

# 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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## Why won't it rain?

The expanding drought situation across most of Australia is creating serious difficulties for dryland and irrigated growers. What is going on with the weather?

For rain to occur, we need atmospheric moisture (in Australia, 95% of moisture for rainfall comes from ocean sources) plus 'triggers' to cool and condense the moisture, creating rainfall.

This year, in many parts of Australia, we have had the 'triggers' (including cold fronts) but the trade winds, which we rely on for moisture, have failed due to the El Nino phenomenon (see pg 12). El Nino interferes with the trade winds that bring moist air across the Pacific Ocean to north-eastern Australia. (In WA, the Indian Ocean is the source of moist air for rain).

In some areas of NSW, QLD and Victoria it will be the worst drought on record, receiving less than 20-30% of their average annual rainfall. Likewise, western WA is dry but other areas and states, such as Tasmania, have received close to their average annual rainfall.

### Why can't we predict droughts more accurately

Part of the difficulty with forecasting is that we can predict the feed of moisture to different parts of Australia, but it is difficult to forecast some of the triggers that are going to get the moisture to condense and cause rain.

We can reasonably predict El Nino – which occurs every six to seven years – but we can't predict the exact areas of Australia that will be affected or the duration of the effects. Most El Ninos build in autumn, affect rainfall for winter, spring and early summer and break down again the following autumn. Hopefully the 2002 one will follow this pattern. Predicting whether an El Nino event will break down or reoccur for a further 12 months as occurred in the early 1990s is, at this stage, still difficult.

### What can farmers do

Local departments of agriculture can offer advice best suited for individual growing areas. Australia-wide forecasts of the probability of receiving median rainfall and above are posted on the Long paddock website [www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au](http://www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au) in the first few days of each month.

In severe drought areas, many farmers are having to take serious measures to adapt to the lack of moisture; including livestock reduction (maintaining just the breeding flocks or herds), cropping fast-growing varieties only, sowing only in areas that have good subsoil moisture and reducing moisture loss through mulching.

Irrigation water should be monitored for quality; in drought, water becomes more saline and/or silty, which can affect crops. If possible, dams should be covered to reduce evaporation losses (some farmers have been using tyres tied together across dams, with good success).

For further information on weather forecasts, radar images, warnings, seasonal outlooks and climate averages visit the Bureau of Meteorology website: [www.bom.gov.au/silo/](http://www.bom.gov.au/silo/)

The software program Australian Rainman, developed by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries, contains an extensive database of historical climate information from across Australia and allows users to determine the chance of rainfall and other climate events by using the Southern Oscillation Index as a forecasting tool. Copies are available by calling the Queensland Centre for Climate Applications on (07) 4688 1200.

For more on El Nino, see page 12.

## contents

Creating retail-driven demand for potatoes	3
Change the destiny of Fresh Potatoes	5
AusHort Project Updates	8
GMO Snippets	11
Potato IAC Meeting	13
Latest R&D Reports	14
Grants & Scholarships	16
Queensland Retail Liaison Project	17
State Roundups	18

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Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines map, showing Australian rainfall from 1900 to 1997.

Copies available for \$7.70 (including GST and postage) through mail order from [www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/Products/RainfallAndElNinoPoster/](http://www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/Products/RainfallAndElNinoPoster/) or  
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# Editorial

## Changes to Eyes for 2003

Next year will see Eyes on Potatoes change to a full colour publication to allow us to use colour photographs to full advantage. The move to full colour was suggested by the editors and has been endorsed by the advisory group. We welcome your feedback on the change.

## Changes to the support group

Advertising agent for the publications, Michael Bailey, is moving on from AT&M to work with TAFE in Tasmania. Michael has contributed significantly to increasing advertising interest in the publications, and while we will miss his valuable input, we wish him well in his new post.

Phillip Ross, the WA representative on the advisory group, is also moving on. He has taken up a job in north Queensland working on revegetation. Many thanks,

Philip, for your valuable input to the advisory committee and the interesting stories you followed up, and all the best for your new job.

## New offices

The EOP editors have moved down the street to new offices at 3 Anderson St., West Melbourne. Please note our new address, shared fax number and new email addresses (see below). Our phone numbers stay the same.

## Sincere thanks

As we near the end of another year of potato industry publications, we'd like to take this opportunity to thank all who lend their support and time to the successful production and distribution of Eyes on Potatoes and Potato Australia. Their names and contact details are listed below and without these people, the publications could not happen.

First, thank you to our advisory group with a representative from each potato producing state, who advise on and source stories, write the state roundups and provide valuable feedback from growers.

Thanks also to our distributors, who maintain the state farmer databases and mail out the publications.

Our appreciation also goes to designer Andrew Perry and David Peck's team of advertising agents and printers at AT&M Sprinta Print for their reliable, professional production of our publications.

Last, but certainly not least, many thanks to you, our readers, for reading the potato publications and for feeding back to our advisory group your views and ideas for future issues.

