

# 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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## New seed potato standards for Australia

After considerable discussion and debate between state industry groups and representatives, new national seed potato standards have been finalised. The standards have been considered and approved by the Australian Potato Industry Council (APIC) at their November meeting.

The certification authorities will begin testing the scheme this season, with a view to official implementation from August 2001.

Although the standards do not go as far as was initially proposed, it is a major step forward for the industry to get to this point and it lays the basis for stronger collaboration between schemes across Australia in the future. It also forms a basis for stronger growth in seed exports and for differentiation of seed quality, should schemes elect to do so in the future.

A national coordinating group for the scheme will be established called Certified Potatoes Australia that will be chaired by the chairman of APIC. The group will work with state seed groups to manage and facilitate the implementation of the scheme.

There will be an annual review process to deal with any changes needed to meet market requirements and address industry concerns.

As approval has been given, planning can now commence on a major education program for the industry.

Tasks to be done:

- Certification Authorities test the scheme this season. (2000/2001)
- Establish the Certified Potatoes Australia group and trademark. (Dec 2000)
- Develop a manual for certification authorities. (Jan 2001)
- Develop information material for the industry. (Feb 2001)
- Complete training of certification staff. (Feb 2001)
- Officially implement the new standards. (Aug 2001)

I would like to thank all members of the steering committee for their tireless contributions and in particular Keith Blackmore for his very valuable input. I also wish to thank Rob Brown and Tony Kellock for their patience throughout this long consultative process.

**Russell Sully**  
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*Participants at the meeting in Adelaide to discuss modifications to standards.*

*Back row: David Carter, Phil Johnson,  
Mark Holland, Keith Blackmore,  
Rob Brown*

*Centre row: Alex Duff, Barry Philp,  
Russell Sully*

*Front row: Tony Kellock, Kimberly Green,  
Bob Peake, Linda Wilson*



## contents

Crop Monitoring	3
APIC Briefs	4
European Powdery Scab	5
R&D Committee Update	6
AUSVEG Breifs	7
Bacterial Wilt	9
World Potato Congress	10-11
State Round-ups	14-15

## Booklets

### Seed Potatoes Victoria Directory

## Potatoes 2000 Conference Proceedings

There are not many copies left so if you want one contact the Farmers Information Centre on 1800 356 446. They cost \$45, which includes postage.



APIC and the  
Eyes on Potatoes production  
team wishes everyone a  
happy and safe Christmas.  
May 2001  
be a great year for us all.



*Eyes on Potatoes is produced by the  
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EYES ON POTATOES



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assistance from the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation and the Potato Levy.*

# Crop monitoring

– extending management skills

**Max Dix grows potatoes for the fresh market at Milang and Langhorne Creek in South Australia and uses a crop monitoring service provided by Derek Cameron from IAMA at Strathalbyn.**

**Max also produces grain and hay as well as runs cattle and sheep at his property at Finness.**



## The service

Derek Cameron has been doing my crop monitoring for about four years now. He starts to monitor the crops at early emergence for pests and diseases and when the first plants get to about six inches high we start tissue testing. We take a tissue sample about once a fortnight and send it away to have it analysed. If any deficiencies show up I apply whatever needs to be applied.

Between tissue testing in the off week Derek does a normal crop inspection. He walks through the crop and checks moisture levels, general crop health and whether there is any pests or diseases. He does the inspection Monday and faxes me the results Monday night. Come Tuesday morning I have the fax there and I know what I need to apply.

## Why use a crop monitoring service

I had been growing spuds for several years doing my own thing. I then had a pretty bad season with powdery scab and a few other problems, which cost me a lot of money. I started wondering whether I was doing the right thing with growing potatoes.

When Derek's service was offered to me I thought it was a good idea to take it and get his opinion on what I was doing, as well as have his backup on doing the weekly inspections on a regular basis. My belief is that two heads are better than one. I am getting expert advice at pretty nominal rates. It does not cost a fortune.

As a result of Derek's advice I have changed my side dressing regime from one side dress at early emergence to one at early emergence and one a fortnight later. That's one difference I have made on Derek's advice and with some degree of success I might add.

I have also changed my spray program considerably. I start controlling fungus in the crop a lot earlier than I used to do and sometimes I do not spray it at all if conditions are not favourable to the disease.

These days we start off with preventative fungicides, a cheap version I might add, but nevertheless a preventative at a fairly early stage in the crops life. If conditions get bad for a problem like target spot a few weeks later, there is already a buildup of fungicide in the crop, which reduces early development of the disease. So you have your leg in the door right from the start if a problem emerges.

## What are the benefits

One of the main aspects of having Derek inside is that I have handed over the monitoring of my crop's progress and condition to him. That means I don't have to do it. I still take a keen interest in what is going on. Now though I look at my crop after I receive Derek's report each week.

