register in three months time you will be losing 48.5% on all items sold and paying 10% extra on what you buy for that period when the GST applies. Not a good way to make a profit!

The following are some points of interest, but for a more detailed explanation, refer to "Your farm business and the GST". More information is also available on the Australian Tax Office (ATO) and Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (AFFA) internet sites or from your local accountant.

- Although food is GST free, most of the goods and services that are used to produce the food are not. Seed potatoes attract a GST (see ATO ruling p1) and so do most of the other items such as fertiliser and fuel.
- It is up to you to remember to add GST on things you sell that are not for human consumption.
- If you sell something that is not for human consumption you will need to produce a tax invoice or be supplied with a recipient generated tax invoice. If you are buying items for the business ask for a tax invoice as this is required to claim GST back from the ATO. This invoice has to be supplied within 28 days of the request. Look at the possibility of merging the tax invoice and your normal invoice into one to reduce paperwork.
- Some items like irrigation water, loans and life assurance do not attract a GST. So check out the exemptions and be clear as to when they apply.
- Especially if you are paying quarterly, plan purchases and sales, where possible, to minimise the impact on cashflow. If you buy a large item at the beginning of a quarter then you will be out of pocket until you receive the refund at the beginning of the next quarter.

- At auctions, the GST can be included before or after the auction. Whatever approach is used should be made clear by the auctioneer, otherwise find out before the auction begins.
- When selling potatoes through an agent on a commission basis the commission attracts a GST.

There is a bit of work to do, it does take time to get your mind around the issues, but if you ignore the changes, you are not likely to stay in business!

## Sources of information



[www.affa.gov.au/taxreform](http://www.affa.gov.au/taxreform)



[taxreform.ato.gov.au](http://taxreform.ato.gov.au)



### *Your farm business and the GST*

The book is available from state farmer associations, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (AFFA) in Canberra and can be viewed on AFFA internet site at [www.affa.gov.au/taxreform](http://www.affa.gov.au/taxreform).

*(Compiled with the assistance of Lorne McLurg, GST Project Manager, South Australian Farmers Federation)*

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# Potatoes 2000

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Interest in the national potato research, development and technology transfer conference in Adelaide on 31 July to 3 August has been excellent. There are only 250 seats available and we were past the half way mark with registrations by the middle of May. So if you want a seat register soon.

Industry support for the conference has been excellent with sponsors including - IAMA, Hifert, Aventis, Novartis, Simplot, Phosyn, Southern Choice, Pivot, SAPITT, Food for the Future, SprayGro, Incitec, Landpower, APIC, HRDC, PIRSA and Potato Growers of SA (SAFF).

The conference will be the place to be if you are interested in keeping up with the latest technology and thinking in the industry. Few events bring so many of the industry participants together in one place. The opportunity for learning about new developments and trends, and making new business contacts is considerable.

Trade exhibitions will cover a wide range of topics and there will be the opportunity to view many of the currently available potato publications from both Australia and overseas. The industry's new pest and disease book will also be launched.

For information refer to the registration booklet sent out with the March edition of *Eyes on Potatoes* or contact:

**Potatoes 2000 Secretariat**  
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 📠 Fax: (08) 8227 0251  
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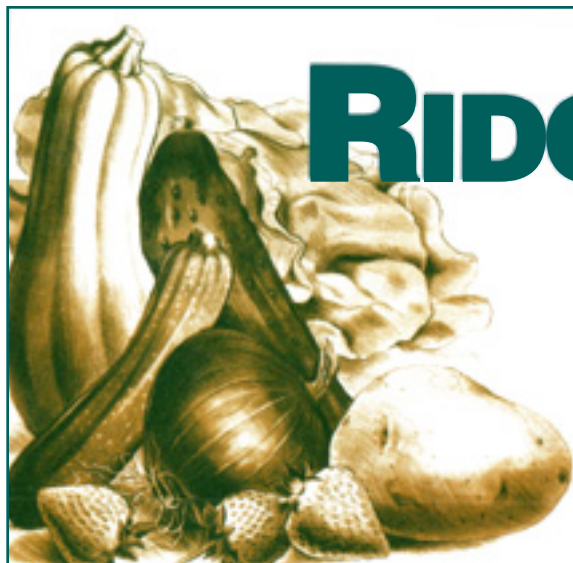
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# Want to buy a computer?

So you want to buy a computer and not sure where to start. You are not alone. Most people just starting out find purchasing a computer a difficult task.

The following article will hopefully make it a little easier.



