

# 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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## Coming to Grips with common scab



Common scab produces scabby lesions on the tuber surface.

Common scab, a persistent problem for Tasmanian potato growers, has become an increasingly serious issue on the mainland in the past four years, particularly for seed growers who must meet stringent certification standards (no more than 2% of tubers with defects, including scab).

Common scab is caused by several species of the soilborne *Streptomyces* organism. Most *Streptomyces* are harmless and are important in the organic matter/nutrient recycling process. However, some cause disease in potatoes (and other root crops like carrots), infecting the small, newly formed potato tubers resulting in a range of superficial, raised or deep pitted scabby lesions on the surface of mature tubers.

According to the text books, common scab is favoured by alkaline soil conditions (particularly after lime incorporation) and low soil moisture at early tuber set. The standard recommendation for control is "don't lime before planting, irrigate during tuber set". This has provided little comfort to growers where the disease persists. However, it is likely the relatively warm, dry conditions of the past four summers have favoured common scab.

In Tasmania, common scab occurs in intensive cropping systems where potatoes are rotated with vegetables, poppies, pyrethrums, onions and other crops.

In Victoria, where most potato crops are grown after a pasture phase, common scab has become an exasperating problem, flaunting text book 'rules'. It can occur where each generation of seed potatoes is grown in 'new' ground (no previous history of potatoes) and in both irrigated and non-irrigated paddocks. It has been

particularly severe on some so-called moderately susceptible cultivars and is common in acidic sandy loam soils. Where a line of seed is planted into an acidic sandy loam paddock and a nearby clay loam paddock, the disease is significantly worse in the sandy soil than in the clay soil.

Research to understand the biology of common scab and factors governing its development in different cropping environments is the key to identifying management strategies for this difficult problem.

Recently, overseas researchers have identified several species of *Streptomyces* causing different symptoms. Some species are favoured by irrigation and others prefer acid rather than alkaline conditions.

In Victoria, a collaborative project between Agriculture Victoria, Knoxfield, and Monash University is identifying the different species and strains of *Streptomyces* associated with common scab around the state. The project will develop tests for the potato-specific strains which can be used for further research into the biology and management of *Streptomyces*.

This work complements research at the University of Tasmania which has identified *Streptomyces* species causing common scab in Tasmania. A related Horticulture Australia project at the university is evaluating potato cultivars for resistance to thaxtomin A, the toxin produced by *Streptomyces* that causes scab symptoms on tubers

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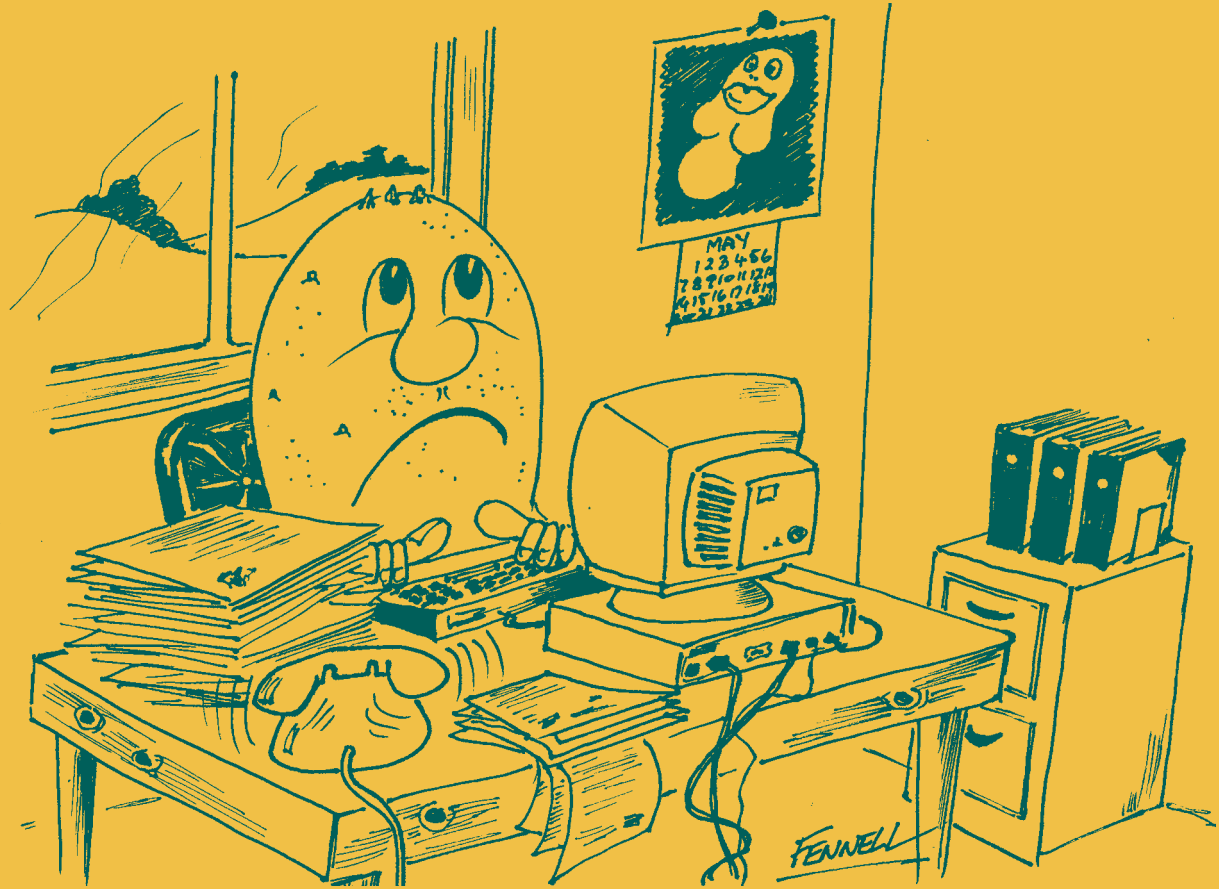
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## Growers want price increase

About 400 Tasmanian potato growers for Simplot and McCain attended a meeting on May 20 at Deloraine in Northern Tasmania to make a strong stand for a price increase for the 2001/2002 season, since there has not been one for 10 years.

A focus of the meeting was on the less than fair share of the retail value of French fries sold through fast food chains. Growers receive only 2% to 3% of retail value, or about 4 cents from a product selling for about A\$1.80 retail a serve. Processors also receive too small a retail share and it was agreed joint action was needed to get a fairer share.

It was unanimously agreed to ask Simplot and McCain to increase the base price by \$30 a tonne. Grower Chairmen from McCain Victoria and McCain South Australia attending the meeting expressed support for the price rise request.