You are never too old to learn. Anybody who says they know it all is only really kidding one person. I have learnt a lot from Derek's agronomic service and I am still learning.


By sharing the load of looking after the crops I have also freed up a lot of my time where I would normally be walking around paddocks. It takes a long time to walk and check a 50-60 acre patch of potatoes. I have plenty of other things to do. With Derek checking it out I can go off fully confident that the job is under control in the potato patch and do something else. That is probably the main benefit quite apart from the fact that we do pick up problems quicker and more successfully control them with Derek's advice.

I could use another tissue testing service but I would have to decide what to put on and what quantities. Whereas with Derek overseeing the operation, he looks at the tissue test results before he sends it to me, weighs up what I need to do and then writes on the bottom of the crop report or the tissue test result and faxes it off to me.

It is too costly these days to go along and make a few mistakes and then say we won't make the same ones next year. One time you could do that and there was enough leeway. These days it is just such a fine line. You cannot afford to make mistakes. It is the best way in the world to go broke.

Another advantage of Derek's service is that he is in touch with all the latest chemicals. All that information just flows through the crop monitoring program to me. There are some huge advantages with some of the later chemicals coming out these days.





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# APIC

## Briefs



The meeting was very well attended with 21 people participating from various parts of Australia.

### Annual elections

#### Chairman

Milton Rodda

#### Vice-chairman

Geoff Moar

#### Treasurer

Max McKenna

#### Public Officer

Brian Newman

#### AusHort R&D Committee delegate

Geoff Moar

Industry representatives are selected by the AUSVEG Potato Group, Potato Processors of Australia and Potato Merchants of Australia.

#### Grower representatives

Max McKenna, Geoff Moar

#### Processor representatives

Milton Rodda, Tony Gietzel

#### Merchant representatives

Geoff Biggs, Peter Toohill

### Freshcare

The council supported being involved in the Freshcare program.

(Freshcare is a program that is building on the quality assurance work carried out by Eric Coleman.)

### National seed potato standards

The council has supported new national seed potato standards. Work on implementing the standards will now proceed.

It was also decided that the current chairman of APIC be the Chairman of the new group - Certified Seed Australia and the implementation group form the basis for the new coordinating group.

### Breeding program

A sub-committee has been formed to explore how an industry organisation can be set up to manage the licensing of new varieties. This will be an important step towards restructuring the breeding and evaluation program.

### Horticulture Australia

(Also see AUSVEG Briefs)

By the next APIC meeting in May the new company Horticulture Australia will have been formed as a result of the merger of the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation (HRDC) and the Australian Horticultural Corporation. At the end of this calendar year HRDC will cease to exist.

### Better industry feedback for chemical changes

The council supported the development of a trial by Leigh Walters and Kevin Bodnaruk to improve the quality of industry feedback into the chemical review process.

### Potatoes 2000

APIC congratulated the organisers on an excellent conference.

*Milton Rodda*

*APIC Chairman*

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# European Powdery Scab Workshop

The European Powdery Scab Workshop, held at the Scottish Agricultural College, Aberdeen over 20-22 July 2000, brought together 21 scientists and technical experts on powdery scab and the potato mop-top-virus (PMTV). They came to review current knowledge on the two diseases and to coordinate current and future research. Seven European countries were represented (Denmark, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Ireland, England and Scotland). Mr Tony Pitt (Seed Potatoes Victoria) and Dr Dolf de Boer (Agriculture Victoria) represented Australia, the only non-European country represented.

The powdery scab fungus, known as *Spongospora subterranea*, infects potato roots and tubers. Its greatest impact is in

the fresh-market and seed sectors, which have a low tolerance to powdery scab on tubers. The fungus is also the vector of the potato mop top virus. Fortunately the virus does not occur in Australia but does cause significant damage in potato crops in some parts of Europe. The control of the virus depends on control of powdery scab.

There were no "magic" cures to take home from the workshop. The consensus of opinion was that powdery scab was very difficult to manage and that there are no simple control measures. However, there were plenty of leads for new research. The meeting provided the opportunity to refocus the direction of the research and to become part of a network of researchers worldwide. It was clear

that Australians were at the forefront of research during the 1960's to 1980's and made a significant contribution towards our knowledge of powdery scab.

A major outcome of the workshop was the draft outline of a collaborative European research proposal that will be submitted to the European Union "Framework 5" (Plant Health) agricultural research funding program late in 2000. An important component of this proposal is the development of new tools for the detection of the powdery scab fungus that can revolutionise research into the biology and management of this disease.

A report on the workshop will be available through the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation. The papers presented at the workshop, as well as summaries of discussions from the various workshop sessions, will be available on the *Spongospora* Website ([www.pa.ipw.agrl.ethz.ch/spongospora/Euworkshop](http://www.pa.ipw.agrl.ethz.ch/spongospora/Euworkshop)).

