

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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Soil organic matter

– A grower's perspective

Shane Radford, a vegetable grower from Moriarty in the north of Tasmania, recognises the importance of maintaining soil organic matter.

Shane and his father, Reuben, grow *Shepody* and *Russet Burbank* potatoes for processing into fries, some on rich red kraznozem soils ideal for growing potatoes and some on lighter sandy loams.

"We're well aware of the need to maintain our organic matter," says Shane. "But we probably still don't realize the importance of soil organic matter to production. Most growers will tell you they get their best potato yields from paddocks coming out of pasture."

In the intensively cropped areas of Tasmania where potatoes are just one crop in a four to five year cropping rotation, paddocks straight out of pasture are in short supply. Most growers put in a winter cover crop such as short-term rye grass, oats or lupins in the autumn after harvesting their summer crops and then spray them off and plough them in, in spring. Shane prefers to sow a short-term rye grass such as *Tama* in the autumn and uses sheep to graze it down over the winter. In the weeks prior to cultivating in spring, he allows the sheep to graze the grass down to five to eight centimetres high before spraying off and ploughing it in.

Paddocks to pasture

"We don't like to plough in too much above ground bulk as this can cause the vegetable matter to go sludgy and the soil to go clumpy. We don't use oats for this reason. We have tried lupins in the past, to get the benefit of their ability to put



Shane Radford with his children, Brock and Caitlin. "We're always looking for ways to improve the management of our soil."

nitrogen in the soil. We let the lupins grow up and then mulched them and ploughed them in. However doing this can trap a lot of moisture in the soil and it causes the clumpiness."

Shane monitors soil organic matter using the results from soil tests. "They give us a good idea of what is going on," he says. One of the main strategies Shane uses to build up organic matter, especially on the sandy loam soils, is to take a paddock out of production for a couple of years and sow it down to pasture.

Shane says they would like to try more things if they were available, to maintain or increase organic matter. As a member of a local potato growers' discussion group, he finds it a useful forum for discussing issues, sharing ideas and hearing about what is and isn't working.

Other strategies he has used are spreading straw from cereal crops onto other paddocks and using an Agritill to bury bulk crop residue after harvesting crops such as broad beans.

As Shane says, "We're always looking for ways to improve our management of our soil. Apart from trying to get better yields, you have to look after your soil, it's your lifeblood."

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Chips

National Potato Business & Marketing Conference 2002

Another change to the Editorial Advisory Group

Editorial advisory group member for Western Australia, Peter Dawson, has handed over the reins to Philip Ross, from Manjimup Research Institute.

Peter has been involved with the group since its inception and has been a terrific contributor. We thank him very much for his efforts.

Philip who is taking over the role is a Development Officer with the

Department of Agriculture and in charge of the technology transfer component of the department's state potato project. We welcome him to the Advisory Group. His role is important if the national potato publications are to provide real benefits to the Western Australian industry.

Ideas! Ideas! Ideas! We are always looking for input from farmers on what

issues they would like covered in the publications. If you have a topic you would like to see an article on please contact either your local Advisory Group representative or send the idea directly to me.

Cathy Sage
Editor

EYES ON POTATOES



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Eyes on Potatoes is distributed free to all participants of the Australian Potato Industry with assistance from Horticulture Australia and the Potato Levy.

Farmer Alert

Watch out for Potato Spindle Tuber Viroid



What is it

The potato spindle tuber viroid (PSTVd) is an exotic disease and can cause serious effects in three solanaceous crops; potato, tomato and eggplant. It can also affect the weed blackberry nighshade and other *Solanum spp.* Severe strains in potatoes result in loss of tuber yield of up to 65%.

PSTVd has been detected previously in Australia on three occasions and successfully eradicated. The most recent detection (June 2001) of the disease was in a glasshouse of hydroponic tomatoes in Western Australia.

Where did it come from

PSTVd originated in North America but subsequently spread to other continents through infected seed. The disease is reported to occur in Asia, Africa, North & South America, Europe and recently in hydroponic tomatoes in New Zealand.

What to look for and where to look

Symptoms of PSTVd may be confused with those of nutrient imbalance, spray damage, insect damage or other plant diseases such as true viruses. Symptoms become more pronounced in warm conditions and under high light intensity.

Foliage symptoms are often difficult to recognise and are rarely distinguishable before maturity. With severe strains, stems remain upright and internodes are longer and more slender than normal. The leaflets may be smaller and curve inwardly, giving a stiff upward growth habit. Leaves near ground level are held in an upright position in contrast to healthy plant leaves that often rest on the ground. Severe strains also cause twisting and crinkling of leaflets.

Tubers are elongated, often with pointed ends and are round in cross section with deep eyes and cracked skins. Tubers of some cultivars develop knobs and swellings and are severely misshapen. Some strains can cause mild versions of the above symptoms or no symptoms at all.

How is it spread

Initial introduction of the viroid into potato crops is mostly through infected tubers. It can spread rapidly from one infected plant through the transmission of plant sap by direct handling of plants, the use of cutting or pruning tools, contaminated machinery, animals, clothes or footwear.

What to do

with suspect plants

If you find plants potentially infected with PSTVd (or suspect plants) please contact your Department of Agriculture for information on how to collect a sample and submit it for diagnosis. Mark the collection site in some way so it can be found easily later.

What to do on your farm

Control of the initial PSTVd infection is through farm hygiene. There is no chemical treatment of this disease.

If the disease is detected, infected plants have to be destroyed and strict farm hygiene practices must be implemented to prevent reinfection. Vinyl or latex gloves should be worn when handling infected plants and gloves dipped in a 120 per cent solution of sodium hypochlorite to decontaminate them and prevent possible spread of the disease.