Have a safe and happy Xmas,

*Cathy, Diana, Jo and Leigh*  
*The Editors*

# EYES ON POTATOES



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

# Creating retail-driven demand **for potatoes**

Creating increased demand for potatoes is about understanding:

- (1) The needs of the retailer
- (2) The needs of the consumer

By needs, I mean understanding why they buy your product, how they use your product and the role your product plays in the produce department. The more you understand the role potatoes play, from a retail perspective and a consumer perspective, the more you can 'position' potatoes to fulfil these needs.

'Positioning', in the marketing sense of the word, is *understanding your product, understanding shopper needs, then creating a strong selling story for your product to meet these needs, creating a desire for shoppers to buy.*

## Positioning your product

For example, I want you to picture the cereal aisle in your local grocery store. There are more than 50 different types of cereal and each one is uniquely positioned within the cereal category, with support from advertising and packaging.

For example, there are kids' cereals with high sugar, vibrant graphics and a free toy inside. There are health cereals featuring low fat or specific nutritional benefits such as added iron and folate. And then there are the energy cereals with their sustainable energy claims.

For example, Special K is marketed to the specific dietary needs of women. You never see a Special K ad or a Special K box targeting children. NutriGrain does not target children; it targets people interested in health and fitness. Their marketing slogan says, "Ironman food." Each cereal has its own unique positioning within the category.

## Potato bag positions fresh spuds

The best example of positioning and marketing I have seen in a long time happens to be potatoes in New Zealand. AS Wilcox and Son, a large potato supplier to the Foodtown chain, has designed the first potato bag to meet the needs of the shopper that positions potatoes as more than 'just a spud'. I interviewed Kevin Wilcox regarding the bag. These are the key points he made about how it originated.

Working with their retail partner:

- They wanted to stimulate interest in the category of fresh market potatoes
- They recognized the potato category is increasingly competing with food alternatives and the need for renewed excitement was great
- The basic concept was to highlight the fact that not all potatoes are the same - that some are better than others when considering cooking use
- They wanted to take the guesswork out of consumers' buying decision
- They wanted to eliminate the confusion many customers face when selecting potatoes by stimulating a meal idea or meal solution
- They wanted to attack the myth that 'A SPUD IS A SPUD'.

This is positioning at its finest.

- Grower and retailer worked together to create the product
- They stood in their customers' shoes in order to understand that shopping for potatoes is not easy
- They designed bags to take the guesswork out of potatoes and ensure their customers could be successful with the product they were buying
- They moved beyond 'commodity' and added value to a product that most growers would agree is hard to add value to.

Their bag is all about enabling the shopper to be successful with their product.

From a consumer perspective, I have always found potatoes difficult. As a product, they are easy enough. But differentiating between waxy and floury is hard to understand because there is no real logic to the names. Does waxy mean baking or boiling? There is no strong word association or visual association in the raw state to help a shopper determine which is which and what is best for what.

With potatoes, I've always struggled with the basics – and that's not even taking the varietal variation into consideration. If the potatoes did not have a tag that indicated use on the bag,



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I did not have a hope of knowing the spud's best use. This is why I love the Wilcox potato bags. Talk about making life easy for potato shoppers! The bag has clear consumer use messages, strong visual appeal and the photo on the bag reinforces the use of the product inside. It enables me to be successful with the product – and this is what increasing sales and creating demand for a product is all about.

The other benefit of the bag is that it becomes a marketing statement for the product inside. Making a marketing statement about fresh produce can often be difficult.

### 'Talking' to your shopper

One of the issues with fresh produce is there is no 'inherent packaging' for the product. Typically, fresh produce items are sold in their raw, bulk state. As a result, there is no packaging or limited packaging on which to convey information about the product or tell a story.

Let's go back to our cereal example for a minute. Because cereal is a processed/ manufactured product, it comes with great packaging and the product always tells a story. NutriGrain tells the story about being food for athletes. Special K tells the story of how it meets the unique dietary needs of women. The package works to sell the product and communicate with consumers.

In produce, we don't have the same opportunity. However, as potato producers, you can create the opportunity by using your potato bag. Similar to the Wilcox potato bag, it is important you recognise your potato packaging isn't just a package to hold your product; it is a package to talk to your shopper.

In the produce department we are often limited in the way we can communicate with shoppers. Retailers limit point-of-sale. And, even if they do allow point-of-sale, it is expensive to produce and its effectiveness is questionable. The best way to communicate with shoppers is via produce packaging – potato bags are the perfect opportunity.

### What do you say on the bag?

Growers often ask me, "But what do I say on the bag?" The answer goes straight back to you being able to position your product successfully. What do you say on the bag? Whatever your customer wants to hear about your product. With the Wilcox potato bag, the consumer wanted to know how to be successful with the product. They used their packaging to ensure the right potato for the job was inside the bag and that the usage was given on the bag.

Effective in-store communication requires you to stand in your customers' shoes and see your product from their perspective. It then requires you to answer their questions through effective marketing. For most growers, potato packaging is not seen as a marketing tool – but a physical bag to hold the product. It's time to change how we view this packaging and reinvent it to be primarily a consumer communication tool.

Creating demand for potatoes and growing the sales of the potato category is easy. It is about understanding the needs of the retailer, understanding the needs of the consumer, then marketing the product effectively to both target markets to enable them to be successful.