## How much will it cost

A good standard package will cost around \$2,000.

## What programs do I need

Although most people look at the computer first it is actually the programs that are the most important part of the package. The main programs you will need are a word processor (letters and reports), spreadsheet program (budgets and planning), Internet browser (surfing the web), virus checker (protects against computer viruses) and an accounting/farm management program (finances, paddock records, etc.). Some of these programs may come with the computer.

Some programs come pre-installed. Make sure you are supplied with copies of these programs on disks in case they need to be re-installed.

## Accounting/farm management programs

This is probably the most difficult and important decision you have to make. You will need to decide whether you want to use a standard accounting program or a specially designed farm management program.

Commonly used accounting programs include the Quicken and MYOB range of products. Both companies have products to suit different needs. These products are well designed, have good support services and are used within many industries. They are not specifically designed for farming but can readily be adapted.

Farm management programs are designed for farmers and can include both financial information and management information such as paddock records. These products include Cashbook Plus, Phoenix 2000+, Cash Concepts Rural, Agrimaster and Mistro plus others that include farm maps and paddock records.

Do not rush into buying an accounting/farm management program. Look at the different options and understand what each one can do. Talk to people who are current users. All of these programs require a fair amount of work to set up properly so it is important to make the right decision the first time.

## What type of computer do I need

Generally speaking the base model computer in the range from most companies is suitable for probably 90% of the tasks you are likely to do.

At present this will be a computer with about a 466MHz processor, CD-ROM drive, a 15 or 17 inch monitor, at least a 4.3GB Hard drive, minimum of 64MB RAM and 4MB Video RAM on the Graphics card. This sort of configuration will easily run most programs except for some of the more memory or power hungry games and graphics packages.

## Processors

The processor is the brain of the computer. Small changes in processor speed do not mean big increases in performance. Changing from a Pentium II to a Pentium III will mean a faster processor but you will pay for it.

## To DVD or not to DVD

Any computer considered should have a CD-ROM drive but some computers now have DVD. Our suggestion is to go for the DVD if it does not cost too much more. DVD will eventually replace CD-ROM. From the point of view of the user, the DVD operates the same as a CD-ROM drive except that you can also play DVD movies and use programs designed for DVD.

## Monitors

Most people with computers would have a 15 inch monitor but 17 inch monitors are becoming more common. For ease of viewing the bigger the better so it really comes back to personal preference, price and how much room you have. If considering a larger monitor look at how deep it is and that you have room for it on your desk. For most people the newer flat monitors would be great except that they are still rather expensive.

## Hard drives

These are where you store all your information in your computer. For many of us the computer files we generate are not very big. What takes up the space are the programs we use

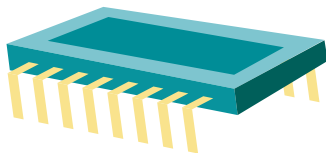
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to produce the files. Unless you are producing a lot of graphics files or using a lot of very large programs the standard size hard disk is quite adequate.



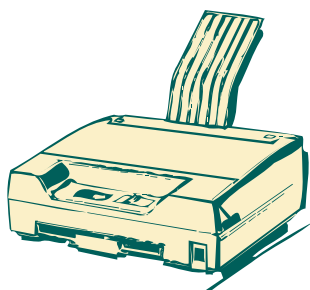
### How much RAM

At least 64MB of RAM memory is needed for the new Microsoft products such as Windows 2000 and Office 2000. If you are using a mapping type farm management program check with the supplier as to how much RAM you will need.

Video RAM on a standard computer is normally adequate for most tasks except for maybe some of the more sophisticated mapping programs and high powered games.

### Hooking up to the internet

If you want to hook up to the internet you will need a modem – the faster the better. Beware that the quality of your telephone line will influence the speed of data transfer. If the computer is to be used for faxing then the modem needs to be fax compatible.



### Printer

For the office you will need a small laser printer (black print only) or a fast bubblejet printer.

Features to look for include separate black and colour cartridges for bubblejet printers, printing speed (at least 8 pages per minute, the faster the better), can print envelopes and the printer produces good quality print.



### Backing up your precious files

Imagine if you had a fire, theft or lightning strike and you lost your computer. If the files have been backed up regularly then no more than a week's information would be lost.

A good backup system is very easy to use and should be used regularly. A hard disk drive with removable disks such as a Zip drive with at least 100MB disks is quite adequate. You do not need to back up your programs only the files you have created. Other backup devices include high capacity floppy drives, tape drives and rewritable CDs.