## Potato exports increase by 18% over two years

Potato exports continue to grow. Please note that the exporting state does not necessarily indicate the source of the produce. Some produce is moved between states prior to export.

### Value of potato and potato products exported from Australia

	1997/98	1999/2000	Change#	
Australia	\$22,445,836	\$26,397,082	+18%	
State	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000	Change#
VIC	\$7,633,560	\$11,315,429	\$15,002,717	+97%
WA	\$4,738,611	\$3,865,913	\$4,816,892	+2%
NSW	\$4,668,145	\$4,459,720	\$2,860,329	-39%
QLD	\$1,332,462	\$540,029	\$2,246,769	+69%
SA	\$722,431	\$1,146,604	\$1,104,158	+53%
TAS	\$3,350,627	\$1,778,204	\$355,802	-89%
NT			\$10,415	+100%
ACT		\$8,000		
Re-exports*	\$1,400,895	\$1,797,259	\$2,338,023	+67%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

\* Re-exports are goods that are imported and then exported again in either the same condition or after undergoing some minor operations which leave them essentially unchanged (eg. Blending, packaging, bottling, cleaning, sorting, husking and shelling)

# Change from 1997/98 to 1999/2000

## Correction – Potato Review

In our March edition, an article on the British magazine *Potato Review* had the wrong email address for obtaining information on subscriptions. The right address is [potatorev@dial.pipex.com](mailto:potatorev@dial.pipex.com).



In July, the Winnaleah Football Club in North East Tasmania held a fundraiser based on all things potatoes. This inaugural event was dubbed "Spud Fest" and involved everything from cutting through to eating, throwing, peeling and sculpting the humble spud.

Although bad weather may have kept some people away, those that attended enjoyed themselves. This combination of a family fun day, an information exchange on the potato industry and a means of raising club funds is set to become a tradition with the staging of Spud Fest 2001.

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# Potato R&D Committee Update

## Concept proposals

At the October meeting in Adelaide the Committee examined 31 concept development proposals that had been submitted by various groups for doing research and development. The Committee recommended that 13 be accepted for further consideration.

This means that the groups who submitted the successful concept development proposals will be requested to put in detailed proposals by the end of November. These will be considered at the next meeting in March.

## New name - same committee

We have changed our name from the APIC R&D Committee to the Potato R&D Committee to avoid confusion as to what we do. The point was made at the meeting that the other R&D committees have the industry in the name for which the committee represents.

## NaPIES review

Discussions were held with Greg Buchanan from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (Agriculture Victoria) on the future structure for the potato breeding program and evaluation process.

The Committee informed Mr Buchanan that it would continue to recommend to HRDC the funding of a joint venture arrangement with the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (Victoria) to maintain a core breeding and germplasm maintenance centre at Toolangi.

All segments of the potato industry continued to value the new varieties that have been produced which, through a range of evaluation sites around Australia, enabled a performance comparison with imported, overseas varieties. Unfortunately, as levy funds have not increased during the ten years of the potato improvement program, a further rationalisation of evaluation sites was inevitable. It was likely that extensive regional testing could only be undertaken if Voluntary Contributions were forthcoming. These funds would be matched by Commonwealth contributions for those regions concerned.



*New members of the Potato R&D Committee  
John Doyle (left), Clinton Zerella, David Addison and Anthony Rehbein*

## R&D Plan update

The updating of the R&D Plan has been delayed but we still intend to have it ready for the next round of submissions in 2001. A draft plan will be sent out to industry groups in the new year for consideration and comment.

## Implications of Horticulture Australia Ltd

As many people will already know HRDC and the Australian Horticultural Corporation (AHC) are in the process of merging into a new company. At this stage the committee is unsure of the impact this will have on its' operations. As the impact of the changes becomes clearer we will keep people posted through the newsletter.

## New committee members

Over the last six months the committee has undergone a number of changes. We now have new representatives for New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania. These are:

**John Doyle** a fresh and processing grower from Berrigan in the Riverina of southern New South Wales and replaces Geoff Moar.

**Anthony Rehbein** grows potatoes in Bundaberg, Queensland for the fresh market on the eastern seaboard and replaces John Bishop.

**Clinton Zerella** grows and packs for the fresh market in South Australia at Virginia just north of Adelaide and at Pinnaroo and Peebinga in the Mallee and replaces Wayne Cornish.

**David Addison** grows for Simplot at Moriarty near Devonport in Tasmania and replaces Max McKenna.

I would like to extend our thanks to our retiring committee members. Their commitment to the task has been very much appreciated.

## Committee visits Waite

While in Adelaide and with so many new members on the committee, we took the opportunity to visit the Waite Research Precinct to talk to the local South Australian Research and Development Institute researchers and see the facilities.