*Eyes on Potatoes is produced by SageWords on behalf of the Australian Potato Industry Council.*

# EYES ON POTATOES



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# Managing the office side of business

*Keith and Paula Taylor have a farm at Jindong that is half way between Busselton and Margaret River in the south-west corner of WA. They grow potatoes, sweet corn, pumpkin and graze sheep and cattle. They have been involved in landcare for a long time and attempting to subdivide and protect a bush block. To also keep them busy they have three children with one at university in Perth and two at home.*

**Office work is not a task many people enjoy and yet it is critical to the success of the farm business. Family businesses tackle the task in different ways and the following interview describes the Taylor's family approach to office management.**

## The approach

**Paula** I am not particularly up with technology. I do most of what I need to do by phone, by hand and with a fax. We are not on the internet or use email as I have not yet found any real need for it in the business.

I do not keep a cash book, I feed the information to our accountant who does that for us. I enjoy doing other things rather than paper work.

We use our bank statement and we fill out information from cheque butts and feed this to our accountant. He does the quarterly BAS statements and lodges them for us. We use banklink and the computer gives us a copy of each bank statement set out in numerical order for cheques and deposits.

I found this approach is not a lot more expensive than doing the taxation once a year. For us it is working very well. We keep up to date by continually feeding information to the accountant.

**Keith** The most important thing that Paula does is coordinate and liaise with supermarkets about how much produce they want and when. She makes a lot of phone calls to coordinate with the transport company so they know when to be here to do pick ups. That is really important so we know what to do out in the paddock.

We are always talking.

We also keep a very close track of invoices. It is much better one person doing it. I go through most of the invoices and make sure they are correct. I do the agronomic work in the paddock, soil tests and petiole tests, and keep all the documentation for SQF#.

## GST

**Paula** I was absolutely dreading GST and thinking how horrible it would be. However, most of our produce is selling as fresh product so we don't have to worry about GST on the sales, so that made it easy.

Stock or hay or anything we sell through the livestock companies, Elders or Wesfarmers, we signed a form and they do any of the GST on the incomings and outgoing. All I do is copy the stock statement or hay statements and the accountant takes the information from these and relates it to the bank statement.

The only other thing I find is we have to keep things such as GST separate. We also have to be careful where there are a number of entries on the invoice as not all of them will necessarily include GST. It is a bit more work to do on the cheque butts but if I do it regularly it hasn't been too much of a problem.

By having to do the books every three months for GST, I am probably more up-to-date with the business than feeding information to the accountant on a 12 monthly basis. I do not know whether I like it, but it has probably made me better in the office.

**Keith** I do the SQF#. I used to use a diary but now most of the information goes into the SQF# documentation supplied through Western Potatoes. It is great having the information recorded so I can check back and find out what has been done.

## The computer

**Paula** The only thing we do on the computer is the farm budget and a bit of word processing.

I just find I get too frustrated with the computer. I can pay the accountant to do our bookkeeping for a small amount of money and that is a lot better as I can do other things that make me happy.

**Keith** I think until a computer system can be designed with the user in mind rather than a software company or the professional computer user, we will not use it regularly. You would not be without a mobile phone. Computers will get to that stage, but there has to be a lot more work put into them yet. I want to be able to turn it on, do the job, turn it off and then go away. I am not interested in the technology, only in the results. It is becoming more apparent though that in nearly every interaction, whether business or social, you have people saying you can contact me via the web or you can check this out on the website.

We do not have an internet connection yet, because the phone lines are very slow. We don't have time to wait for things to download for half an hour for a reasonable size document. Until we can get high speed internet access at a lower cost, people are not going to use it if they are in areas like ours.

**Paula** The most important thing for me is the phone contact with the people I deal with as the more I deal with them the easier it is to do business.

## How have things changed over time

**Keith** There is a lot more crap that comes into the office.

**Paula** I like to have things organised and regularly sit there and sort out the rubbish. The piles of paper in the doorway soon mount up.

**Keith** It is a bit like a farm workshop; you can always clean it up. There is a lot more paper coming into the office now. There can be problems dealing with that but Paula now has a good filing system and we can find things very quickly. Getting stuff filed away quickly and easily is important.

**Paula** We are also doing a far better job in the office than what we did before and are therefore more conscious of what is happening. When we started we didn't have time for the paperwork, just work, and we would be rushing to get everything done. We were also bringing up three kids.

**Keith** There is more paperwork these days, for example, when selling livestock today we had three forms instead of one. I think government departments and businesses need to have a good look at what they do.

## The essentials

**Keith** All you need is a cheque book, invoice book, deposit book, fax and phone!

**Paula** And a bottle of wine!

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● MANDURAH

● BUNBURY

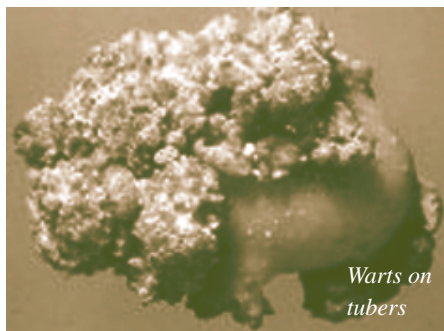
● JINDONG

# SQF or SQF2000 is a Quality Management or Quality Assurance system that has been introduced through Western Potatoes.

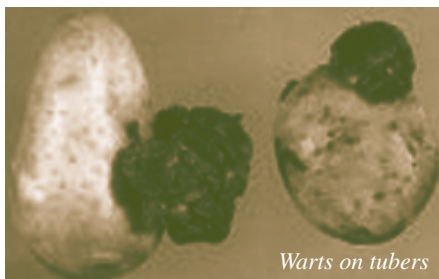
# Is a 'foot and mouth' type scenario likely for Aussie potatoes?

News of an outbreak of the destructive potato wart disease on a farm in Canada and its consequences has raised the spectre of potential 'foot and mouth' type scenarios for Australian potato growers which could destroy their livelihoods.

In October 2000, a potato farmer on Prince Edward Island in Canada discovered a dozen tubers with symptoms of potato wart disease. His farm was quarantined, the movement of seed and table stock potatoes from the island into the US banned and he faced the prospect of a ban on all future production from that field. Prince Edward Island (the home of McCains and *Shepody*) produces about 1.3million tonnes of potatoes annually, a sizeable proportion of which is shipped to more than 30 countries each year as fresh and processed product. About 20% of fresh market production is sold in the US and the ban on importing Island potatoes into the US has only just been lifted with an estimated \$22 million loss in sales since October.