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*This is edited from a presentation Lisa gave at the National Potato Business and Marketing Conference in Mt Gambier, August 2002.*

*Lisa is the author of the book **What Is The Cost Of A Bad Apple? 13 Fresh Ideas To Increase Your Fresh Produce Sales.***



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# Chance to change the destiny of fresh potatoes

When it comes to potatoes, Australian consumers want more information about varieties and health benefits, more recipe ideas, potatoes that are quick and easy to cook, and a wider choice of fresh and processed product.

These are some of the findings from recent market research, which concluded that to arrest the decline in fresh potato consumption the industry must focus more on customers and less on production.

The qualitative and quantitative market research was conducted in July 2002 among Australian eastern seaboard consumers and included a review of Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and overseas data.

The study recommended strategic marketing to help the fresh potato industry address its key problems:

- Declining per capita volume [39 kgs per person in 1979 to about 27 kgs in 2002]
- Declining price per kilo
- Strong, heavily advertised and marketed competition from pasta and rice
- The changing customer and purchaser
- The changing retail scene.

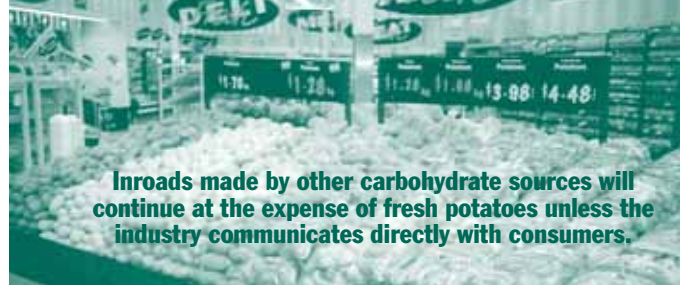
## Major competition for fresh potatoes comes from other potatoes and pasta and rice.

ABS Household Expenditure data reveal competition from (processed) potato chips as well as pasta and rice.

- Fresh potato as a share of the carbohydrate food purchase has declined dramatically from 49% in 1984 to 23% in 1999.
- The value of the consumption of potato chips has remained relatively constant.
- Pasta has made the greatest gains.

## Need for a better-managed system between supply and demand for fresh potatoes

Consumers reported a significant variation between the average price paid in each city - Sydney \$1.62 per kilo, Brisbane \$1.17 and Melbourne \$1.04. The industry needs to work at encouraging customer demand across the board so there can be



a fairer return in all markets. This requires better strategic integration of production and marketing.

## There is an opportunity at the demand level for greater profits for growers and retailers

This study found significant segments of the market were not price sensitive:

- 47% of the loose buyers and 27% of the bag buyers could not recall how much they last paid per kilo for their fresh potato purchase
- 67% indicated if the price increased 50% there would be no difference in their purchase behaviour.

This under-developed price potential is another reason to better match the supply and demand for the fresh product (it will also assist in getting a better quality product to the consumer).

## The nutritional message lacks focus, authority or connectivity. The industry needs to educate consumers about the nutrition benefits of fresh potatoes.

27% believed potatoes were unhealthy 'depending on how you cook them'. The industry has not been getting its message across about the wonderful health benefits of the fresh product, which would interest consumers.

This requires marketing of potatoes' benefits in their own right and compared with pasta and rice.

## The Australian market can be split into user segments defined by their ideal fresh potato product

- 13% All purpose potato - one type good for all their serving needs
- 11% Chip segment - want the best type for making chips
- 9% Gourmet potatoes - willing to buy and try new and exotic varieties, interested in flavour and the colour
- 10% Want 'the best' potato for each way of preparing - they want to be informed that this variety is the best say for mashing or see the word mashing on the packet.

*continued page 6*

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# Chance to change the destiny of fresh potatoes (continued)

## It is critical to inject excitement into the product to add value and, potentially, profit

### (i) Transform potatoes from a commodity to a product

Currently 60% of consumers buy their fresh product loose. Getting people to buy loose will mean less product sold but can mean more revenue and more profit when properly managed.

### (ii) Introduce new descriptors and linguistics for fresh potatoes that offer growers of fresh potatoes value-adding opportunities

The Australian retail industry reports and manages potatoes:

- Loose
- Prepacked
- Brushed, washed, red and white.

The majority of consumers describe potatoes as washed or unwashed. The key is consistency that goes beyond descriptors such as washed and brushed. While it will take time this strategy could have major benefits for the fresh potato industry.

### (iii) Demand for the product is often determined by groups other than the industry

The industry should not look to the supermarkets as the only way to introduce excitement and interest. Supermarkets see potatoes as a “suspect quality product that is convenient”.

Greengrocers/independents are perceived to offer better quality and price and more varieties – an environment conducive to moving potatoes from a commodity to a product.