Always work in clean areas first then move to infected areas. Remember that plants may be infected but not showing symptoms. When moving from PSTVd infected areas into clean areas, clothes and shoes should be changed.

The use of healthy planting material is recommended. Potatoes should only be grown from certified seed.

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Improving soil organic matter: the do's and don't's



Organic matter is very important for soil: its structure, water holding ability and ability to retain nutrients. Of particular importance is young organic matter, resulting from recently ploughed residues that have been decomposed by microorganisms. Young organic matter is the component that maintains good soil structure – so it's important to have as much crop residue going into the soil as possible.

The useable carbon from crop residues forms soil organic matter. However, the microorganisms that decompose crop residues deplete soil carbon levels by busily converting the residues into energy and carbon dioxide. So, keep incorporating crop residues into the soil.

If you stop ploughing residues in or lessen the amount, the microorganisms continue to decompose the residues and existing organic matter at about the same rate, so carbon levels in the soil decrease. To maintain soil organic matter levels and soil structure, you need to keep putting as much carbon into the soil for as long as you can. For cropping systems, this means returning all residues back into the soil.

You can pour all sorts of artificial carbon into the soil and it won't do any good. Total carbon levels are no indication of soil health, as a lot of the carbon might be charcoal. A better indicator is how much crop residue you are putting in: the more that's introduced, the more it turns over into useable

carbon. All crop residues will eventually decompose, but if residues are woody, they take a long time to decompose and so are not as valuable.

Fallowing is perhaps the worst thing any grower can do in terms of soil organic matter levels - especially in summer - because microorganisms are more active when it's hot but no residues are going into the soil, so carbon levels can fall drastically.

Do

- Maintain carbon input for as long as possible
- Plough in residues
- Maintain cover crop rather than fallow

Don't

- Fallow for a long period of time or in summer
- Burn residues – burnt carbon cannot be used by microorganisms so it does nothing to improve fertility and structure
- Over plough

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Potato Leaf Roll Virus on the rise

Just when we thought we had it under control, significant levels of leaf roll virus have been seen in some potato crops in the major production areas across southern Australia. This could have disastrous consequences for seed and commercial producers.

So what's the problem?

Leaf roll is a major disease of potatoes worldwide. The virus is transmitted by aphids, in particular the Green Peach Aphid. Once in the plant, the virus spreads from leaves to tubers. Crops planted with these tubers can be severely stunted, resulting in devastating yield losses.

Why did we think we had leaf roll under control?

The introduction of **certified seed potatoes schemes** was the single most important factor in controlling the virus in traditional production districts. In fact, certified seed schemes were introduced not only to ensure varietal purity, but also to control the seed-borne viruses that devastated crop yields several decades ago. Seed crops are regularly inspected for signs of leaf roll to ensure they meet tolerances for certified seed (less than one percent of plants with leaf roll). The overall result of introducing certification schemes was to dramatically reduce reservoirs of virus in each district.



So why this sudden flare-up in leaf-roll levels?

There may be a number of possible reasons. Generally, there will be small pockets of plants affected by leaf roll on potato properties, often in volunteer potatoes. As long as aphid populations are in check, these pockets remain localised, especially when certified seed is used throughout the district every year.

However, a lot has changed in the past decade. Production has expanded into new areas that have a higher leaf roll risk. There are more potato crops around at any one time because, in some districts, potato crops are growing every month of the year while in others, the growing season has been extended by bringing forward traditional spring plantings. The past five winters have been relatively mild with few frosts. All of these factors favour the survival of the aphid. Pesticide sprays for thrip, brought about by the fear of the tomato spotted wilt virus, may have killed beneficial predator and parasitic insects that controlled aphid populations.

What can we do to manage this problem?

It is important to recognise that in any production area leaf roll is everybody's problem, seed and commercial growers alike.

1. It is absolutely essential that only **certified seed potatoes** are planted to help eliminate reservoirs of the virus. Certification provides the highest level of certainty that a consignment of seed potatoes does not exceed the maximum tolerable virus levels. Avoid 'one-off' or non-certified seed as there is no regulation of these crops and a much higher risk of leaf roll.
2. Develop a management program for volunteer potatoes and remove and dispose of cull piles, which attract winged aphids.
3. Enlist the help of specialists to help manage the aphid populations and the virus on your property.
4. Commercial growers must also recognise that their farm is a potential source of virus in districts where seed and commercial crops are grown side by side and should be as diligent as seed growers in practicing a virus management program to help minimise the virus risk throughout the district.

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Spraying for thrips

– it can be a waste of time and money!

Spraying for Western Flower Thrips (WFT) or any thrips before you have them is a waste of time and money.

Research has shown that spraying unnecessarily for thrips reduces the number of natural enemies (the good guys) in potato crops, which can result in an increase in aphids that may spread virus.

Additionally when thrips do enter crops that contain no natural enemies they are able to do much more damage than if crops had not been preventatively sprayed.

Growers should wait until there are sufficient numbers of thrips present before spraying.

Alison Medhurst and Gary D'Arcy
Department of Natural Resources and Environment – Knoxfield
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Growers encouraged to adopt Freshcare Code of Practice



Freshcare is a national, on-farm food safety program for the fresh produce industry.

Launched nationally in major wholesaler markets in July 2000, Freshcare links food safety to the approved supplier programs of other members of the supply chain. Already more than 1,000 grower businesses are registered, with full certifications in all mainland states and the Northern Territory.

Owned by growers and wholesalers, the program receives funding support from Horticulture Australia. Its basis is the Freshcare Code of Practice, which covers the on-farm practices required to meet the food safety requirements of customers and consumers.

A qualified food safety and quality auditor assesses the on-farm practices and, if successful, the grower is issued with a uniquely numbered Freshcare Certificate. The Freshcare Certification Number and logo can be used for marketing product and demonstrating to customers that the grower is managing food safety.