Warts on tubers



Warts on tubers

## What is potato wart

It is a disease caused by a soil-inhabiting fungal parasite *Synchytrium endobioticum* with a similar biology and lifecycle to that of the powdery scab parasite *Spongospora subterranea*. The fungus infects the growing tips of potato plant stolons, buds and tuber eyes -

eventually forming big cauliflower-like outgrowths or 'warts' which render tubers unmarketable. The thick walled survival spores have a lifespan of more than 40 years in soil.

Fortunately, potato wart does not occur in Australia. However, if introduced, it would result in a 'foot and mouth' scenario with potentially devastating consequences. The introduction of ring rot bacteria (*Clavibacter michiganensis* subsp *sepedonicum*) and new strains of the late blight fungus (*Phytophthora infestans*) would have equally devastating consequences. Discovery of potato cyst nematode in Australia in the 1980s resulted in the quarantining of affected farms, and in restrictions in interstate trade and the export of potatoes. Recent outbreaks of the devastating bacterial wilt disease (*Ralstonia solanacearum*) on a few farms outside known areas has highlighted the need for greater awareness of these issues, good hygiene protocols to stop further spread and the know-how to better detect and manage an outbreak.

## Protecting the Australian potato industry from imported diseases

There is greater trade and movement of people around the globe than ever before. What is the possibility of potato wart or other exotic pests and diseases coming into Australia? Do we know how to deal with them? Pests and diseases are everyone's problems – they do not appreciate fences or borders. Being aware of the potential threats and having the know-how to deal with them is essential to ensuring the future of the potato industry.

In response to world trade obligations, our Federal and State Governments have taken new initiatives to protect our agricultural produce.

An example is a current Victorian State Government Science and Technology Initiative to identify high risk exotic pests and pathogens posing a potential economic and environmental threat to agriculture. This initiative will develop



Potato wart on stems

the capability to quickly and accurately diagnose and identify exotic pests and pathogens, increase awareness in agriculture of potential threats, update pest and pathogen reference collections and databases, and provide a more accurate picture of the current pest and disease status of agricultural crops. This process also provides the capability to respond to requests by trading partners for a Pest Risk Analysis of agricultural produce destined for export.

The initiative is commodity based and, although the current focus is on stone and pome fruit and some cereals and grain legumes, the potato has been identified as the next major crop for investigation.

The anticipated outcomes of the project for the Victorian potato industry are:

- targeted information for industry about potential threats and how to deal with them
- know-how for scientists to rapidly detect and deal with new pest and disease outbreaks

While government has taken the initiative, nationally the industry must take responsibility for developing contingency plans to deal with introductions of new pests and diseases, which, in this age of global trade and travel, may be inevitable. Being prepared is the only way to avoid a potential 'foot and mouth' scenario in the potato industry.

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# Obituaries

## John Smink

The death of Tasmanian potato grower, John Smink, in a tractor accident on his property on March 17 was a devastating blow to his family and to the farming community.

He was well known and respected in Tasmania and nationally as a delegate to various grower organisation bodies and committees.

John actively participated for more than 20 years as a member of the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, Vegetable and Potato Councils. He served a two year term as Chairman of the Vegetable Council and was an executive member of both Councils and the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association General Council.

He was responsible for the formation of the McCain Processed Potato Growers Group in Tasmania in 1987 and was founding Chairman. He represented the interests of fresh market potato growers for some years as a member of the Board of the Tasmanian Potato Industry Authority.

John was also held in high esteem at the national level. He served a term as Chairman of Potato Growers of Australia, was a member of the Australian Potato Industry Council and at one time was Deputy Chairman of that group.

John was also delegate to the Australian Vegetable and Potato Growers Federation. In more recent times he was a delegate to the Potato Sector of that association.

He was prominent in local community affairs, including Landcare and Pony Club committees, to name just two.

He was clearly dedicated to his own farming enterprise and to the business of representing the interests of farmers. He worked tirelessly on behalf of farmers to achieve better price and contract conditions for processing potato growers.

John leaves his wife, Beth, and children, Johanna, Linda, David and Peter.

The high regard John was held in can perhaps be measured from the attendance at his funeral of more than 750 people on March 22.

His valuable input to debate and his overall contribution to the many issues facing the farming community will be sadly missed.

## John Rich

### Executive Officer

### Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association

## Brian Francis Clark

The South Australian vegetable industry is mourning the loss of one of its stalwarts, Brian Clark, of Virginia. Brian died, age 64, on Saturday May 5 after a long battle with illness.

Heavily involved in industry and district associations, he was made Citizen of the Year for the City of Munno Para in 1993 to recognise his lifetime of service.

He joined the Virginia Country Fire Service in the mid-1970s and was Brigade Captain for some 23 years until his death.

Brian was born in Paradise where he grew celery with his family and then moved to Virginia in 1956 to expand the farming operations. In the following years Brian, with his brother Darrol, grew celery, potatoes, onions, lettuce and carrots. They were particularly successful with an American celery line, which they marketed into Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide.

Brian was a meticulous farmer who was passionate in whatever he did.

The potato industry has been well served by Brian as has horticulture in general with his involvement in the Horticultural Association of South Australia, now a commodity group of the South Australian Farmers' Federation.

Brian was a member of the South Australian Potato Board until it was dissolved in 1985 and was a foundation member of both Potato Growers of South Australia and Potato Growers of Australia.

A tireless worker, he was the last Chairman of SAFRATE Society Ltd before it closed in October 1997, a fact that always weighed heavily on Brian's mind, as none had worked harder than he to keep it going.

Brian had a passion for fine motor cars, particularly Jaguars. He was a keen collector.

Brian's determination and integrity are two characteristics that will be sorely missed by those who knew him.

To Brian's wife Joy, we extend our deepest sympathy.

## Bill Bishop

### Manager, SAFF Market Services

## The need for a HACCP plan - it depends on your customer

Whether you need a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan or not depends on the Quality Assurance system your customer is operating under.

A HACCP plan identifies and evaluates potential hazards in a food production chain so they can be controlled or prevented. Hazards may be physical (for example, wood splinters, pieces of glass), chemical (for example, pesticide residues) or biological (for example, bacterial contamination). HACCP plans are audited and must comply with international standards.

If you are asked to implement a HACCP plan and need help, you can:

- contact your state department of agriculture/primary industries
- use a consultant
- attend a training course and become accredited in the use of HACCP

However, unless growers directly supply a retailer or processor, they are likely to need only the simpler approved supplier program rather than a HACCP plan. The requirements for becoming an approved supplier are covered in the booklet *Australian Potato Industry Quality Assurance Guide for Potato Farmers* by Eric Coleman (QDPI) (distributed last year with *Eyes on Potatoes*).