Some programs, especially financial management packages, will have a backup option built in. For other files you will need an easy to use backup program.

### A final warning

As a general rule the computers of the day are designed to run the software of the day. Buying new programs in a few years time may require some upgrading of your system.

*Leigh Walters*  
☎ 08 8232 5555

*John Maynard*  
*Davey & Maynard Agricultural Consulting*  
☎ 03 6424 9311

## Potato Industry Conference

A conference to provide information on marketing and business management is to be held on the 15-20 March 2001 (to be confirmed) in the Mount Gambier region.

*For more information contact Malcolm Kentish on*  
☎ (08) 8739 8230.

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# Potato industry in New Zealand

## Overview

Potatoes are the most important vegetable crop in New Zealand both in dollar and volume terms. Total potato retail sales are estimated at \$284 million. Approximately 44% of the table/ware crop is sold fresh, approximately 15% is made into crisps, and the rest is made into French fries.

In 1999, a total of 377 growers produced about 500,000 t from 12,000 ha, however the industry is now characterised by a declining number of growers who produce greater tonnage from less area.

Industry representation is through The New Zealand Vegetable & Potato Growers Federation (Vegfed). Vegfed provides an umbrella organisation covering issues of concern to all vegetable growers, and operates from levies on produce sold. Sectors within Vegfed look after specific crops. The Potato Sector has representation from all growing areas and has subcommittees for promotion and commissioning research and development projects.

## Potato production regions

While potatoes are grown throughout New Zealand, production is centred in three main areas:

### South Auckland – Waikato (30%)

South Auckland traditionally produces early potatoes (Sept-Nov) while mid-season and late - season harvested crops are grown further south. Ware potatoes are often ground stored through winter. The two major crisping companies are based in South Auckland and draw most of their potatoes from the local area.

### Rangitikei – Manawatu (28%)

This region produces potatoes predominately for ware and French fry supply to Heinz Watties. Most potatoes grown in this area are dryland but *Russet Burbank* crops require irrigation.

### Canterbury (26%)

In the north of the Canterbury region, production is aimed at fresh market production. Further south, supply is predominately for a small crisping factory and McCain's French fry line.

Over 90% of certified seed production is grown in this region, particularly higher up the plains where aphid numbers are lower and the mixed cropping (animals and crops) farm systems allow long rotations.

## Market Sectors

### Fresh

The main cultivars grown are New Zealand bred; *Ilam Hardy* for early-mid season production, and *Rua* for mid-late harvesting. In recent years *Desiree* and *Nadine* have become popular while *Frisia*, *Red Rascal* and *Karaka* are well known. An innovative marketing venture has been the use of 2 kg cardboard cartons for retail display of early season potatoes.

### Processing

French fry production is based on *Russet Burbank* with increasing areas of *Ranger Russet*. Other cultivars used include *Shepody*, *Fianna*, *Kiwitea* and *Agria*. Heinz Watties and McCain Foods are the major French fry processors although a number of other companies produce both frozen and fresh fries.