## Next meeting

The committee will be meeting in March 2001 in Auckland, New Zealand. This will enable a meeting to be held with the New Zealand VegFed R&D Committee. Both committees have expressed interest in establishing some joint projects, or sharing results from current projects, to avoid unnecessary duplication.

*Dr Jack Meagher  
Chairman  
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# Bacterial Wilt – the potato millennium bug?

Recent outbreaks of bacterial wilt in a few potato crops has raised the spectre of a potential 'millennium bug' in the potato industry. Bacterial wilt, also known as "brown rot", is caused by the bacterium *Ralstonia solanacearum* and is one of the most destructive diseases of agricultural crops worldwide. Symptoms in potatoes include wilting and subsequent death of plants (bacterial wilt) and a tuber rot (brown rot).

Some potato growing areas in Australia were abandoned during the early half of the 1900's because of bacterial wilt. Outbreaks on a few individual properties can have far reaching consequences for many unaffected growers, with a potentially devastating impact on trade both within and out of Australia.

Some Australian states and many overseas countries classify the bacterial wilt pathogen as a quarantine organism and impose restrictions on the movement of potatoes to prevent its spread. Affected paddocks can be subject to a 20 km radius quarantine zone from which produce cannot be exported to interstate markets for five years. Properties within this zone that do not have the disease are also subject to quarantine, as well as washing plants that process material from within the zone. Potential losses of income can run into millions of dollars.

Apart from a few localised areas, Australian potato production is, as far as we know, essentially free of bacterial wilt, giving us a competitive edge in the export of fresh potatoes (ware and seed). Recent outbreaks in Europe have been very costly and the European Union directive now specifies that seed crops must be surveyed for bacterial wilt.

As a result of an outbreak in the Netherlands in 1995, the Dutch Plant protection Service tested over 60,000 seed stocks for the bacterium at a cost to the potato industry of over \$A6M. Contingency plans are in place to manage outbreaks and prevent further spread. The European directives are underpinned by research and the development of technology for rapid and accurate detection of the bacterium in soil, water, plant and tuber samples.

How do you get bacterial wilt? New outbreaks can often be traced back to poor choice in seed potatoes, such as one or more years off certified seed, seed from non-seed districts, or the "smalls" from a packing line. This material can carry "latent" bacteria, which spreads to the progeny. Best practice is to buy seed endorsed by a Certification Authority. Research in Europe shows that irrigation from watercourses contaminated by affected properties or weed hosts on banks is another means of spread. The purchase of reputable seed, crop rotation and good farm hygiene are essential in preventing contamination of "clean" farms.

In Australia, bacterial wilt is potentially a disaster waiting to happen that could become "everybody's" problem. We have much to learn about this disease and need to know where "reservoirs" of the bacterium occur, what the alternative hosts are, how long the bacterium survives in soil and water and the most likely means of spread. To ensure that domestic and export potato industries are protected and remain viable, we need to take the lead from other potato growing countries and work towards developing and adopting robust detection, monitoring, prevention and contingency programs for bacterial wilt in Australia.

*For further information contact, Dolf de Boer or Nigel Crump at Agriculture Victoria Knoxfield.*

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## New extension program in Victoria

Agriculture Victoria (Department of Natural Resources and Environment) is embarking on a new government funded horticultural extension program called HortEX. The program has the primary aim of improving the awareness and adoption of best practices arising from projects funded by HRDC and the R&D levy (although any issues relevant to a particular industry can be addressed). Within HortEX, the project dealing with vegetable industries is called Veg Cheque. The Veg Cheque staff is currently consulting with potato industry representatives to plan activities which will make the best use of the available resources and deliver information in the most appropriate manner. The Veg Cheque project is scheduled to run for five years.





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*Ghassan standing among potato plants used to produce true potato seed from flowers at the Scottish Crop Research Institute at Dundee.*



## Trends in the Scottish and Netherlands potato industries

In a recent visit to Scotland and the Netherlands and while attending the World Congress, I observed some interesting industry trends.

Mergers or alliances among seed companies and partnerships between seed companies and research institutes are becoming quite common. Access to the right variety is becoming a key factor to success in the industry. A greater emphasis is also being placed on developing disease resistant varieties using seed from the potato flowers to produce the clones within the breeding program.

In recent years, there has been an upsurge of interest in hydroponic seed. With this technique, high numbers of healthy tubers can be produced at acceptable costs.

In the Netherlands, the use of tissue culture to produce tubers is growing steadily, but the bulk of basic seed is still produced using traditional methods as this approach gives good results.

Quarantine pests and diseases such as bacterial wilt, ring rot, and potato spindle tuber viroid (PSTV) are still seen as the most important threats to seed production in both the Netherlands and Scotland. Other threats in Scotland include the high value of the currency and cost of transportation.

At the World Congress it was reported that there was an increased demand from buyers for qualities above the minimum level required by the official quality assurance scheme. As a result, growers were keeping additional records to protect themselves from unjustified claims.