## Andrew Henderson

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# Retail grocery industry code of conduct

-a guide to dispute resolution

Litigating disputes in the retail grocery industry can cost companies in terms of legal fees, time and, in many cases, a loss of trust between the parties. An alternative to litigation is now available under the new Retail Grocery Industry Code of Conduct.

## The Code

The Code is a set of voluntary guidelines promoting fair trading practices in the retail grocery industry and a simple dispute resolution mechanism in the event of a dispute. It came into effect on September 13 and addresses four important issues:

- standards and specifications for produce
- product labelling, packaging and preparation
- contracts
- voluntary notification of retail business acquisition

Any breach of the Code or of any other vertical supply dispute may be referred to the Retail Grocery Industry Ombudsman, even if it is not described in the Code.

## Vertical supply dispute

A vertical supply dispute is one between industry participants in different stages of production or distribution in the retail grocery industry. For example, vertical supply disputes may arise between farmers and wholesalers; wholesalers and retailers; and retailers and farmers.

## Who is covered under the Code

The Code covers all industry participants in the Australian retail grocery industry in their vertical supply relationships with one another. They include those businesses involved in the production, preparation and sale of food, beverages and non-food grocery items, including (but not limited to) primary producers, manufacturers and/or processors, wholesalers, importers and/or distributors, brokers and/or agents and grocery retailers.

Although the Code is voluntary, all industry participants have access to the Ombudsman to mediate vertical supply disputes arising between them.

## Who isn't covered

Consumers and those entities falling outside the Australian retail grocery industry are not covered by the Code. (Consumers are already protected by existing Federal, State and Territory consumer protection laws and should contact their local consumer affairs authority.)

Participants within the retail grocery industry sector with horizontal disputes are not covered. For example, farmers with farmers, wholesalers with wholesalers and retailers with retailers.

## Dispute Resolution Scheme



## How disputes are handled under the Code

Parties are encouraged to resolve disputes between themselves. Where this is unsuccessful or impossible (that is, one party feels unable to raise the dispute with the other party for a genuine reason, or there are no internal dispute resolution procedures), disputes may be referred to the Ombudsman.

## The Ombudsman

The Ombudsman is the person or persons appointed by the Federal Minister for Small Business to mediate disputes for the retail grocery industry sector in accordance with the Code.

## The Ombudsman's role

The Ombudsman mediates disputes in accordance with the Code. In particular, the Ombudsman will determine whether a dispute is covered by the Code and whether it is suitable for mediation. Provided the dispute is covered by the Code and is suitable for mediation, the Ombudsman will attempt to mediate the dispute with the parties.

## Mediation

Mediation is a private conference involving the parties to a dispute and the Ombudsman. During mediation, the Ombudsman helps the parties understand the issues in dispute, identify creative options for resolving the dispute and reach a negotiated agreement, where possible.

Mediation can be a genuine alternative to taking the matter to court and can result in a fast, effective solution to many types of disputes. Unlike a court of law, the Ombudsman does not "hand down" a decision or impose a solution onto the parties. The parties retain control over the process at all times and only reach agreement on what is acceptable to all concerned.

Lawyers are not permitted to act on your behalf. You may, however, bring a support person along to the mediation.

## When mediation is appropriate or suitable

The Ombudsman can mediate any vertical supply dispute between industry

participants occurring on or after September 13.

If your dispute is not a vertical supply dispute or occurred before September 13 (or otherwise falls outside the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman), the Office of the Retail Grocery Industry Ombudsman (ORGIO) will endeavour to refer you to another contact point for help. The ORGIO cannot, however, give legal advice.

## How industry participants can apply for mediation

Industry participants can contact the ORGIO or visit the website to complete a mediation enquiry form.

If your dispute is applicable under the Code, it is assessed for mediation against a number of eligibility criteria.

## The cost

A \$50 application fee applies when you lodge an application for mediation. However, applicants may apply to the Ombudsman to waive the fee on the grounds of serious financial hardship.

The Ombudsman is fully funded by the Federal Government but parties must meet their own costs of attending mediation.

## When and where mediation takes place

Mediation takes place at a time and location agreeable to all parties. The ORGIO will assist the parties in this process.

## Where you can get further information

The Office is located within the Federal Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business.

Information, including mediation enquiry forms and updated versions of the Code, can be viewed or downloaded from our website at [www.rgio.dewrsb.gov.au](http://www.rgio.dewrsb.gov.au)

You can also email us at [rgio@dewrsb.gov.au](mailto:rgio@dewrsb.gov.au), telephone us on (02) 6121 7302 or (02) 6121 5394, or send us a fax on (02) 6121 7598.

# AUSVEG Briefs

## AUSVEG pays respect to John Smink

Everybody was sad to hear about the death of John Smink, who was very active in the AUSVEG Potato Group. A minute's silence was held at the beginning of the May 3 meeting to pay our respects.

Max McKenna thanked the chairman and other state organisations for condolences sent to the family.

## AUSVEG proposal to Horticulture Australia

The formation of Horticulture Australia has brought with it new responsibilities for the AUSVEG Potato Group as it is responsible for the grower part of the levy under the legislation.

The AUSVEG Board has prepared a proposal about the structure and operation of vegetable and potato R&D programs in the new system, which is being considered by Horticulture Australia.

One of the issues discussed was that under the arrangement, the services provided by Horticulture Australia would be more flexible to satisfy the needs of different industries. So, where before there was a flat 10% administration fee on levy receipts to run the R&D program, this fee will now be negotiable. So if the potato industry wants some services offered by Horticulture Australia but not others, it can negotiate a suitable package.

## New Horticulture Australia Managing Director

The AUSVEG Potato Group welcomes the appointment of John Webster as the new Managing Director of Horticulture Australia.

## Grower groups worldwide look for better retail share

At a recent meeting in the US, Australian and New Zealand potato grower representatives exchanged industry information and developed working relationships with the North American Potato Marketing Association. The outcome will be to help growers and processors of French fries worldwide to work together for a greater share of the retail value of the finished product.

In addition to contacts made in the US, good links have also been made with growers in the UK, France, Germany and South Africa.

## Review of levy program

The group agreed to review the levy program in line with its initial commitment when the program was started seven years ago.

A recommendation for a comprehensive review of the operations and outcomes of the levy program was put to APIC.

*Dom Della Vedova*  
Chairman

☎ (08) 9776 1233

✉ [della1@iinet.net.au](mailto:della1@iinet.net.au)

## Technico signs multi-million dollar contracts

for China market

Technico has signed orders in excess of \$2 million for the supply of early generation seed potatoes to McCain Foods China and Simplot China.