Stepping stones to Freshcare

Freshcare emerged from a market need for industry approved supplier and quality assurance programs to be externally audited.

A key step was the Eric Coleman project that led to the Australian Potato Industry Quality Assurance Guide for Potato Farmers. The project investigated Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) food safety systems on farms in the Lockyer Valley and identified good on farm practices to control food safety risks.

The resulting guide covers traceability and documentation through crop records, harvest and packaging records, and serves as a valuable information resource for growers.

The guide looks at food safety issues on farms, including the sources of chemical, physical and microbial contamination, and their management. It provides checklists that can be followed, to ensure nothing is overlooked.

Product specifications are a key component of establishing quality objectives - they need to be agreed with customers and checked to ensure they are being met.

Staff training critical to food safety

The guide targets staff training as a critical factor in managing food safety risks. For example, staff members applying chemicals need a current chemical users training qualification, and those involved in grading, harvesting and packing need to be aware of food safety hazards such as glass or metal, and how to respond appropriately. This guide, and other similar publications, formed a basis for the Freshcare Code of Practice.

The next steps involved a trial with about 150 growers of various crops, negotiations with key customers, and the development of on-farm training courses to help growers implement the Freshcare Code of Practice.

The Freshcare Board endorses three courses, which are delivered by a national network of qualified trainers.

The courses are:

Approved Supplier Requirements Systems for the Food and Fibre Industries

Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture

Quality Assurance in Agribusiness – Freshcare Program

North Coast Institute of TAFE NSW

Approved Supplier Training Program Northern Territory University

At the course, growers receive workbooks and sets of example records and documents to assist in implementing their Freshcare program.

Growers satisfied

Growers undertaking the Freshcare Program are assessed by independent auditors, who are professionally qualified



in quality and food safety systems and have a history of working with other rural industry programs.

A survey of certified Freshcare growers showed a high level of satisfaction with the way audits have been conducted. Comments include:

“Very good attitude of auditor – put me at ease straight away.”

“Clear, easy to understand program. Very simple and more affordable for smaller producers than other existing food safety programs. Excellent.”

“We think that this is a far more user friendly system than any other.”

“Process not as challenging as feared.”

Linking with other on-farm programs

Common elements from other on-farm food safety programs, including CATTLECARE, FLOCKCARE and Graincare, were incorporated into Freshcare, so that other industry programs can be audited at the same time. This reduces duplication and costs, with particular benefits for multi-enterprise farms.

Steps to certification

1. Complete and return a Freshcare application form.
2. On receipt, Freshcare will acknowledge the application and send a welcome letter and free copy of the Freshcare Code of Practice, with a list of approved training programs and providers.
3. If no one in the business has undertaken training, a representative of the business must attend an approved training course.
4. Implement the practices described in the Freshcare Code of Practice.
5. Notify Freshcare when the business is ready for the initial audit. Forward a completed Freshcare Audit Notification Form (included with the welcome letter).
6. Successfully complete the audit. The auditor sends the report to Freshcare with a recommendation that certification be granted and gives the grower a copy.
7. A numbered certificate is issued and the business name is entered onto a register of certified enterprises and listed on the Freshcare Website. A business representative will be asked to sign an agreement to abide by the Freshcare Certification Rules.
8. To renew certification each year, Freshcare will contact the business to arrange an audit.

Further information:

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AUSVEG Briefs Notes from the November 2001 meeting

World Potato Congress

The AUSVEG Potato Group sees the conference as an important event and will be encouraging interested growers to participate. John Rich (TFGA – Tasmania) is facilitating a group that may join in with other countries.

Potato processing price dispute

This has been resolved with a satisfactory outcome. Cooperation between states was a big contributor to the success of the negotiations.

Horticulture Australia report

The recommendation for the existing Potato R&D Committee to also be the Industry Advisory Committee or IAC, as required under the requirements for the formation of Horticulture Australia, has been accepted by Horticulture Australia.

Review of Potato R&D Levy

No action to date due to restructure process in Horticulture Australia. The AUSVEG Potato Group has recommended the review be completed by June 2002. The review will be independent and will need to produce a report that will assist levy paying members to determine their views on the future of the Potato R&D Levy and the potato R&D program.

Potato breeding program

Disagreement still exists between the potato industry and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Victoria, which manages the breeding program, over exclusive rights including the option to restrict access to new varieties. This is a complex issue that impacts on how growers can market their produce.

Opposition by members was expressed for the introduction of a 'closed loop' arrangement that has the potential to exclude some growers from access to new varieties that have been developed with funding from the Potato Levy and Horticulture Australia.

APIC

Concerns were expressed with the operation of APIC. It was decided to raise the concerns at the APIC meeting.

Elections

Chairman – Dom Della Vedova (WA)

Vice Chairman – Max McKenna (Tas)

Representatives on the AUSVEG Board – Max McKenna (Tas), Neil Perry (SA), Dom Della Vedova (WA)

Representatives on APIC – Geoff Moar (NSW), Max McKenna (Tas)

Dom Della Vedova

AUSVEG Chairman

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Next Potato Congress in China

The next World Potato Congress will be held in Kunming, Yunnan Province, China from April 20-25, 2003. More information is on the congress internet site:

www.potatocongress.org

Those interested in being part of a group with the possibility of a post-congress tour are invited to register their interest with John Rich (Tasmania). John's contact details on p2 of this newsletter.



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The **GMO** snippets

The following articles are from the December edition of Guiding Meaningful Opinions (GMOs), the gene technology newsletter of the horticulture industry, compiled by Agrifood Awareness Australia for Horticulture Australia.