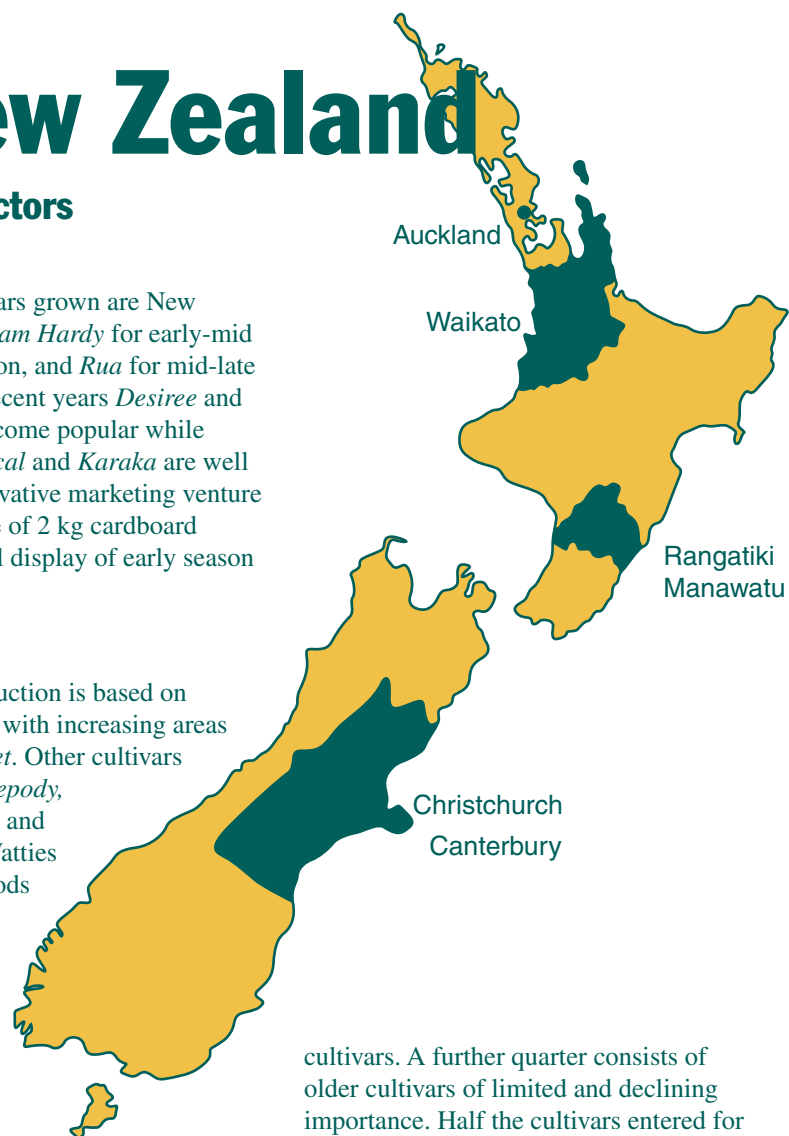
The crisping industry uses a range of cultivars including *Ilam Hardy*, *Fianna* and *Agria*. Bluebird Foods and Britannia Brands are the major crisp producers.

### Certified seed

A certified seed potato scheme began in 1927. It was based on growers maintaining healthy lines through inspection, roguing and designated locations. In 1980, the Pathogen Tested (PT) Seed Potato Scheme was initiated. This scheme and another similar scheme now covers around 98% of certified seed.

Seed is derived from pathogen-tested tissue cultures and subsequent minitubers. Trained inspectors inspect each crop at least twice during the growing season. After harvest the resulting seed tubers are further inspected to complete the certification process. A minimum interval of five harvest seasons must be observed between successive seed crops.

While 58 cultivars were certified in 1999 only a quarter of them could be currently considered as important commercial



cultivars. A further quarter consists of older cultivars of limited and declining importance. Half the cultivars entered for certification are for small areas of new lines in the early stages of commercial assessment.

## Future

Despite promotion, fresh potato sales are declining (currently 46 kg/person/annum) but increasing processed production appears to be compensating for the loss. Future trends point to a slight expansion in processing production and fewer growers. With minimum population growth any major expansion will have to come from increased export of both fresh and processed potatoes.

## Research

Crop & Food Research, in consultation with Vegfed and other trade sectors, merchants, processors and consumers, primarily conduct potato research. Crop & Food Research conducts a potato breeding programme which is integrated with research in biotechnology, pathology, entomology, nematology, agronomy, postharvest physiology and food technology.

**Russell Genet  
Potato Breeder  
Crop & Food Research, New Zealand**

# Seed bin hygiene – It's everyone's responsibility

There are many potato diseases that can be readily spread in and on dirty bins. Crop waste, soil and debris are potential carriers of bacterial and fungal diseases and eelworms.

Certified seed growers have a simple message to all buyers supplying used bins to be filled with certified seed.

**“Thoroughly wash and preferably disinfect each bin before you send it to be filled with certified seed.”**

## Why??

- Dirty bins can infect clean seed
- Infected seed will not provide the quality of fresh or processing crop that you wish to produce
- Washing dirty bins on the seed growers property only transfers the infection to his property.
- There are still pockets of serious diseases such as bacterial wilt, which is very easily spread by potatoes, soil and debris.
- Dirty bins which arrive at certified seed growers' properties in Victoria will be returned to the buyer at the buyers expense.

The Victorian certified seed industry along with other schemes request that prospective certified seed buyers only supply thoroughly washed and disinfected bins or order their certified seed in new containers

New bulka bags are becoming very widely used for certified seed purchases.

**Keith Blackmore**

**ViCSPA**

☎ 03 59629 043

## Improving our product mix through variety development

The *Delaware* and *Nadine* varieties have continued for some time to be the backbone of the Western Australian potato industry. The percentage of these varieties in the market has been up to 88% of total sales with 41 other varieties making up the remainder. Many of these varieties are not in sufficient quantities to be marketed in a meaningful way, but at the same time it is recognised that there is an on-going need to trial and experiment with new varieties.