The McCain's contract covers various potato varieties to be supplied to McCain next year with the likelihood of similar valued contracts in future years. The Simplot contract will start supply this year.

*For further information refer to the Technico website at [www.technituber.com](http://www.technituber.com)*



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or to: T Vidler,  
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# APIC Briefs

## **Government advisers**

APIC had two government advisers on the council – Barry Philp from Primary Industry and Resources SA and Rowland Laurence from the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research. At the last meeting and at Barry and Rowland's request, their role was reviewed and it was decided a regular commitment to the council was no longer required. Barry and Rowland indicated they were prepared to provide support if there was an issue requiring their input.

The council would like to thank them for their excellent work over the years as they have made a significant contribution to council outcomes.

## **National seed standards**

The council was informed that the new national standards are finished. Except for a few operational issues to be finalised between the council and the project team, the last remaining task is to introduce the minimum standards. This process is well underway (see Page 11.)

## **WinHort**

WinHort is a program to encourage greater involvement of horticultural women in decision making positions. The council was briefed on it by Libby Abraham, a program manager with Horticulture Australia, and Cathy McGowan, a rural consultant and program leader for WinHort.

The council gave its full support to the program.

## **Changes to the breeding and evaluation program**

When the councillors were brought up to date with R&D activities, they stressed the importance of the R&D Committee completing the review of the breeding and evaluation program as soon as possible.

## **AusHort program**

Horticulture Australia's AusHort program is funded by many horticultural industries to tackle common issues. Geoff Moar is the potato industry's representative on the AusHort R&D Committee.

Libby Abraham provided a program update and indicated the next meeting would focus on the new cross-industry advisory committee resulting from the formation of Horticulture Australia, and new and continuing projects.

## **Review of levy program**

The council endorsed the resolution put forward by the AUSVEG Potato Group that an independent review of the levy program be initiated.

The levy program has been going nearly 10 years and it is important it be reviewed to determine if any changes are needed.

## **John Smink's death**

The council would like to pass on its sympathy and sorrow to John's family and friends. John was previously a councillor of APIC who was well liked and a tireless worker for the potato industry.

### **Chairman**

**Milton Rodda**

☎ (03) 5339 2241

✉ [mhrodde@mccain.com.au](mailto:mhrodde@mccain.com.au)





*Cathy McGowan is keen to hear from women wanting to network and develop leadership skills*

## Bringing women's skills to the top jobs

Horticulture Australia has initiated a program (WinHort) with the horticultural industries to encourage greater involvement of women in decision-making positions. WinHort aims to capture the largely hidden resources available to horticultural industries in all areas including communication, planning, business and policy development.

Program leader for the project is Cathy McGowan who is a rural community consultant with more than 15 years' experience in agriculture and related industries.

Cathy is keen to hear from women who want to develop their skills in leadership and establish networks with like-minded women in horticulture.

**Cathy McGowan**  
 ☎ (02) 6024 6834  
 Fax: (02) 6056 5134  
 ✉ [cmcgowan@albury.net.au](mailto:cmcgowan@albury.net.au)



## Elders picks up Wrightson varieties

Elders has obtained the marketing rights, previously held by Wrightson, for varieties from several potato breeders in Europe and the US.

The company has been looking for potatoes with a wider appeal for all industry sectors including brushing, crisping, French fry and multi-purpose lines to add to the washing *Nadine* line already commercialised.

In addition to Caithness Potato Breeders, UK, Elders will work with other overseas breeders to commercialise potatoes. They include: Cygnet Potato Breeders (previously Plant Breeders International, Cambridge, UK), Cornell University (US), Agrolon (UK), Van Rijn (Holland) and Boreal Plant Breeding (Finland).

Potatoes from these programs include *Saxon*, a potato with taste, high yield potential and good size (from Cygnet Potato Breeders) and *Andover*, a crisping-type potato with high yield potential and good sizing characteristics (from Cornell University). There are several new potato lines at various stages of importation and development that will be in limited supply until trials determine their suitability for their intended markets.

**René de Jong**  
 Elders Potato Coordinator  
 Ballarat  
 ☎ 0418 523 710  
 ✉ [rdejong@elders.com.au](mailto:rdejong@elders.com.au)



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*The Australian and New Zealand R&D Committee members at the conference centre at Mt Wellington in Auckland.*

# Potato R&D Committee Update

In March the Potato R&D Committee met with its New Zealand counterpart, the VegFed R&D Committee. Under the new trans-Tasman arrangement, the New Zealand and Australian R&D Committees have a joint annual meeting to identify potential areas of collaboration. Representatives from the VegFed R&D Committee came to Australia in March 2000 so it was our turn to visit New Zealand this year.

The format for the trip was a field tour on Wednesday March 7 followed by the Australian meeting on the Thursday and then the joint Australian-New Zealand meeting on the Friday.

## Joint project support

Although this was the second cross-Tasman meeting it was the first time all members were present from Australia and New Zealand committees, making it a learning exercise for both groups.

In any joint venture, it is natural that there are some reservations about how such an arrangement might work. In this case, it is important that both countries gain benefits, whether through increased efficiencies or by avoiding duplication. It is the responsibility of both committees to ensure we reach a suitable outcome.

After discussing how each of our systems worked a range of possible joint projects were considered and two projects were supported:

**Project one:** to develop diagnostic tests using genetic markers for potato cyst nematode (PCN) and bacterial wilt to enable more rapid, accurate and cheaper testing of samples. A major part of the work is field validation to build on work already done.

In this instance, the benefits of trans-Tasman cooperation were very evident. New Zealand has PCN and Australia does not. We have quarantined areas of bacterial wilt and New Zealand does not. Neither country wants the other pest in their country but need to be able to test for it more effectively so they can deal with an outbreak should it occur.

To produce an effective diagnostic test you need to be able to test for the diseases using samples from the field where the pest or disease is present, otherwise you do not know whether the test will work properly when you need to use it. So by carrying out the high risk PCN work in New Zealand and the bacterial wilt work in Australia, both countries obtain what they need for two important problems at far less cost.

The Institute for Crop and Food Research Institute in Christchurch, New Zealand, will work closely with the Institute

for Horticultural Development at Knoxfield in Victoria on the project.

These tests are important, as in recent years, we have had instances where considerable stress and hardship resulted from situations where quarantine pests and diseases could not be identified easily. PCN and bacterial wilt were involved in two instances and bacterial ring rot in another.

**Project two:** a world scanning service of potato research articles. Called *Chips*, this circular is currently provided to New Zealand potato growers and for a small contribution which assists both industries, we can now include *Chips* as an insert into *Eyes on Potatoes* and *Potato Australia*.