Labelling update

From December 7, 2001 all foods containing novel genetic material or protein in the final product must have their GM status identified on the package within the ingredients panel, or in the case of unpackaged foods, near the food (there are currently no GM fresh fruits, vegetables, meats or fish available in Australia).

In October, health ministers from Australia and New Zealand agreed on a transitional arrangement for products on the supermarket shelves prior to the new labelling requirements. Rather than remove these products for relabelling or destruction, they will be allowed to remain in supermarkets for up to 12 months. This will allow products that have a low turnover rate or long shelf-life time to be sold.

For more information see: www.anzfa.gov.au

Research update

US researchers at Thomas Jefferson University are developing plant-based vaccines for diseases such as HIV, Hepatitis B and rabies.

Researchers believe that plant-based vaccines will be safer and cheaper than current vaccines, because they are easy to transport and less susceptible to contamination. **Spinach** and **lettuce** are the delivery plants being tested.

Meanwhile, Cornell University scientists are encouraged by results from the first human trials of a **potato**-based edible vaccine against Hepatitis B.

The recession really started a long time ago

The rural recession has been explained in simple terms by an old-time farmer:

“It all started back in '66 when they changed from pounds to dollars – that doubled me bleeding overdraft.

“Then they brought in kilograms instead of pounds – me bleeding wool clip dropped by half.

“After that, they changed rain to millimetres and we haven't had an inch of rain since.

“As if that wasn't enough, they brought in Celsius, and we never got over 40 degrees; no wonder me bleeding wheat wouldn't grow.

“Then they changed to hectares and I ended up with only half the land I had.

“By this time I'd had enough and decided to sell out. I put the property in the agent's hands and then they changed miles to kilometres.

“Now I'm too far out of town for anyone to buy the place.”

— Anonymous

Potato stats

The following are the latest statistics from the 1999-2000 Australian Bureau of Statistics survey.

Area, Production, Gross Value and Number of growers for 1999-2000

| State | Area (hectares) | Production (tonnes) | Gross value | Number of growers |
|--------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| NSW | 7,173.0 | 169,547.7 | \$65,285,116 | 299 |
| QLD | 5,308.0 | 120,233.3 | \$43,627,609 | 341 |
| SA | 8,483.6 | 295,729.2 | \$91,761,496 | 246 |
| TAS | 6,418.8 | 289,443.7 | \$60,457,868 | 575 |
| VIC | 12,282.9 | 351,131.0 | \$125,954,312 | 544 |
| WA | 2,496.2 | 95,804.2 | \$43,320,799 | 203 |
| Total | 42,162.5 | 1,321,889.1 | \$430,407,201 | 2,208 |

Yield, Return and Production change for 1999-2000 calculated from the survey statistics

| State | Yield (t/ha) # | Return (\$/t) * | Production change from previous year (%) |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------|--|
| NSW | 23.6 | 385 | -4.1 |
| QLD | 22.7 | 363 | +8.5 |
| SA | 34.9 | 310 | -7.1 |
| TAS | 45.1 | 209 | -18.4 |
| VIC | 28.6 | 359 | -10.5 |
| WA | 38.4 | 452 | -20.3 |
| Average | 31.4 | 326 | -10.3 |

Production divided by area * Gross value divided by production

For 2000-2001, there will be a full agricultural census.



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The research team at the Southern Crop Protection and Food Research Centre, Canada

Common scab lessons from Canada

In the past, the inability to quickly and accurately detect and measure the amount of disease in the soil has hampered research into soil borne diseases.

Common scab is a major focus of research in Canada where it is a significant problem for the potato industry. The disease has also become an increasingly frustrating and costly problem for Australian potato growers.

Last year Nigel Crump, from Natural Resources and Environment - Knoxfield, spent four months working with a team of researchers at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Southern Crop Protection and Food Research Centre, London, Ontario. The team, lead by Dr George Lazarovits, included specialists using new DNA techniques to detect and measure the amount of potato diseases such as *Streptomyces* and *Verticillium*. Their research is focused on disease control with organic soil amendments such as blood and bone, pig manure and fish emulsion (*Potato Australia*, Volume 12, 2001).

Nigel modified and refined the techniques used in Canada to detect and measure the potato attacking strains of *Streptomyces* in soil samples sent from Australia. These tools will speed up research into common scab and other soil borne diseases including rhizoctonia, powdery scab, pink rot and bacterial wilt. They will help determine the relationship between the amount of disease in the soil, damage in the crop and yield loss. These soil tests will ultimately be linked with disease prediction. They will also be invaluable in another project that aims to study the relationship between the pasture phase of potato cropping and the survival of disease in the soil.

The relationship developed between researchers in Canada and Knoxfield will be invaluable in developing collaborative research programs to solve common disease problems.

*Dolf de Boer and Nigel Crump
Department of Natural Resources and
Environment - Knoxfield*

☎ (03) 9210 9222

✉ nigel.crump@nre.vic.gov.au

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Obituary

Mike Kinsella
Chairman, ViCSPA
12.2.35 to 21.1.02

The horticultural industry in Australia has lost a friend and enthusiastic achiever in Mike Kinsella. Mike had an extensive role in the development and running of many horticultural industries.

A graduate of Melbourne University in 1960, he spent 38 years in the Victorian Department of Agriculture. Following his retirement in 1998, he continued to be closely involved with various aspects of horticulture, through his consultancy.

In September 1998 Mike was appointed Chairman of the Victorian Certified Seed Potato Authority (ViCSPA). Mike's enthusiasm, leadership and ability to communicate assisted in the continued development of ViCSPA and its role in

providing certification services, which benefit Australian potato growers. He will be sadly missed from this role.