In the Netherlands, the market for washed seed potatoes is increasing quickly due to the increased spread of soil related diseases with unwashed seed potatoes and the increased demand by buyers for high quality products.

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# AUSVEG Briefs

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Dom Della

### Vice Chairman

Max McKenna

### Representatives on the AUSVEG Board

Dom Della

Max McKenna

Neil Perry

### Grower representatives on APIC

Max McKenna

Geoff Moar

## Fresh Potato

### Marketing Levy

Due to lack of industry support the application to Senator Troeth for the establishment of a Fresh Potato Marketing Levy will be withdrawn. No national marketing and promotional strategy will therefore be implemented.

### Breeding program

This has been a complex debate but is extremely important to the future of the industry. The main concern has been not to create a system that will prevent access by farmers to varieties bred using levy and government money.

## Potato conference

The committee was very pleased with the success of the conference and wish to thank the organising committee and all those people who helped to make the event a success.

## Horticulture Australia

The Chairman of AUSVEG, Silvio Favero, has represented AUSVEG on the steering committee for the amalgamation of the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation (HRDC) and the Australian Horticultural Corporation (AHC).

The negotiations for the formation of the new company have been quite extensive and at times difficult due to the accountability requirements of the Federal Government and the need to protect the interests of industry members.

Once the legislation has passed through parliament the Board members for the company will be announced and a Chief Executive Officer will be appointed.

Under the new company there will be Industry Advisory Committees for each levy paying industry. These committees will be required to hold an Annual General Meeting at which all levy payers can participate.



*Geoff Moar (past Chairman) congratulates Dom Della (right) the new Chairman of the AUSVEG Potato Group.*

There will also be a requirement for the Industry Advisory Committees to produce an Annual Operating Plan, Annual Financial Plan and an Annual Research & Development Plan. An Industry Advisory Committee may or may not be the existing R&D Committee.

The Industry Advisory Committees will also require an independent Chairperson. The Potato R&D Committee is the only R&D committee at present with an independent chairperson already in place.

**Brian Newman**  
*Executive Director*  
**AUSVEG**

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# World Potato Congress 2000

The fourth World Potato Congress (WPC) took place in Amsterdam in September 2000. This followed successful congresses previously held in Canada, England and South Africa.

There were around 700 people from 52 countries at the congress with 23 delegates from Australia.

The aim of the Congress was to bring together and provide information to potato growers, researchers, processors, traders, suppliers of machinery, equipment and services and other industry people, including Government representatives.

The gathering of people from around the world provided an opportunity to discuss a wide range of potato related issues. It enabled industry representatives to come together, share experiences and work to support the continued development of the potato.

The congress was followed by the international potato show at Emmeloord called Potato 2000.

**John Rich**  
*Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association*

☎ (03) 6331 6377

✉ [jrich@tassie.net.au](mailto:jrich@tassie.net.au)

**The following is an extract from a talk at the World Congress given by Dr H Smits from the Rabobank Group in the Netherlands.**

## Key drivers and trends in the world potato industry

The world potato industry operates in a diverse, dynamic environment. Of 300 million tonnes produced world wide, 170 million tonnes are used for human consumption. Ware potatoes represent the largest segment, but processing and seed are becoming increasingly significant.

The potato starch industry is another important segment. This serves the food industry, non-food (industrial) and animal feed markets.

## Global consumption – statistics and trends

Global consumption of potatoes is experiencing strong growth, around 4.5% annually. Most growth is occurring in developing countries, such as China and India where the rise in population and income levels increases demand for food. Per capita consumption amounts to around 18 kilograms in both China and India. This is currently below the world average of 29 kilograms, however increasing consumption will see an alteration to this ratio.

The situation becomes more complicated in developed regions, with consumption being more stable in terms of volume. Per capita consumption is already high in regions like the USA and Europe, where people consume between 60 and 80 kilograms of potatoes annually. (Editors note - For the first eight years of the 1990's Australia's average consumption was 66kg of potatoes annually.)

The key factors in these developed regions revolve around markets characterised by trends towards greater convenience and more added value. Other issues include consumer concerns about health, nutrition and food safety.



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Changing lifestyles has seen a reduction in kitchen preparation times from over two hours previously to now less than 20 minutes. This gives a greater reliance on convenience products and meals away from home. The result of this is that there has been a decline in market share for ware potatoes against processed potato products. Fresh chilled and peeled potatoes, ready to be fried and ready to eat meals with potatoes as a basis are some examples meeting demand for convenience.

The potato industry as a whole has to face ever increasing competition from products such as pasta and rice. These products form the basis of a range of easy to prepare meals, at competitive prices. They are also the mainstays of diets in many areas in the world where food consumption is growing. The potato rates highly in terms of nutrition and as an efficient source of vitamins for consumers pursuing healthy lifestyles.