## Australian project proposals

Seventeen full proposals were considered and a recommendation made to Horticulture Australia that 10 be funded. Approved projects will start in the new financial year after contracts have been finalised. Information on new projects will be published in *Potato Australia* in September.

## Breeding and evaluation program

The committee carefully considered a report on the breeding and evaluation program by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (Agriculture Victoria). Due to the difficulty in reaching the desired outcome, a small working group from the committee will engage independent consultants to evaluate proposals and develop a business plan for the program.

For the committee, this has been a drawn out and difficult process which all members want resolved as soon as possible.

## Potato R&D plan

The Potato R&D Plan should be finalised by the time you receive this issue of *Eyes on Potatoes*. Hard copies will be available from Horticulture Australia and can also be downloaded from their internet site ([www.horticulture.com.au](http://www.horticulture.com.au)).

## Other issues

A number of other issues were discussed including: new arrangements with Horticulture Australia, maintaining core research expertise and progress on the proposal for the new internet site.

**Dr Jack Meagher**  
Chairman  
☎ (03) 9836 1943



*Local Pukekohe farmer Jayant Master talks to the members of the R&D Committee in his crop.*

# New seed certification scheme

The new national seed certification standard for the potato industry is now complete. It replaces five separate state standards with a single, uniform set of minimum field and tuber production measures for disease, trueness-to-type and defects.

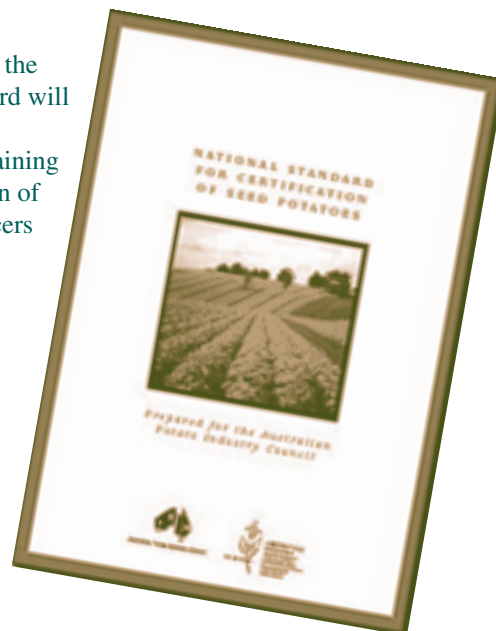
The rules outlined in the new standard are not much different from those applying in the state-based schemes. Inspection staff will continue to operate for certification authorities in each state.

The National Standard will provide important benefits for all industry sectors. These include:

- minimum standards for presence of disease, tuber quality and trueness to type
- common terminology
- uniform national labelling for domestic and export certified seed potatoes
- uniform rules and guidelines for seed production including: rotations, crop isolation, hygiene, seed grades, field inspections of crops, tuber inspections, packaging and transport procedures

The adoption of the National Standard will also lead to uniformity in training and accreditation of state-based officers responsible for certifying Australia's seed potatoes.

The new standards will take effect for any seed crops sown from August.



**Russell Sully**  
*National Seed Standards Project Manager*  
*Agriculture Victoria, Knoxfield*  
☎ (03) 9210 9222  
✉ [russell.sully@nre.vic.gov.au](mailto:russell.sully@nre.vic.gov.au)

The national seed certification standard project was a levy funded project initiated by the Australian Potato Industry Council to provide benefits for all industry sectors.

## Seed industry workshop - opportunities for the 21st Century

Seed Potatoes Victoria is holding an industry workshop at the Warragul Arts Centre on August 20-21 titled Opportunities for the 21st Century.

The workshop will focus on:

- issues/opportunities for the potato industry, given a changed water-use policy
- doing business in the 21st Century
- changes in buyer requirements
- industry trends

It will also feature a major trade display of planting machinery, with machinery demonstrations planned (weather permitting).

The registration cost is \$150 and all interested persons are invited. Inquiries about the workshop and accommodation options should be directed to Seed Potatoes Victoria.

**Tony Pitt**  
*Executive Officer*  
*Seed Potatoes Victoria*  
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# Latest R&D reports

The following is a list of Horticulture Australia Final Reports released in the past three months.

DNA fingerprints and cryopreservation of potato cultivars for improved Quality Assurance	PT97011
Evaluation of potato publications	PT98042
Investigation on common scab disease of potatoes and development of control methods	PT96010
Potato breeding and cultivar trials in Australia – WA component	PT96017
Production and assessment of virus-resistant potato cultivars	PT97013
Selection and evaluation of potato cultivars in QLD	PT96015

These are available from Horticulture Australia for \$22 each in Australia or \$US30 outside Australia including postage. To obtain reports send a cheque or money order with a note quoting the project name/s and project number/s to:

*Ms Sharon Baker*  
*Horticulture Australia*  
*Level 1, 50 Carrington Street*  
*Sydney NSW 2000*  
☎ (02) 8295 2300  
☎ Fax: (02) 8295 2399  
✉ horticulture@horticulture.com.au

Alternatively, reports can be purchased through the Horticulture Australia internet site at [www.horticulture.com.au](http://www.horticulture.com.au)

## New century export approach for fresh market seed potato growers

Although production in Tasmania of certified seed for the fresh market has been gradually declining, growers are meeting to explore various marketing options available to them and how best to promote certified seed and increase sales and returns.

With assistance from Joe Horak, the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment New Opportunities and Marketing Officer, and Roger Tyshing, the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association's Vegetable Industry Development Officer, growers have decided a collaborative marketing strategy, rather than the ad-hoc individual approach of the past, would yield the best return on investment.

They have developed a two-pronged strategy for increasing sales to two different market segments - retail and fresh market ware growers.

For the retail nursery and garden centre market, it was decided joint marketing of certified seed potatoes under the existing but little used TasSeed brand, and providing information and point of sale material such as signage, literature and display boxes to retail outlets would encourage them to stock only certified seed, raising its profile.

Certified seed growers would still be able to market seed under their own name but would be encouraged to participate in the joint marketing venture by making some seed, time and financial commitment to the venture.

The second part of the strategy was to merge the Fresh Market Seed Growers Association with the Fresh Market and Export Vegetable Growers Group. Both are small commodity groups operating as part of the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association Vegetable Council. Merging them would give the resulting entity greater depth but best of all an opportunity for seed growers to communicate with ware growers.

Direct communication between seed growers and commercial growers in the processing and fresh markets has not been as good as it could be. Opportunities to improve this situation by working together to improve the marketing of potatoes have been identified.