His many and varied roles in horticulture included involvement in Research, Extension, Seed Certification and Plant Standards duties. Some of his achievements included:

- Chairman of the Tomato Processing Industry Negotiating Committee 1976 to 1981
- He directed the Department's plant regulatory services from 1982 to 1998
- He was instrumental in developing the Tri-state fruit fly strategy
- Chairman of the Plant Health Regulatory working group
- Chief Quarantine Officer (plants) Victoria and State Supervising Officer (Exports)
- Chairman of the Victorian Dried Fruits Board
- Involved in the marketing of Pink Lady apples internationally
- Deputy Chairman of the Melbourne Fruit & Vegetable Marketing Trust 1982 –1993
- Directed the issue of fire blight when it was identified in the Melbourne Botanic gardens

Mike was awarded the Farrer Memorial medal in 1998 for distinguished services to agricultural science in Australia. This was great recognition for a career of achievement for a potato grower's son from the Koo Wee Rup district in Victoria. Above all, Mike was a much loved and committed family man.

Keith Blackmore
Manager
ViCSPA



Searching for old photos

For future editions of *Eyes on Potatoes* and *Potato Australia* we would like to collect a range of old industry photos. The potato industry has gone through many changes over the years and it is often interesting to reflect on what has been done in the past and the characters of the time.

If you do have some really good photos and you do not mind them being used in the potato publications, please let Leigh know so he can arrange to have them copied.

Can you indicate briefly what sort of photos you have and your contact details - most importantly your name and telephone number. Leigh will get in contact to sort out the best way for copies to be made.

Leigh Walters
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The new Seed Potato Advisory Group

*Back (L-R)
Mark Holland (WA),
Keith Blackmore (Vic),
David Carter (NSW)
Front (L-R)
Milton Rodda
(Chairman),
Linda Wilson (Tas),
Bob Peake (SA)*

New National Seed Potato Group

The newly established Seed Potato Advisory Group (SPAG) held its first meeting in December 2001 in Devonport, Tasmania. All seed potato growing states are represented on SPAG with the meetings being chaired by the Australian Potato Industry Council (APIC) Chairman, Milton Rodda.

The role of this group is to maintain and further develop the National Standards for Certification of Seed Potatoes for the benefit of the Australian Potato Industry.

At its first meeting, the group discussed proposed changes to the National Standards. These will be taken to industry meetings in each state before the end of March 2002. After consultation with industry participants, the proposed changes will be taken to Horticulture Australia, and then endorsed by APIC. Any changes will come into affect from July 1, 2002, ready for the next season.

In consultation with industry, the group will review the National Standards annually.

SPAG will support training for Seed Potato Certification staff in administering the National Standard for Certification of Seed Potatoes.

For more information on SPAG or on Seed Potato Certification contact

*Linda Wilson
Seed Potato Certification Officer
☎ (03) 6421 7642*

New version of Starter Pak



Version 4 of the Potato Internet Starter Pak has just been released, with many new sites added and old sites updated. If you use the internet, the Starter Pak can save you a lot of time searching for potato sites.

You can obtain a copy of the new version by emailing: lwalters@saff.com.au and include in the subject box – Request for Starter Pak (note spelling!). In the area where you write your message, type - Request

Previous users, who have not changed their email address, should have already been contacted about the update.



Briefs

*Notes from the
November 2001 meeting*

Potato Breeding Program

A delegation from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Victoria, put forward their position on how they wished to move forward with the changes to the breeding program. Opposition resulted in no outcome being reached. Time restraints meant the issues could not be discussed fully and it was proposed that a separate workshop be held.

Industry Advisory Committee (IAC)

Jonathan Eccles reported that, under the new Horticulture Australia constitution, the new IAC has the responsibility of producing an:

- Industry Strategic Plan
- Industry Annual Plan
- Industry Annual Report

Horticulture Australia report

The Potato R&D Plan is being printed. Jonathan Eccles provided an update to the Council on levy collections and funding available for R&D.

New Seed Certification scheme

A new Memorandum of Understanding was discussed and accepted with some minor changes.

National PCN Management Plan

The council supported the inclusion of Bruce Ure (Gembrook, Victoria) on the Steering Committee of this project, and adjustments to the end date to allow for adequate consultation.

AUSVEG matters

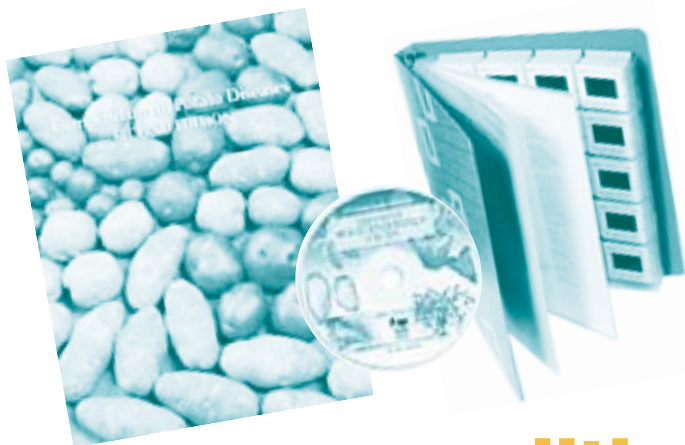
AUSVEG Potato Group raised concerns about the operation of APIC. As there was not enough time to deal with the issue properly, decisions were deferred pending further discussion among participating groups.

A meeting of APIC councillors has since been called to discuss this and other issues in Sydney on February 21.

Elections

It was decided the Office Bearers would remain unchanged until the above situation had been resolved.

*Milton Rodda
APIC Chairman
☎ (03) 5339 2241
✉ mhrodde@mccain.com.au*



new edition Compendium of potato diseases

The first edition of the Compendium of Potato Diseases, produced by the American Phytopathological Society, was popular in Australia among farmers, processors and advisors.