### (iv) Convenience and meal solutions are the trends into which the industry needs to tap

The study clearly identified the key target market for today’s product as families with children. The industry’s marketing has to take into account that today’s consumer is reflective of/responsive to:

- Smaller families
- Convenient ready to eat food
- Time poor food shopper/preparer
- Meal solution ideas, such as recipe cards
- Working women looking for quick and easy food
- Single person households
- Young people’s attitudes towards preparing food
- Asian migration
- Increase in meals eaten away from home
- Low fat health consciousness. Community concern and awareness of diet and health related issues

## What consumers want

The findings of this study echo those identified by the British Potato Council, that consumers:

- Want to know more about varieties
- Want more recipe ideas
- Believe that the health benefits are understated
- Want specific meals for occasions
- Want potatoes that are quick and easy to cook
- Want a wider choice of potatoes – fresh and processed

*A copy of the full report is available from Horticulture Australia. See page 14 for details.*

*Michael Brownlee and Jill Stephens*

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## back in salty snacks

Arnotts Snackfoods re-enters the Australian salty snack market after an absence of 11 years.

In August Arnotts Biscuits acquired the Australian owned company Snack Brands Australia. Arnotts Snackfoods was re-launched for the first time since it's 50% share of the joint Frito-Lay/Arnotts Company was bought out by Frito-Lay in 1991.

Arnotts Snackfoods has a strong portfolio of potato brands including Thins, Kettle, Samboy, French Fries and Colvan. Other brands owned by the new company include CC's, Cheezels and Planters.

The Australian salty snack market is now dominated by two large multinational companies: The Smiths Snackfood Company (Frito-Lay) and Arnotts Snackfoods (Campbells Soups), which have a combined market share of greater than 90%.



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# AUSHORT Project Updates

Projects supported by all levy paying horticultural industries

## Development of an industry position with regard to acute dietary risk assessment of pesticides

Acute dietary intake is a relatively new (1999) methodology for estimating potential exposure to agrochemical residues on produce.

Industry needs to be aware of the potential impact of this new system including the potential loss of many traditional chemicals and higher costs associated with data generation to retain registrations or register new products.

The project supported a workshop on the topic with the purpose of informing industry of the new system, raising awareness in regulatory bodies of the implications for horticulture and providing input from industry into the regulatory process.

The workshop was conducted in Canberra in early April 2002. The 45 participants represented Commonwealth and state regulators, chemical manufacturers and various agricultural industries.

Outcomes included support for a number of additional refinements to the system including more information sharing between agencies.

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## How can horticultural industries best capture, store and make available relevant information on environmental management

To answer the above question a comprehensive review of the literature was undertaken and surveys of supply chain members (ie. growers, merchants, processors, etc) and "other stakeholders" (state and national industry association staff, industry development officers, Horticulture Australia staff, extension officers, researchers and educators).

The aim of the supply chain survey was to develop an understanding of environmental information needs and delivery preferences. The aim of the "other stakeholders" survey was to determine information delivery preferences and to capture a snapshot of the existing stakeholder skills base with respect to environmental topics.

The two surveys were delivered nationally between August and November 2001 with over 2000 people participating of which 211 were from the potato industry.

In general, the consultation findings revealed an urgent need for additional tailored, locally relevant information products. The results also indicated that many industry members are struggling to cope with an existing "information overload". Many find it difficult to

locate appropriate resources and industry members are often unsure of "where to go" to find the information they need. As a group, they described a need for a "roadmap" of information, and for more effective archiving and retrieval systems.

A recommendation was presented in the report for an **Industry Development Manager (IDM)** position to be created. The IDM would drive the dissemination of information through existing industry networks, at both a state and national level.

Also recommended is the development of a **comprehensive information system** centred on an online "one-stop shop" to help address the serious issue of "information overload". The internet site would serve as the main point of contact between Horticulture Australia's environmental program and supply chain members.

The internet site would provide access to a range of relevant Australian and overseas publications, an effective horticultural search engine to help industry members cope with an increasing "information overload" and tools such as a guide to relevant legislation and a comprehensive inventory of relevant technologies and techniques.

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### Horticulture Emergency Plan

The Horticulture Emergency Plan (HEP) is a national emergency management plan that individual industries can use to develop their own emergency plans. It is a template to help industries deal with a range of emergency situations from pest and disease incursions to food safety issues.

The HEP template has been finalised, printed and distributed to all peak industry bodies and major agencies. It will also be available electronically on the revised Horticulture Australia website. A number of industries are now using the template document for the development of their own emergency plans.

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### Horticulture gene technology communication package

To facilitate better understanding of Genetically Modified Organisms or GMOs a horticulture gene technology newsletter is compiled and distributed to industries called "GMOS - Guiding Meaningful Opinions". Extracts from this newsletter have been included in Eyes on Potatoes and Potato Australia under the header of GMO snippets.

**Evonne Lovric**  
*Horticulture Australia*  
☎ (02) 8295 2300  
✉ [Evonne.Lovric@Horticulture.com.au](mailto:Evonne.Lovric@Horticulture.com.au)

### Horticulture industries coordinated response to regulatory issues arising from reviews undertaken by the National Registration Authority and Codex Committees

At Codex and National Registration Authority (NRA) levels there has been an ongoing review of existing farm chemicals. An outcome of these reviews can be the loss or reduced access to these farm chemicals. This project resources the coordinated response, on behalf of horticulture, to the regulatory bodies and chemical manufacturers with regard to the review chemicals, as well as communicating with industry on the potential impacts of the reviews.