People are spending an increasing amount of free time travelling and eating out. These new eating habits have been described as "grazing", "mouth surfing" and "refuelling". It is suggested that in the future, many people might eat five or even more meals each day. Altered lifestyles may provide new opportunities for innovative potato products. The challenge for the industry may be to further transform the potato into more easy to eat, interesting and readily available products.

### **Quality Assurance and traceability**

Quality and efficiency of production are now essential elements of the flow through the value chain. Quality production starts at the farm with appropriate crop management practices, including the use of fertilisers and crop protection methods. Food safety concerns are causing buyers and consumers to demand tracking and tracing systems for potatoes and potato products and this requires the implementation of sophisticated quality assurance systems.



*An Australian company promoting their wares*

The industry has seen mergers or alliances taking place among seed potato companies, traders and processors. This trend is seen to lead to greater efficiencies and scale of operation of such companies.

### **Varieties – "Fit for purpose"**

Varieties of potatoes being bred and grown for specific use are gaining ground. The optimum length of the potato for the French fry industry is now recognised to be important to reduce waste and add to overall efficiency of production. The cooking characteristics of ware potatoes have become more important to the consumer. Specific varieties are suitable for different purposes, such as boiling, frying or potato salad. This concentration on varieties, "fit for purpose", is expected to expand the product range within the ware potato segment of the market place.

Access to the right seed potato variety is therefore becoming important as a success factor in the industry. Potato breeders are focussing on specific market segments, and working with traders and processors in order to develop exclusive varieties. This is intended to provide an edge for the variety in the food chain with retail and food service buyers.

An issue of great and on-going concern is the need to develop disease resistant varieties. Growers will need to access modern biotechnology if it is going to be able to overcome these problems. Technological developments will be a key driver for all sectors of the potato industry.

### **GMO's**

The use of Genetic Modification is currently a hotly contested and sensitive issue. Governments, the community at large and the potato industry, all have to make decisions, choices and regulations relative to the development and acceptable use of GMO varieties. A Code of Safety has been established in Europe.

### **The challenge**

The potato industry faces a big challenge in keeping pace with consumption growth, simply because production potential is seen to be limited. At this time, production appears to be concentrated in relatively few geographical regions suitable for potato cultivation. There are wide variations in productivity and quality, even in the most suitable regions. Much work is required by the industry to meet demand in terms



*A very large range of novel processed products were on display*

of both volume and quality required for processing, particularly in developing and transitional countries.

Unlike wheat, maize or rice, it is not practical or economical for potatoes to be traded at long distance as raw produce. Fresh potatoes are difficult and costly to store and transport. Potatoes in processed form as frozen product, potato crisps or dehydrated granules are therefore easier to handle and are being produced and traded by large international companies. The industry is highly concentrated with a few processors dominating the market worldwide.



*Most of the main international potato groups were represented at the congress or at Potato 2000 at Emmeloord*

## **Potato Industry Conference**

**A conference planned for Mt Gambier to provide information on marketing and business management has been postponed until March 2002. More details will be available in future editions of *Eyes on Potatoes*.**

# National internet site



The Potato and Vegetable R&D Committees have supported the production of a Business Plan for the development of a national Internet site for the potato and vegetable industries.

A series of planning sessions in late October and early November were carried out with small groups of growers and other industry people in all states. The sessions involved reviewing the prototype Internet site originally produced as part of the potato project on Electronic Information Services.

The prototype Internet site will be used as the basis for developing a Business Plan which will be considered at the March Potato and Vegetable R&D Committee meetings. If the plan is supported and money is available, work will commence in July with the site hopefully operating by Christmas.

*Leigh Walters*

*Technology Transfer Manager (Potatoes)*

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## Thorpdale Potato Festival - coming up!

The 23rd annual Thorpdale Potato Festival on Labour Day weekend will provide a variety of competitions associated with the potato industry. There will also be amusement rides, craft and produce stalls, wood chopping, displays of vintage trucks, cars and engines and a full range of catering by local groups.

**Where:** Recreation Reserve  
Stockdales Rd, Thorpdale 3835  
**When:** Monday, 12th March, 2001  
**Contact:** Jeanette Moore, Publicity Officer  
RMB 1270  
Cook's Rd, Thorpdale 3835

## Grower groups get together

At the 4th World Potato Congress held in Amsterdam I chaired an informal meeting of potato grower representatives to consider a range of common interests and issues. Twenty three people representing grower organizations from Canada, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, United States, Argentina and Finland attended the meeting.

The ad hoc meeting was convened following discussions at the Congress among delegates about the continued reduction in potato grower's terms of trade around the world. Particular reference and emphasis was given to potatoes being grown for processing. The meeting established there was a clear and urgent need for potato grower groups around the world to have a closer communication network.

It was agreed by the participants to work towards this improved communication through the office of the World Potato Congress. The first step would be to establish a contact list of potato producer bodies.