The second edition (released October 2001) is likely to be just as popular, providing up to date information on identification and management of diseases and disorders affecting potatoes worldwide.

The compendium has 144 pages with almost 200 colour pictures and 83 black and white illustrations. Cost is approximately \$US49 plus postage.

The compendium published by APS Press can be ordered online at: www.apsnet.org or through technical bookshops.

Other recent releases from APS Press include a *Root and Tuber Crops CD-Rom* and *A Pictorial Guide to Potato Diseases* slide set for people presenting information on potato diseases.

The CD-Rom contains approximately 777 colour images of cassava, potato, sweet potato and sugar beet. Search for images by host, pathogen, disease name and key word. Disease images may be magnified, printed and exported. Cost approximately \$US79 plus postage.

The slide set includes 193 full colour slides, a three-ring binder to keep the slides organised and an index. Cost approximately \$US348 plus postage.

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Moving notice

In December Senior Consultant, Potatoes for Primary Industries and Resources South Australia, **Bob Peake**, moved north from Mt Gambier to Lenswood in the Adelaide Hills. His new contact details can be found on p2.



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Latest R&D reports

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

Australian Potato Research & Technology Transfer Workshop, Adelaide, July 2000 **PT98039**

Development of extreme resistance (immunity) to common scab disease within current cultivars **PT98015**

Evaluation of potato publications **PT98042**

These are available from Horticulture Australia for \$22.00 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:

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Alternatively, reports can be purchased through the Horticulture Australia internet site at www.horticulture.com.au.



Australian Plant Disease Database

The recent launch of the Australian Plant Disease Database (APDD) is a milestone for quarantine and plant pathology in Australia. For the first time, 95% of Australia's records of plant disease fungi are on-line. The site is password protected so that only quarantine agencies can use the information.

The APDD provides the basis for identification of the plant pathogens that cause millions of dollars in lost production to Australian farmers and foresters. It includes 130,000 specimens, most of which are held in state department collections at Knoxfield (Vic), Indooroopilly (Qld) and Orange (NSW).

The main roles of the APDD are in:

- the formulation of Australia's quarantine policy
- pest risk analysis, to identify which organisms occur in Australia
- research and development in Integrated Pest and Disease Management
- taxonomic research into plant pathogenic microorganisms

The APDD is the first step in a national initiative developed by Commonwealth and State governments and Plant Health Australia. The second step is to link all the reference collections of plant pests into a single virtual collection on-line. This powerful resource will significantly enhance Australia's capacity to manage plant pests and diseases.

Peter Merriman

Department of Natural Resources and Environment - Knoxfield

☎ (03) 9210 9222

✉ peter.merriman@nre.vic.gov.au

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THE SECRET RECIPE

Leek and potato soup

This recipe is a favourite of Rita Perry, of Cohuna, Victoria. Originally adapted from Don Dunstan's recipe book, it has been further improved and passed on to Rita's family.

- 3 leeks, thickly sliced (white flesh)
- 4 potatoes, peeled and diced
- 1 litre chicken stock
- 500 ml vegetable stock
- 1 cup of milk
- butter

Melt a little butter in a thick-bottomed saucepan over a low heat. Lightly cook leeks until soft – don't let them brown. Add stock, potatoes and a little cracked pepper to flavour. Cook over medium flame for about 30 minutes, or until potatoes are well cooked. Add milk and a dollop of butter, then reheat without boiling. Serve in bowls with fresh crusty buttered rolls for a heartwarming winter meal!

To contribute:

Please send your favourite potato recipes and your photo (and stamped self-addressed envelope for its return) to:

Potato Recipes
Cathy Sage
Editor, Eyes On Potatoes
PO Box 1246
Kensington Victoria 3031
Fax: (03) 9328 5312
✉ sagewords@a1.com.au

New PGSA Chairman

At the November 2001 Annual General Meeting of the Potato Growers of South Australia (PGSA), Wayne Cornish took over as Chairman of PGSA and Steven Page as Deputy Chairman.

The South Australian Farmers Federation would like to thank past Chairman, Neil Perry, for his dedication to the industry over the last few years. His role has not been an easy one with many difficult issues facing the industry.

Adam Gray
SA Farmers Federation
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Potato archives Copyright notice

Potato archives are being developed to provide better access to past information generated from the levy funded research and development program.

The archives will be available for sale on a CD ROM, or through a proposed national internet site for the Australian potato industry.

This notice is to inform organisations and people who have supplied editorial material for Eyes on Potatoes, Potato Australia, potato conferences and Horticulture Australia Final Reports that if they have any concerns with their information being used in this way to contact:

Leigh Walters

☎ (08) 8232 5555

Fax: (08) 8232 1311

✉ lwalters@saff.com.au

Where copyright does not reside with Horticulture Australia and the Australian Potato Industry Council for the publication, the author/organisation will be contacted directly to obtain permission to use the material.

Leigh Walters

Technology Transfer Manager

Australian Potato Industry

Worth a look web information

An increasing number of government and company sites are including potato pages to make it easier for growers to access relevant information.

A good example is the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) internet site, which contains a wide range of information on varieties, agronomy, nutrition, diseases and postharvest techniques.

The site contains the papers from the Potatoes 2000 Research, Development and Technology Transfer Conference, links to other sites and a useful contacts/roles directory.



The site can be found at:

www.sardi.sa.gov.au/hort/potpage/potatopg.htm

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Western Australia

Growers have experienced a relatively dry winter followed by a drier than normal summer. This created a few headaches earlier in spring, when poor winter rains were insufficient to replenish dam supplies. Growers were faced with the gamble of planting and relying on late rains to fill the dams, particularly in the Manjimup and Pemberton regions. The lower than average rainfall has resulted in an increase in salinity levels of some watercourses and dams, which has caused problems for some growers in the affected catchments.