A certified seed awareness campaign is in the final planning stages ready for spring and a growing number of retail outlets are keen to participate.

*Roger Tyshing*  
*Industry Development Officer (Vegetables)*  
☎(03) 6331 6377  
✉ [tfga.rtyshing@bigpond.com](mailto:tfga.rtyshing@bigpond.com)

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# GM plants in Nature

Results of a study investigating the possibility of genetically-modified (GM) plants escaping into natural habitats have recently been published in the scientific journal, *Nature*.

The study involved planting four GM and non-GM crops (canola, potato, corn and sugar beet) alongside each other in 12 different habitats and monitoring them over a 10-year period. The GM crops were either herbicide tolerant or insect resistant.

The UK-based study was established to investigate the validity of concerns that GM crops would become weeds and invade natural habitats, or that the introduced genes would be transferred by pollen to wild relatives whose hybrid offspring would then become weedy or invasive.

The plants did not become weedy, invasive or self-sustaining. The GM plants fared the same as the non-GM plants – within four years all the corn, beet and canola plots had died out. Only one plot of potatoes lasted the full decade, and all of the survivors were non-GM.

*Articles from GMO - Guiding Meaningful Opinions, The GeneTechnology Newsletter for the Horticulture Industry - Compiled by Agrifood Awareness Australia for Horticulture Australia*

# Market Research on GMs in New Zealand

A National Business Review-Compaq poll comparing New Zealand consumer attitudes to GM food in the years 1999 and 2001 has found people are becoming more positive about the idea of eating GM food.

The number of people who said they would eat food they knew to be GM has risen from 28 per cent in March 1999 to 35 per cent in March 2001.

Fewer people said no to GM food, down from 59 per cent to 56 per cent, and fewer people were unsure about GM food, down from 13 per cent to 9 per cent.

Half the people surveyed said they needed more information about the technology, and were still unsure about the issue.

Forty-five per cent of the undecided respondents said the risks of gene technology outweighed the benefits. A third of the undecided group said the benefits of GM outweighed the risks and 22 per cent were unsure.

Young people were more willing to eat GM food than older people, with 69 per cent of those aged 18-19 and 53 per cent of those aged 20-24 saying they would eat GM food.

# Horticulture Australia

## appoints Managing Director



Horticulture Australia's first Managing Director has been appointed. John Webster, formerly of Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) took up the position on May 18.

John holds a Bachelor of Economics from the Australian National University majoring in economics and law. He also studied Strategic Marketing Management at the Harvard Business School, US.

Board Chair, Dr Jane Wilson said John impressed the Board with his energy and obvious understanding of the issues at hand. John's achievements bear testament to his vision and strategic thinking skills as well as his ability to work in partnership with industry. His ability to merge research, development and marketing functions into commercial outcomes for industry will be invaluable.

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# ROUND-UP

## State

### Western Australia

#### Fresh market

Western Potatoes launched pre-prepared mashed potato on the Mother's Day weekend, prior to winter when consumption is usually greatest.

The product is prepared for Western Potatoes by an established food processor. It adds value to fresh potatoes and will increase returns to growers.

#### Crisp exports

The crisp export market is steady.

#### French fry

The Manjimup Apple Export Syndicate (MAES) has added a French fry processing plant to its operations. The plant, which was relocated from Perth, has a capacity of 10,000t. The General Manager is Doug Grewar. MAES believes it can service niche markets better than the bigger manufacturers. It is targeting domestic and export markets.

A change of personnel at Vital Foods in Albany has seen Phil Batt appointed as new General Manager. Vital Foods produces frozen vegetables and French fries.

#### Seed

The Potato Growers Association will be holding a workshop on June 8. For more information, contact Jim Turley, Executive Officer PGA, Ph: (08) 9481 0834.

*Peter Dawson  
Project Manager, Potatoes  
Agriculture Western Australia*

### Queensland

The Darling Downs region is harvesting the autumn crop. Much of this was planted under hot and dry conditions, causing concern to the growers. Fortunately, the weather changed, providing good cool growing conditions for most of the season. As a result, early crops were light on yield and later crops much improved. A similar pattern was seen with processing crops, which suffered from some lower specific gravities in the early crops.

Conditions were similar for Gatton crops and yields followed a similar pattern. Fresh market prices for these crops have tended to be good due to a supply shortage. Ground preparation for Gatton spring crops is underway.

Planting has started in the Bundaberg region and will continue until July. Wet weather has caused some small delays to planting schedules, but this will not have a major effect on the season. A concern is the occurrence and spread of the hard-to-control melon thrip in some crops. The pest has been detected in Childers, 50km from Bundaberg and is expected to move south into warmer, drier regions.

Early season plantings have begun on the Atherton Tablelands, generally from own-kept seed, although a few early shipments of certified seed have also been planted.

*Michael Hughes  
Extension Agronomist  
Department of Primary Industry*

### South Australia

Harvesting of summer ware crops in the Riverland, Murraylands, Lakes and South East has been completed or near completed. Yield and quality were highly variable depending on irrigation and overall crop management during the very hot January and February period. Heavy spring rainfall adversely affected some of the early planted South East crops on shallow soils. Prices have been very good which is a bonus compared to last season's, which were ordinary.

The winter crop in the Lakes region has been planted and is establishing well with the mild autumn conditions.

Processing crops in the South East have had a mixed season. Those planted in early spring on draining soils yielded well. Crops planted on shallower soil types in late spring and early summer were delayed by three weeks due to heavy spring rain which waterlogged many paddocks. The delayed planting and hot summer made irrigation and crop management critical for success this season. The region then had highly variable heavy rainfall in mid March which, when combined with low temperatures, stopped crop growth. The early planted crops were less affected by these events than the late planted crops, which produced a greater proportion of 'smalls' at harvest, due to the early cessation of active growth. Thankfully this rainfall was not repeated and harvesting has proceeded with minimal problems.

The processing crop will be harvested by late May, with most growers achieving contract tonnages.

*Bob Peake  
Senior Consultant Potatoes  
Primary Industries and Resources  
South Australia Rural Solutions*

## Tasmania

Well, we have arrived at the business end of the season when growers get to see what really has been growing under all those healthy, well grown potato tops! There is always plenty of speculation about what the harvest is going to be like, but thankfully this year the predicted lower yield and quality in Tasmania generally hasn't eventuated.

Simplot and McCains report that *Russet Burbank* crops planted earlier (prior to the November cold snap) did tend to be down on tuber size and therefore yield. However, early *Shepody* for McCains showed up to 20% yield improvement from last year which has been attributed to increased application of the agronomic information made available to growers.