The meeting identified that there were many issues of mutual interest and concern among participant groups. The principal item for discussion was the relatively low share of retail value of their product that growers were being paid. The discussions indicated a strong need for growers to work towards obtaining a greater share of the consumer dollar.

The meeting fully endorsed and supported recent actions being taken by the North American Potato Marketing Association in wanting to lift the grower price by US \$15/ton. It was also agreed to create mechanisms for information exchange between grower groups.

As a result of discussions in Amsterdam, an invitation has been made to interested potato bargaining groups from around the world to attend the winter meeting of the Potato Marketing Association of North America at San Antonio, Texas in January, 2001. The group hopes to promote global cooperation among processing potato growers in response to the globalisation of the French fry industry.

The Amsterdam meeting was noted as being a world first in having potato grower groups from various countries coming together. This is all part of the globalization process and is expected to lead to strong international exchange on matters of mutual interest.

*John Rich*

*Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association*

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# ROUND-UP

## State

### Western Australia

#### Fresh market

Production has increased and sales are up.

In Pool 6 (May to June deliveries) sales were up 10% on the previous year. *Nadine* was in strong supply. To ensure an oversupply does not occur the *Nadine* share of this pool has been set at 65% for 2000/2001. Also, when licences are transferred from low to high yielding areas, the area licensed will be reduced.

For Pools 1 - 3 (July to mid November deliveries) production was also higher by 4-7 tonnes per hectare. This increase is partly due to last years poor, flood affected crops. Nevertheless, sales for these pools are up 6% on last year.

*Nadine* and *Delaware* remain dominant but *Winter Gem*, *Ruby Lou*, *Mondial*, *Eureka* and *Royal Blue* are establishing a minor share of the market.

#### Export

A seminar on potato seed export was held at Manjimup in August by AGWEST and Western Potatoes. Speakers were from Philippines, NSW, Vietnam and Indonesia. An outcome of the seminar was initiation of a strategic plan for seed export development in WA. This should be completed over summer.

AGWEST has obtained funding through AusAID to continue work with the Vietnamese potato industry. The project aims to increase the productivity and profitability of potato production in the Red River Delta through an integrated crop production and marketing program. The project is a co-operative research and extension program between the Food Crops Research Institute Vietnam, Agriculture Western Australia and Curtin University. Improvements in productivity and net returns will be achieved by training Vietnamese agronomists and extension agents in the methodologies used by the potato industry in Western Australia.

*Peter Dawson*  
Project Manager, Potatoes  
Agriculture Western Australia

### Queensland

This year's production has seen highs and lows in northern Queensland. A heavy wet season followed by an unseasonably early frost at the start of June affected over 100 hectares of the Evelyn and Kaban regions. Few of the crops were totally destroyed, but most had sizeable yield reductions and growers were not able to move many small sized tubers. Since August, conditions have improved in this area and some good crops are expected for the latter part of the year.

With the exception of a few growers affected by a very hot dry spell in late September/early October, most lower Tableland crops fared well. A number of producers grew their best crops in years. Many growers have averaged 37.5-40 t/ha with some claiming 50 t/ha. Insect and disease pressures tended to remain low for much of the season, allowing crops to go full-term, and in some cases requiring them to be killed off. Favourable comment has been received on the higher standard of field grading of Tableland potatoes this year. Rats continued to be a problem, especially in crops planted in ground out of peanuts.

Overall northern Queensland prices have been steady for most of the season. The gourmet market was low early on but has since improved. For the first time in a number of years no *Sebago* from northern Queensland were sold to processors.

Southern Queensland was affected by a dry period in autumn, which kept pressure on growers trying to irrigate crops without the assistance of rainfall. This has resulted in clean tubers with little of the post-harvest disease problems associated with the hot wet spring weather. Early spring harvested potatoes have been of high quality with prices for the spring crop reflecting the improved quality. Plantings this spring were down on previous years, which will hopefully result in a better price.

*Michael Hughes*  
Extension Agronomist  
Department of Primary Industry

### South Australia

South Australia has generally enjoyed a slightly above average winter and spring rainfall. Some areas have received well above average rainfall.

In the Lower South East the spring rainfall has delayed the completion of planting for the processing crop by approximately three weeks. Heavy rainfall events have caused some seed to breakdown in some early planted crops, so these will need to be replanted.

Safries, the local processing company, has increased storage and contracted tonnage by 10,000 tonnes for the coming season.

The Murraylands region experienced a severe frost in early October that affected low-lying areas. As these crops were at an early stage of development it is likely that only some yield will be lost.

There have been reports of powdery scab on early planted crops which is not unexpected given the spring rainfall and the overall weather conditions we have experienced in some districts.

The spring has been very windy which has slowed crop growth in the areas planted early.

Generally ware crops are looking average with no change to total area planted.