A statutory review of the Marketing of Potatoes Act 1946 is due for completion shortly. This is the Act under which Western Potatoes regulates the supply of ware potatoes to the Western Australian market.

Supplies of ware potatoes have been consistent and quality has generally been good. Some minor quality issues were experienced over the seasonal change. Yields this year have generally been above past years' performances.

The Western Australian potato market has come under some price pressure due to South Australian surplus production.

Crisp

Western Australia's crisping capacity has increased to 30,000 t/year, with the Smith Snackfood Company completing its factory refurbishment. The extra capacity will allow additional contracts to be let to growers over the next few years and will enhance export prospects. The variety Dawmor is becoming more popular as a crisping potato.

Fries

MAES Fruit and Vegetable Exporters have commissioned a potato chipping operation in Manjimup, with a capacity of around 7000t/year.

Export

The export of potatoes from Western Australia is gradually increasing, although accurate statistics are difficult to get. The last 12 months has seen increases in potatoes exported for seed and processing. Collaborative projects are underway with Vietnam and Indonesia, to increase potato exports.

Phillip Ross
Development Officer
Department of Agriculture

South Australia

Fresh market

The South Australian Riverland region (with alkaline soils and river water) and the adjacent Mallee region (with neutral to acid soils and bore water) form the largest fresh market potato area in Australia, producing more than 80,000t/year. Production has greatly declined in the Mt Lofty Ranges.

Prices for fresh, top quality washed potatoes have been low and unsatisfactory for more than three months before February 2002 (only up to \$150 to \$200/t). This has led to some reductions in planting pivot areas in the Mallee and Riverland. In recent months, most of South Australia has experienced the lowest summer maximum temperatures for over 20 years. If these conditions persist, crops of high yield and quality potential are expected.

Seed crops

Southern Choice has reported a large expansion in certified seed output from Kangaroo Island and the Mallee. Seed for varieties such as Shine will be available.

Processing

Most French fry crops in the South East have high yield potential due partly to the mild summer growing conditions. A few cases of late or Irish blight (*Phytophthora infestans*) have been recorded in South East crops. Growers need to look out for this problem.

The Southern Food Group Pty Ltd (a group of private investors, 100% Australian owned) plans to construct a new French fry factory at Millicent, South Australia in 2002. They plan to begin operation in January 2003 and work up to the factory's capacity, 50,000t/year of raw potato equivalents, within a few years.

The company is interested in speaking with people experienced in potato growing in the area who have the capacity to increase their output. The contact is Mark Campbell – mobile 0414 232 025.

The National Potato Business and Marketing Conference 2002 will be held on August 21-23 at Mt Gambier, South Australia. For further information refer to the conference registration booklet in this edition of Eyes on Potatoes.

Chris Williams
Senior Research Scientist
South Australian Research and Development Institute

New South Wales

The Maitland district had a dry growing season, with growers irrigating from mid-July to late October. Digging of the early crop started in early November and ended in mid-December.

Despite the dry weather, crop yields were fair, averaging 35 t/ha. Ware prices over the harvest ranged from \$320/t to \$400/t on-farm. Planting of the late crop started in mid-January and finished in mid-February. The late crop areas remain similar to last year.

The Dorrigo district had a difficult season, with no spring rains. Digging of the early crop started in early December and finished in late January. Dryland yields were down, averaging 25 t/ha, while irrigated crops averaged 37 t/ha. Fresh market prices remained firm, ranging from \$400/t to \$500/t on-farm. Planting of the late crop started in mid-January and was completed by mid-February. The late crop areas in the Dorrigo district are similar to last year.

The Riverina district had a dry, cool spring and summer. Digging of the early crop started in early December and finished in mid-February. Crop yields were high, with heavy crops going to 50 t/ha. The quality of fresh and processing crops was excellent. Ware prices remained firm during the harvest, with premium lines selling from \$280/t to \$300/t on-farm. Sowing of the late crop started in mid-February, with crop areas expected to be similar to last year.

The main summer crop in the Guyra, Blayney and Crookwell districts was planted on schedule last year with the dry conditions before Christmas. Crop areas in the Tablelands are similar to last year, although there are fewer red skinned varieties being planted by some certified seed growers. All districts have required supplementary irrigation to maintain crop growth.

There was a record attendance at the Guyra Lamb and Potato Festival in late January, with numerous machinery displays, craft stalls and plenty of lamb and potatoes being consumed. The main crop harvest will start in early March, with reasonable crop yields and excellent seed quality expected in most Tablelands districts.

Stephen Wade
District Horticulturist
NSW Agriculture

ROUND-UP

State

Tasmania

Planting was on and off through October and November. Cool, wet weather struck in December and into January, particularly in the south, making it an interesting time.

Most processing crops were planted late by two to three weeks and crops were slow to get going. Fortunately, they seemed to 'weather the conditions' alright and apart from being a fortnight behind, it was a good finish to the season. Early harvesting of Shepody started on February 1.

Late blight was a problem in most areas during the growing period, exacerbated by the lack of availability of Ridomil.

Hollow heart showed up in some crops and could prove to be a bigger problem than in the past couple of seasons.

As a result of last years' McCains grower group success at Boat Harbour, six grower groups are active around the state. McCains has seen positive results from its emphasis on educating growers about seed quality and planting performance.

Simplot seed growers were encouraged to plant late, to assist with manipulating physiological age and, potentially, common scab. They have been invited to participate in trials involving working up old pasture sites as early as possible before next years' planting to expose the *Rhizoctonia* fungi and minimise eelworm damage.