**Kevin Bodnaruk**  
*AKC Consultancy*  
☎ (02) 9499 3833  
✉ [akc\\_con@zip.com.au](mailto:akc_con@zip.com.au)

### Improved labelling of pesticides to encourage optimum use in horticultural crops

A number of government initiatives are underway with regard to the chemical labeling system. These include a review by the NRA of some aspects of labels, the global harmonization (standardising) of Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) and addressing the issue of control of use. The latter includes such issues as the differences in control information on labels between states. Farmers straddling borders would be particularly aware of differences in what can be done with a

*The potato industry contributes 5% of the potato levy receipts to the Aushort program*

chemical depending on which side of the border they are on.

The project supports the liaison with the various government agencies to ensure the horticultural perspective is being considered and where industry needs to input more into the process that this is facilitated.

**Kevin Bodnaruk**  
*AKC Consultancy*  
☎ (02) 9499 3833  
✉ [akc\\_con@zip.com.au](mailto:akc_con@zip.com.au)

### Scoping study for value adding technologies for Australian horticulture

This project involves a study to identify value adding technologies that would have broad application across a number of fruit and vegetable industries.

The project involves the use of a strategic research planning tool, 'Technology Value Mapping', (previously known as 'Research Value Mapping') to identify the research program in value adding technologies of greatest benefit to the industries. The results of this work are being written up.

**Ian Gould**  
*Food Science Australia*  
☎ 03 9731 3220  
✉ [ian.gould@foodscience.afisc.csiro.au](mailto:ian.gould@foodscience.afisc.csiro.au)



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# AUSHORT Project Updates

*continued*

## Statistical scoping study for the Australian horticultural industries

Access to accurate statistics has been an ongoing issue for horticultural industries. This project assessed the use of horticultural statistics in Australia and identified what data had been collected by industries, how it was used and how it might be used.

The report highlights a number of issues that need to be addressed if high quality statistics are to be collected and used to commercial advantage by industry.

**Martin Kneebone**  
Retailworks Pty Ltd

☎ (03) 9852 8733

✉ [mkneebone@retailworks.com.au](mailto:mkneebone@retailworks.com.au)

## Understanding the elements and adoption of environmental best practice in horticulture

The aim of the project was to develop Guidelines for Environmental Management (GEM) for industry sectors to use when implementing improved environmental management practices.

This was done by reviewing national and international work in this area across a range of agricultural industries, conducting case studies on adoption of improved practices in two key horticulture regions and field testing of the draft guidelines through a series of regional consultations. The aim was not to develop a single prescription for best practice, but to define options which industry sectors should consider in order to maximise the adoption of better environmental practices.

The project has concluded (See pg 14 for details about obtaining a Final Report).

**Andrew Grant**

Ernst & Young (formerly Arthur Andersen)

☎ (03) 9286 8786

✉ [Andrew.grant@ernstyoung.com.au](mailto:Andrew.grant@ernstyoung.com.au)

## Worker exposure to endosulfan in the Australian horticultural industries

The National Registration Authority for Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (NRA) is undertaking assessment of older chemicals that have been in use for some time. Many of these have not had the same amount of study that is now required of newer chemicals. Endosulfan is one of these chemicals. The Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety has undertaken a study of worker exposure of endosulfan for Horticulture Australia. Workers include mixers, loaders and applicators as well as those required to enter sprayed crops.

Information required by the NRA on occupational health and safety has been generated and a report submitted to the NRA. Horticulture Australia is now waiting for comment.

**Lyn Fragar**

University of Sydney

☎ (02) 6752 8210

✉ [lfragar@doh.health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:lfragar@doh.health.nsw.gov.au)

## Horticulture Australia AusHort Projects for 2002-2003

AUSHORT projects are funded by all horticultural levy paying industries. The AUSHORT program tackles issues of common interest.

Project title	Chief investigator	Phone	Page
Development of an industry position with regard to acute dietary risk assessment of pesticides	Kevin Bodnaruk, AKC Consultancy	02 9499 3833	8
Horticulture Emergency Plan	Libby Abraham, Horticulture Australia	02 8295 2300	9
Horticulture gene technology communication package*	Paula Fitzgerald, Agrifood Awareness		9
Horticulture industries coordinated response to regulatory issues arising from reviews undertaken by the National Registration Authority and Codex Committees**	Kevin Bodnaruk, AKC Consultancy	02 9499 3833	9
How can horticulture best capture, store and make available relevant information on environmental management	Vicki Lane, Queensland Horticulture Institute	07 3821 3784	8
Implementation of the Freshcare On farm Food Safety Program ***	Clare Hamilton-Bate, Freshcare Limited	02 9764 3244	
Key genes for horticultural industries	Dr Anna Koltunow, CSIRO Plant Industry	08 8303 8610	
Scoping study for value adding technologies for Australian horticulture	Ian Gould, Food Science Australia	03 9731 3220	9
Statistical scoping study for the Australian horticultural industries	Martin Kneebone, Retailworks Pty Ltd	03 9852 8733	10
Understanding the elements and adoption of environmental best practice in horticulture ****	Andrew Grant, Andersen	03 9286 8786	10
Worker exposure of endosulfan in the horticultural industries	Assoc Prof Lyn Frager, University of Sydney	02 6752 8210	10

■ Projects ending in late 2001 and 2002

■ Ongoing Projects

\* Superseded the project "Gene technology newsletter for the Australian horticultural industries".