*Bob Peake*  
Senior Consultant Potatoes  
PIRSA Rural Solutions

## New South Wales

Digging of the late Coastal and Tablelands ware crops started in April and ended in September. Crop yields averaged 30 tonnes/hectare and quality was excellent. However, the fresh market remained oversupplied during autumn, with some growers leaving crops in the ground due to the low prices. Ware prices averaged \$6 to \$8 a fifty-kilogram bag, down \$230/tonne on last season. Late sales of Certified Seed also declined following the poor prices.

The late Riverina ware crops harvest started in June and finished in late October. Crop yields averaged 20 tonnes/hectare and quality was good. While crop areas were similar to last year, the fresh market continued to remain oversupplied during winter. On-farm prices were down by \$100/tonne on last year - averaging \$200/tonne for bulk, dirty potatoes and \$365/tonne for washed consumer packs.

Planting of the early Riverina crops stayed on schedule despite the rainy weather in August. Crop areas for the fresh, crisping and French fry crops are similar to last year. Although some crops had a patchy emergence, the mild growing conditions since October have lifted the yield prospects for the December harvest.

Sowing of the early and main crops in the coastal and Tablelands districts was on schedule with the dry weather. Early crop areas are down on last season, with many growers sowing their own seed to cut costs. Growing conditions have been difficult, with most crops in northern NSW requiring irrigation until late October. Digging started on the central coast in November. Crop yields and quality were good. However, only average yields are forecast for the lower Tablelands districts when harvesting commences in December.

A further exodus of small growers from the NSW potato industry has occurred following the winter downturn in the ware market. Financial liquidity remains tight for the remaining fresh growers, with payment delays to producers increasing after the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax and the Pay As You Go Tax system.

*Stephen Wade  
District Horticulturist  
NSW Agriculture*

## Victoria

Welcome heavy rains during late October have set most Victorian growers up for a good growing season, although planting schedules were disrupted in many areas.

Growers in Gippsland have suffered delays, with very few early fresh market crops in the ground. The delays, along with reduced production by some growers, could see good market prices in the next few months.

On the Koo Wee Rup Swamp planting has been delayed by at least a couple of weeks. Processing companies are watching the weather closely in case their continuity of supply is disrupted.

After rainfalls of 40-100mm in one week, French fry growers around Ballarat face the possibility of similar delays. If the wet spell continues, all growers will have to be alert to the possibility of powdery scab and late blight in their crops.

The Victorian Certified Seed Potato Authority (ViCSPA) will accredit a total of 10 laboratories/facilities in the coming year for the production of microtubers, minitubers and plantlets for the Australian industry. New methods are still being developed for increasing the yields of these products. All accredited laboratories must supply ViCSPA with 6-10 microtubers/minitubers/plantlets per batch produced; these are grown out in the field at Toolangi as a quality check for variety trueness-to-type and purity and for the presence of off-types.

A tight financial climate has resulted in sales of certified seed being well below the record of 39,000 tonnes sold last year.

On the export front things are generally quiet during October/November, as overseas customers decide on their seed requirements for the coming growing seasons. Most orders tend to start arriving in December, which means that a certain amount of estimation is required to match production with demand. One factor to consider this year is the dry weather in some Asian countries, which may restrict the areas that can be planted.

*Andrew Henderson  
Technology Transfer, Potatoes  
Agriculture Victoria*

## Tasmania

Following on from Tasmania's record planting last season the industry had a good but dry season. A record tonnage of an estimated 415,000 tonnes over all sectors of the industry was harvested. The other big news has been that after a relatively dry autumn/winter period, welcome spring rain over most of Tasmania replenished irrigation reserves and soil moisture levels in preparation for the coming season.

### French fry

The quality of potatoes grown for processing last season was generally very good, with the potatoes that came out of storage processing well. The final harvest finished early in October, with only a small tonnage left over winter. Harvesting conditions were generally ideal over most of the state.

Planting for the 2000/01 season got off to a good start with sufficient planting of early varieties to enable processing to commence on schedule. Although spring rains delayed the planting of the main crop until the end of October, conditions for the bulk of planting were largely ideal.

McCain Foods has initiated a major project with growers to improve yields and quality this season. The emphasis of the project is on seed quality, planting performance, general agronomy and irrigation scheduling.

Meanwhile, Simplot has an increase in contracted tonnes again this year.

### Fresh market

Yields of fresh market varieties were down last year mainly due to lack of water, particularly in the south of the state, as well as frosts in January which hit plants hard at flowering. The number of growers in the fresh market sector, particularly of seed, has decreased for the coming season, which may create a vacuum for some varieties.

### Seed

Planting of seed began as usual towards the end of October and will continue through to December, with the number of certified seed growers being down on last season.

*Linda Wilson  
Seed Potato Certification Officer  
Department of Primary Industries,  
Water and Environment*



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