The November plantings of *Russet Burbank* are yielding well, probably on a par with last year, with very few common scab problems. This year has seen some rot which has caused partial crop losses in marginal areas of the state where the paddocks were prone to waterlogging. Generally, wet weather has only caused minor delays to harvesting.

McCains finished storing in the first week of May, while Simplot is due to finish storing about mid-June, with the intake continuing until August.

This season has seen the introduction of tuber inspections for seed certification in Tasmania to comply with the National Standards for the Certification of Seed Potatoes. The Tasmanian guidelines have always had a tuber standard but in the past it has been the responsibility of the seed growers, so tuber inspections involving certification inspectors is something different for everyone involved. Eelworm, common scab and rhizoctonia are proving to be major causes of rejection.

Finally, the death of John Slink in March was a great loss to the Tasmanian farming community and particularly the potato industry, and we all wish to express our sincere sympathy to his wife Beth and family.

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

## New South Wales

Digging of the main ware crop started in early April across the Tableland districts, with only average yields of 37t/ha being dug in most districts. Production was down on last year as a result of reduced plantings and some growers sowing their own seed to cut costs. Fresh market prices remained firm with the tight supplies, climbing from \$400/t to \$500/t in April and May, a big increase on the \$160/t to \$240/t received in the same period last year.

Seed crop harvesting is also underway in the Guyra, Orange and Crookwell districts. Seed areas are similar to last year. Rising ware prices have produced a fair demand for most lines of certified seed. This year's recommended minimum price for Crookwell certified seed has been set at \$500/t.

Planting of the late ware crop in the Coastal and lower Tableland districts started in mid January and was completed by late February. Many crops on the far north coast have suffered from the "big wet" earlier this year, with some areas receiving 1000mm (40 inches) of rain after sowing. Poor establishment and low fertility have reduced crop prospects; with below-average yields expected when digging begins in the Dorriggo district in mid-May.

Sowing of the Riverina late ware crop started in early February and finished mid-March. Crop areas were considerably down on last season due to poor returns for fresh potatoes. While most growers achieved average crop establishment, the mild temperatures in March and April slowed crop development. As a result, digging is expected to be delayed until June to give crops the maximum growing season and only average yields of 30t/ha are forecast when harvest begins.

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

## Victoria

After a long wait, substantial rain finally arrived in most districts in late April. Some heavy falls were experienced in the space of a few days (for example, about 200mm in the Otways). While there were some delays to harvesting as a result, the rain reduced the potential for bruising at harvesting. Despite the overall dry year, some French fry growers around Ballarat finished the season with high yielding crops (up to 70t/ha).

By contrast, yields of fresh market crops seemed to be below average, probably due to a lack of water and poor emergence in later crops. However, there has been strong demand for the crop and prices have been high in the harvest period. The crop has been much easier to sell than was the case last year.

Yield and quality have been down among crisping potato crops, with some growers struggling to fulfil their contracts. A lack of drying winds following the rain caused delays in harvesting on the Koo Wee Rup swamp and losses were caused by common scab and potato moth.

Very clean certified seed crops have been produced this season, with few rejections (about 3%). The harvest has progressed quite well, although heavy rain in some areas has resulted in losses. There has also been some incidence of eelworm and potato moth. The demand for seed has been strong and most seed growers are fully committed with orders. The total area of certified seed is slightly less than for last year.

Seed Potatoes Victoria is planning a workshop on August 20-21 in Warragul to look at current technical and other issues for the industry. The second day of the workshop will be a planting trade day. (See page 11 for details)

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

# Searching for scrumptious spud recipes

Think you've tasted the best scalloped potatoes, the tastiest shepherd's pie or the most mouth-watering home-made gnocchi? We'd like to share your home baked secrets!

From next issue, *Eyes On Potatoes* will publish readers' recipes – to celebrate the versatility, nutritional benefits, delicious flavour and texture of potatoes.

Please send us your favourite spud recipe along with a photo of yourself, your name and address and a brief history of the recipe you like and why you like it so much.

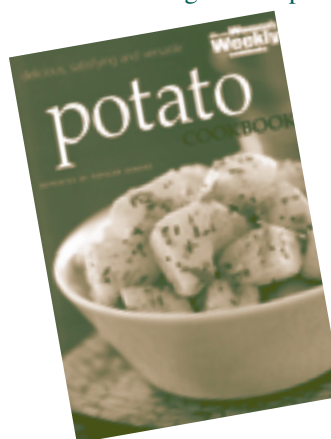
Submit your recipe, name, address and photo to:

**The Editor,  
*Eyes On Potatoes*  
PO Box 1246,  
Kensington, Vic, 3031**

And for readers interested in other spud recipes, here are some cookbooks given over to the glorious spud!



▲ Available by sending \$9 cheque or money order (which includes GST and postage) to:  
**Potato Cookbook, PO Box 78, Thorpdale, VIC, 3835.**  
Proceeds go to local community projects and charities.



▲ Available at newsagents and bookshops.



▲ Check out the Western Potatoes internet site at [www.Westernpotatoes.com.au](http://www.Westernpotatoes.com.au)

## Australian potato export opportunities: bonanza or myth

Massive export market opportunities for Australian potatoes in Asia will not be realised unless the Australian industry can address some major issues, according to a study just completed for the Australian Potato Industry Council and Horticulture Australia.

The two year study by the Institute for Horticultural Development, Knoxfield, VIC, looked at the potential in export markets and what the Australian Potato Industry needed to do to improve its export performance.

As part of the study, Dr David McKinna, a leading marketing strategy consultant, prepared two reports, which look at the industry and markets, and outline the way forward.

### Niche market potential

Australia is unlikely to be able to compete at the bottom end of the market because of cheap imports from the US, and Holland and the emerging threat from China and Indonesia. The sheer size of the industries in the US and Holland, and the cyclical nature of production, mean they can land product at half the landed price of Australian product.

Potentially, there is an opportunity to build the premium markets in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia through product differentiation, marketing and promotion. However, the industry is neither well enough organised nor has the critical mass at present to be able to capture this opportunity.

### Production and supply issues

Some of the main issues which need to be addressed include reducing cost of production, overcoming the major disadvantage in Australian freight rates (which account for up to 15% of landed product price), developing more efficient packaging systems and improving quality and consistency.

From a broader industry perspective, there needs to be stronger synergies between the domestic and export markets to offset the current advantage held by the US and Holland. They have critical mass and are able to move product freely between domestic and export markets.

At present the Australian industry has no coordinated capability for gathering market intelligence or supporting a marketing and promotion campaign for potatoes on domestic or export markets. The industry needs to address this deficiency if it is going to develop the markets to their potential.

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