\*\* Superseded the project "Understanding the implications of Codex issues to horticulture" and "Advancing horticulture's response to the Existing Chemical Review Program"

\*\*\* Report on Freshcare in March 2002 Eyes on Potatoes.

\*\*\*\* Superseded the project "Horticultural audit of production and sustainability, phase two – best practices study"

# The **GMO** snippets

The following articles are from the October edition of GMOs – Guiding Meaningful Opinions, The Gene Technology Newsletter of the Horticulture Industry – compiled by Agrifood Awareness Australia for Horticulture Australia Limited.

## Research Updates

**Russia** – According to the BBC, genetically modified potatoes will soon be sold on Russian supermarket shelves. The potatoes are resistant to the Colorado Potato Beetle, and will save Russian farmers millions of dollars.

**US** – Scientists at the University of Rochester, Cornell University and Tulane University have genetically modified a potato that may protect women against a common sexually transmitted virus, the human papilloma virus (HPV), which causes almost all cases of cervical cancer.

## Market Research

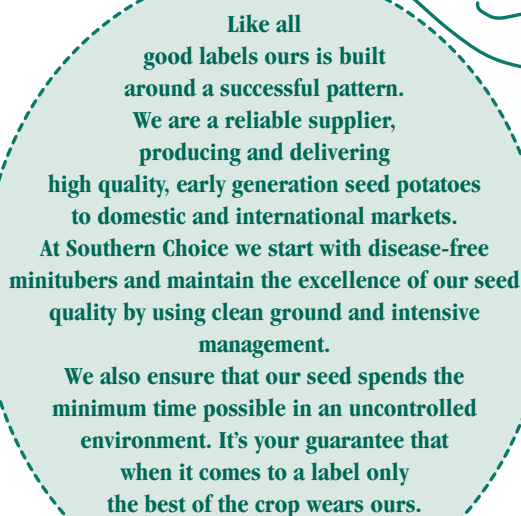
**Asia** – The Asian Food Information Centre (AFIC) recently commissioned a survey by international market research company, ISIS Research, to find out what consumers in China, Thailand and the Philippines know and think about GM foods. Six hundred

consumers participated and key findings included:

- 66% of consumers believed they would personally benefit from GM foods in the next five years
- Almost two-thirds (61%) of respondents believed they had eaten GM foods recently
- 90% of those who believed they had eaten GM foods recently were satisfied with this situation and took no action to avoid it
- More than 80% of those surveyed were willing to try a snack containing GM ingredients when it was offered
- More than 80% of consumers felt labelling of GM foods was unnecessary
- The top three food concerns among those surveyed were nutritional quality, microbial contamination and animal diseases that can be passed to humans.

*This 2002 survey followed a similar survey undertaken in 1999. The findings were consistent with Asian consumers' cautious optimism about the future benefits of biotechnology. They wanted more information about the topic and believed the mass media was a key source of information.*

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## El Nino

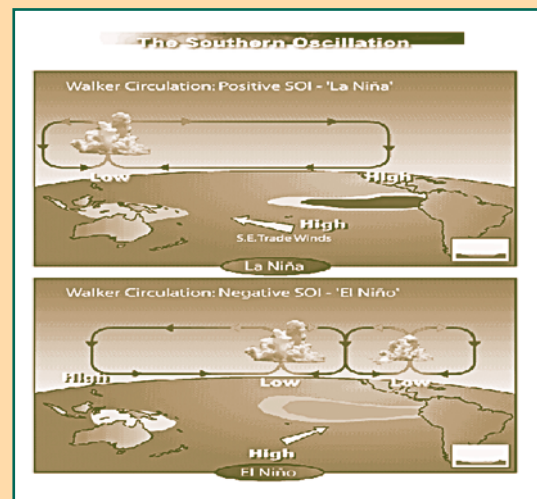
*The El Nino phenomenon has been recognised as having a major influence on Australian rainfall but why should a climate pattern in the middle of the Pacific Ocean affect our weather?*

El Nino is the name for an ocean/atmosphere pattern consisting of a sizeable but specific area of the Pacific Ocean, along the equator and near the International Date Line, which increases in temperature by at least 0.8°C above normal for the time of year.

This area of relatively warm ocean changes the flow of air above it by redirecting the normal southeast trade winds (which usually bring moisture over eastern and northern Australia) away from the western Pacific and instead towards the central Pacific. Without the feed of moisture, Australian weather systems produce limited rainfall.

When El Nino is present in the ocean, there is very little moisture for the eastern high to draw on so less rain falls in southeastern Australia over winter, spring and early summer. For areas receiving little rain outside these times this can result in a serious problem.