There is a requirement to provide a better product mix in our variety programme to ensure more varieties that satisfy the needs of the consumer are available in-store. Currently we see the variety programme falling into two categories, mainstream and 'niche'. Growers are sought to grow a mixture of these varieties to ensure a greater selection.

The dominance of *Nadine* and *Delaware* will change as new varieties are

introduced. However, for this program to be successful it is critical that all varieties are monitored to assess how they perform on an agronomic level and that selections are modified accordingly.

**Brian Dickson & Maree Brealey**

**Western Potatoes**

☎ 08 9335 8999



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# ROUND-UP

## State

### Queensland

The southeast Queensland autumn crop was planted in mild but dry conditions. In April it was quite hot and dry, however most plantings were relatively disease free with conditions ideal for insects like thrips, with mites also causing some problems.

At the end of April there was a rapid change to cool moist conditions which saw a number of crops with disease outbreaks, in particular rhizoctonia and fusarium. Harvest of the autumn crop started in earnest at the end of May with nothing to look forward to except to follow on from a very depressed Victorian market.

At the time of writing, there were isolated reports of prices around the \$14.00 per 50 kg bag for the earliest Lockyer crops and the Darling Downs crops. Prices for Darling Downs' districts and areas around Warwick like Goomburra have been very poor over the summer months with prices of \$6.00 to \$8.00 per 50kg bag being paid.

Atherton Tablelands has had some very wet weather, but this does not appear to have been overly detrimental to the early crops. Some crops now approaching harvest are of good tuber size and quality. Prices have started to rise and growers are showing more optimism.

There has been an increase in the number of red skin potato crops. Plantings on the upper Tablelands are down 10% and one month late, again due to the wet conditions.

Preparations are underway for the main season crop, which is expected to be of equal size to last years.

**Michael Hughes**  
*Extension Agronomist*  
*Department of Primary Industry*

### South Australia

Isolated but heavy thunderstorms in February and March resulted in recordings up to 75 to 100mm in some localities south and north of Adelaide and in the Murray Mallee and Riverland regions. The following warm humid weather caused some seed breakdown in recently planted crops, and some replanting. Both the Murray Mallee and Riverland are prone to early frosts that may severely damage late planted crops but luckily the frosts have not eventuated so far.

The warm humid weather also caused some quality down grading to crops that had been sprayed off, or were being harvested. This reduced yields and deliveries into what had been an over supplied market. The reduced supply coincided with increased ware prices.

The low and fluctuating prices in January, February and March caused serious cash flow challenges for some of the smaller ware growers. Some crops were left, others were fed off to livestock and some were ploughed in. In some cases prices to growers varied from \$50 to \$150 per tonne. The recent rise in prices for the ware crop has been obviously welcomed.

The processing crop is all but completed. Most contracts are filled with the quality and yields average. The storage sheds are full with the remaining crop being delivered direct to the processing line.

**Bob Peake**  
*Senior Consultant Potatoes*  
*PIRSA Rural Solutions*

### New South Wales

Digging of the main ware crop in the Tablelands started in early April, with average yields being dug in most districts. Oversupply continues to be a problem for the fresh market, with prices well down on this time last year. Fresh market prices ranged from \$160 a tonne in April to \$240 a tonne in May, considerably less than the \$350 to \$380 a tonne that many growers received over the same period last season.

The harvesting of seed crops has also started in the Guyra, Orange and Crookwell districts. Seed areas are similar to last year. With the exception of *Sebago*, there has been a fair demand for most lines of certified seed. This year's recommended minimum price for Crookwell Certified Seed is \$435 a tonne.

Sowing of the late ware crop in the coastal, Tableland and Riverina districts finished in early March. Crop areas were similar to last year. Seasonal conditions have been cooler and very much wetter than usual over the last three months. As a consequence fungal diseases (target spot and sclerotinia) and insect populations (potato moth and heliothus caterpillar) were up in some districts, although they have not caused any significant problems for most growers.

Only average yields are forecast when digging starts in late May on the coast and Tablelands and during June in the Riverina.

Many New South Wales potato growers remain uncertain about the industry's future and unless fresh market prices improve during winter, a further exodus of small growers from the industry is expected next season.