Both companies are offering incentives for seed growers to harvest early this year to help control seed age and minimise disease. Seed crops are progressing well.

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

Victoria

Cool conditions in November and December delayed planting in the later districts by up to two months but, although late, overall Victorian crops are healthy.

Early Gippsland crops were delayed and the lack of heat caused uneven emergence and slower growth. However, most crops are growing well and making up for the cool start. Koo Wee Rup swamp crops are growing well in reasonable conditions.

Planting in South Gippsland, the Otways and Portland have been delayed by up to two months, with a few finishing planting in late January. Crops north of the divide and northern Victoria have had good conditions resulting in good growth. Ballarat crops south of the dividing ranges are only slightly late but are maturing quicker, making up for the wet start.

ViCSPA conducted a Seed Certification Officers' workshop at Toolangi Research Station in December, attended by delegates from five states, in the lead up to the National Standards coming into effect in 2002. This will enable Certification Officers across Australia to speak the same language and inspect to consistent levels.

ViCSPA Chairman, Mike Kinsella, a name synonymous with vegetable growing in Victoria, with 40 years in Department of Agriculture, sadly passed away in late January. An obituary is provided on page 11.

Bruce Fry
Horticultural Extension
Department of Natural Resources and Environment

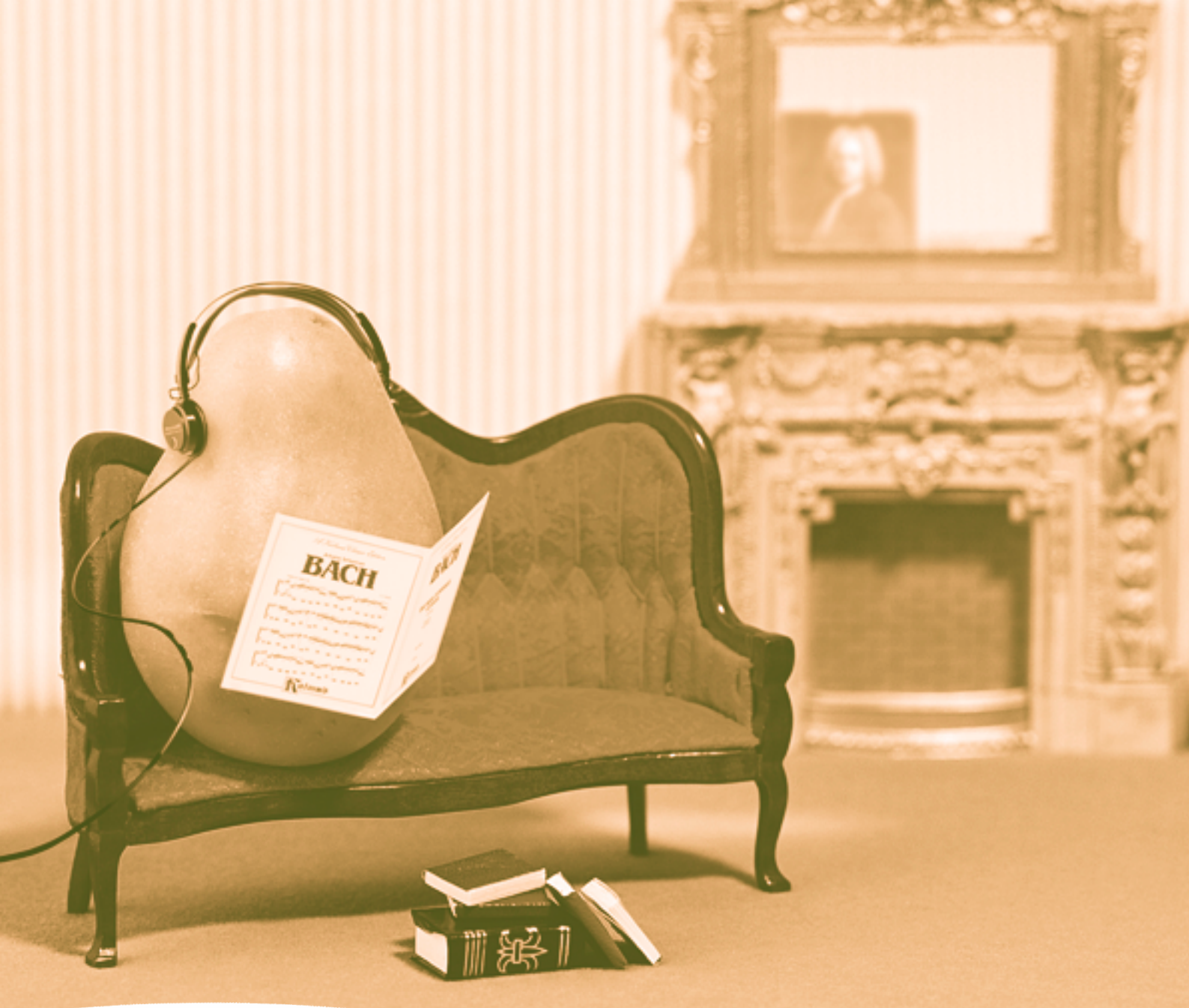
Queensland

Growers in the upper Atherton Tablelands are preparing their ground and, weather permitting, will plant their first crops in mid-February. They expect a normal season. The early lower Tableland plantings will start later.

The late season crops of the Lockyer Valley yielded well and commanded reasonable prices. The Lockyer Valley has been hit by hot and dry weather. This is not expected to carry into the planting season and preparations are being made for a normal season. Should this hot dry spell continue some plantings might be delayed.

Bundaberg is also experiencing hot, dry conditions. Again, this is not expected to carry into planting and growers are expecting a good season similar to last year.

Michael Hughes
Extension Agronomist
Department of Primary Industries



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