Since El Nino affected weather systems are not the only ones that produce rain in eastern Australia and because sometimes even small influxes of moisture can meet up with really good triggers to produce some rain, the state of the El Nino affected parts of the ocean can't provide a perfect prediction of rain. However, it does give a good guide to the chances.



## Stephen on the move

Stephen Wade our main potato agronomist with NSW Agriculture has moved from Finley to Bathurst. His new contact details are:

*Bathurst Agricultural Research and Advisory Station  
PO Box 1386*

*Bathurst NSW 2795*

*☎ (02) 6330 1216*

*Fax: (02) 6332 1458*

*✉ [stephen.wade@agric.nsw.gov.au](mailto:stephen.wade@agric.nsw.gov.au)*

# Potato IAC

## meets for the first time

The Potato Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) met for the first time in Melbourne in late September. The Potato IAC replaces the Potato R&D Committee and is responsible for advising Horticulture Australia on R&D issues relating to the Potato Levy.

IAC responsibilities include:

- Preparation of a five year Strategic Investment Plan
- Preparation of the Annual Investment Plan
- Preparation of the Annual Report
- Reporting back to industry at an Annual General Meeting to be held within three months of the end of the financial year
- Initiation of new R&D projects consistent with the Industry's Strategic Investment Plan
- Assessment of R&D proposals seeking funding from the Potato Levy.

The new IAC will result in some changed arrangements, but for the potato industry these are not major and tend to address concerns raised by industry (particularly the processing sector) and research providers.

The most significant change has been the formation of fresh and processing IAC sub-committees to better focus on the needs of each sector.

The time between project submission and commencement will be shortened. This resulted from discussions between Horticulture Australia and major research providers and industries. Instead of 15 months, it is now nine months and the timetable is:

<b>Aug/Sept</b>	<b>IAC finalises industry priorities</b>
<b>Nov</b>	<b>Concept development proposals submitted</b>
<b>March</b>	<b>IAC meets to evaluate proposals</b>
<b>April</b>	<b>Full project proposals submitted</b>
<b>July onwards</b>	<b>New projects commence</b>

Other changes relate to industry being more pro-active and indicating more clearly what they want rather than relying on researchers submitting projects that may or may not meet industry needs.

It will take a few meetings before everything settles down but the new arrangements should result in better outcomes for industry.

Our first day meeting involved updates on the review of the levy funded research development program, a rundown on communication activities, reviewing changes needed to the Potato R&D Plan and setting priorities for the processing and fresh sectors.

As the new Chairman I look forward to working with the Committee to ensure our R&D program provides real benefits for industry and the Australian community.

**John Gallagher**  
Chairman

☎ (08) 9274 5355

✉ [jgallagher@agric.wa.gov.au](mailto:jgallagher@agric.wa.gov.au)



*Potato IAC (left to right) Jonathan Eccles, Mark Heap, Ken Labett, Anthony Rehbein, Frank Rovers, John Doyle, Paul Frost, Des Jennings, Dom Della Vedova, Neville Beaumont, Clinton Zerella, John Gallagher, Tony Gietzel, John Oakshott, David Addison*

## Potato Industry Advisory Committee (IAC)

The AUSVEG Potato Group selects the grower representatives and the Potato Processors Association of Australia selects the processor representatives. These two groups are the original signatories to the legislation for the Potato Levy.

### Independent Chairman

John Gallagher

### Processing Group

#### French fry processors

Paul Frost (Safries)  
Mark Heap (Simplot)

#### Crisp processor

Tony Gietzel (Arnotts)

#### French fry growers

David Addison (Tas)  
John Doyle (NSW)  
Ken Labett (Vic)

#### Crisping grower

Frank Rovers (Vic)

### Fresh Market Group

David Addison (TAS)  
Neville Beaumont (NSW)  
Dom Della Vedova (WA)  
Des Jennings (Vic)  
Anthony Rehbein (Qld)  
Clinton Zerella (SA)

### Horticulture

#### Australia Advisers

Jonathan Eccles  
John Oakshott

### Technology Transfer Advisor

Leigh Walters

## Correction

*There was a bit of a blunder in the Black dot article in the last Potato Australia on p38. The caption on the photo for Fig 3 should have read Fig 5 and the Fig 3 photo referred to in the article was missing. The missing photo we will include in the March edition of Eyes on Potatoes, which will be produced in full colour.*



# Latest R&D reports

Horticulture Australia

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

<b>A strategy for horticulture to best capture, store and make available relevant information on environmental management</b>	<b>AH00022</b>
<b>Potato pink rot control in the South East of South Australia</b>	<b>PT01042</b>
<b>Putting the steam back into the potato market; from commodity to product *</b>	<b>PT01050</b>
<b>Understanding the elements and adoption of environmental best practice in horticulture</b>	<b>AH00018</b>

AH – AUSHORT projects are funded by all levy paying industries and tackle issues of common concern.