**Stephen Wade**  
*District Horticulturist*  
*NSW Agriculture*

## Western Australia

### Fresh market

Fresh market potato yields were approximately 7% higher than last season therefore supply has been strong.

The summer fresh market potato crop has been plagued with internal problems from early January up till May. *Nadine* was the variety most seriously affected. The commencement of deliveries from the coastal districts will improve the overall quality of WA potatoes and also see *Delaware* deliveries increase. Supply is likely to further align itself with demand creating a faster turn over of stock that will further increase quality.

### Fresh Exports

Export sales of fresh potatoes have been disappointing. The prices are so low that growers will lose money. This situation was unexpected and is believed to be due to large supplies from New Zealand.

The crops grew well although there was some problems in seed quality with new varieties. The availability of commercial quantities of high quality seed is still a constraint for the adoption of new varieties.

The poor price is a major setback and it is doubtful that many growers will be interested in the export trade next season.

### Crisp exports

The crisp export market has been much better with stable prices and quantities. The internal problems that affected the fresh market crops did not show in the crisp crops to the same extent. This indicates that the preventative measures that crisp producers take are enough to conquer the problem.

### Seed

Growers in the new seed areas of Bremer Bay and Esperance are improving their disease protection through a process to make their shires "Declared Seed Areas".

**Brian Dickson**  
*Operations Manager, Western Potatoes*  
**Peter Dawson**  
*Potato Project Manager,*  
*Agriculture Western Australia*

## Tasmania

Following the variable conditions in the early part of the growing season, Tasmania has experienced an exceptionally dry late summer-autumn period. Growers with insufficient irrigation have had difficulty finishing off their crops.

### French fry

Both Simplot and McCain report that crop yields are about average with tuber size smaller than normal but with an increased number of tubers set.

The companies have been happy with tuber quality, with good solids and sugar levels. Tuber shape has also been quite good, given *Russet Burbank's* susceptibility to stress.

The dry season has reduced the overall disease pressure compared with other seasons, with common scab proving to be the biggest problem once again. However the processors report that the level of rejections due to scab is on a par with other seasons.

Simplot has two new storage sheds in the Midlands area. Filling of these stores is progressing well. At its Ulverstone site, another new store is being built with filling planned to commence in June.

### Fresh Market

Damage caused by harvesting in such dry conditions and an increased level of scab has reduced packouts for fresh market produce. Other quality parameters have been good, although many growers have had difficulty getting the size into late crops due to lack of moisture.

### Seed

Harvesting of seed crops is well underway. Quality is generally good although common scab is once again proving to be the biggest reason for crop rejection.

Yields have generally been good with one grower reporting 75t/ha.

**Nathalie Jarosz**  
*Communication Specialist*  
*Department of Primary Industries,*  
*Water and Environment*

## Victoria

Some of the driest conditions for many years have been experienced in the 1999-2000 season, especially around Ballarat and Portland, and threatens to cause delays to harvest. However, some timely rain provided good conditions for completing the harvest of French fry crops around Ballarat.

Tuber size was down because of the dry conditions, but the number of tubers set was satisfactory. Overall, yields have been average or slightly above average. There were some instances of common scab, hollow heart and brown centre, but very little rotting in tubers going into storage.

Harvesting of crisping crops has been completed earlier than usual this season. Good quality has been achieved, with specific gravity a few points higher than for last season. There has also been an increase in yield, resulting in plenty of surplus potatoes and lower prices. Some growers on the Koo Wee Rup Swamp had problems with potato moth towards the end of the season.

By mid-April, seed harvesting was well advanced in Gippsland, with most other areas just starting. Yields have generally been down.

The Victorian Certified Seed Potato Growers' Committee has recently changed its name to Seed Potatoes Victoria, which is certainly less of a mouthful! In light of the current debate about genetically-modified organisms (GMOs), Seed Potatoes Victoria has developed a policy of not allowing genetically-modified potatoes in the Victorian seed scheme. They will also not be encouraging seedgrowers to grow experimental GMO lines on their properties, in case this should compromise commercial supply chains.

Seed Potatoes Victoria has also become interested in undertaking courses in managing farm safety, which are organised by the Victorian Farmers' Federation. Courses are planned for Gippsland in the near future and hopefully other districts and industry sectors will also take up the opportunity.

Peter Carr (Ballarat) has left the DNRE potato group to take up a position with DNRE's Chemical Standards Branch. He will have a regulatory role in connection with biotechnology projects.

**Andrew Henderson**  
*Technology Transfer, Potatoes*  
*Agriculture Victoria*



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