*\* A delay maybe experienced in receiving this publication as it was still being finalised at the time of Eyes On Potatoes going to press.  
The reports 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:*

*Sharron Baker  
Horticulture Australia  
Level 1  
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Sydney NSW 2000  
☎ (02) 8295 2300  
☎ Fax: (02) 8295 2399  
✉ publications@horticulture.com.au*

## Internet Assistance Program

If you are having problems with your internet connection, this self-help service maybe of assistance. [www.iapselfhelp.com](http://www.iapselfhelp.com)



The internet site enables you to test the speed of your connection and, depending on the result, will provide the appropriate advice. The site has lots of tips to get the best out of your service. As Lawrie Mortimer from Telstra indicated at the Potato Business and Marketing

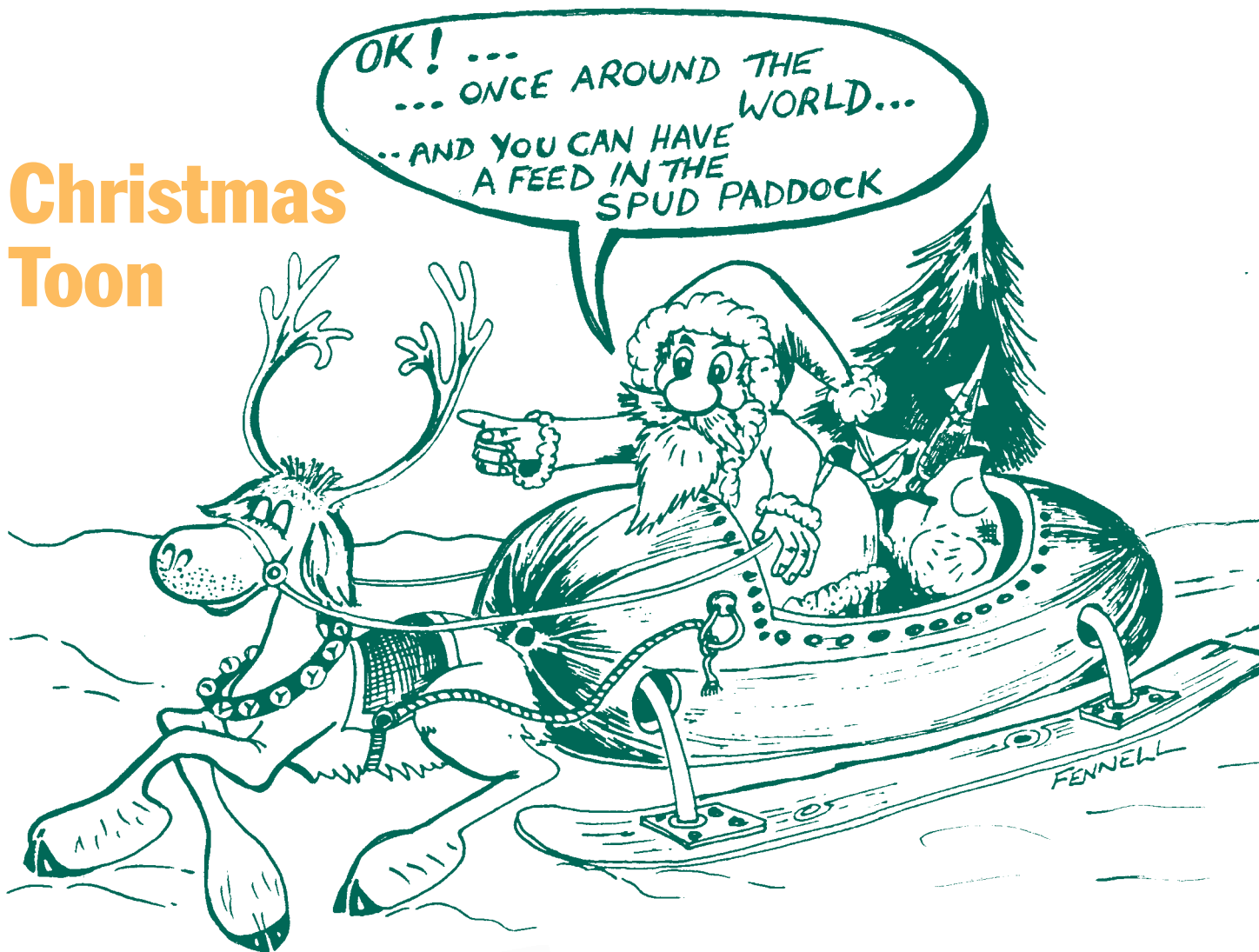
Conference, contact Telstra on 1800 427 457 if you are having a problem. Telstra isn't always aware if there is a problem with a service.

It will not always result in a solution but it would be a pity if you did not try and the problem could be fixed!

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# Christmas Toon



## Food Standards Australia New Zealand

Australia New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) has changed its name to Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ).

FSANZ is an independent statutory authority that develops food standards applying to all foods produced or imported for sale in Australia and New Zealand.

Its aim is to protect the health and safety of the people in Australia and New Zealand by maintaining a safe food supply.

In Australia, the authority develops food standards to cover the whole food supply chain – from paddock to plate – for the food manufacturing industry and primary producers.

*Modified from a statement on the FSANZ internet site.*

## Diary note: European / UK potato tour 2003

**A potato industry tour to England and the Netherlands is being planned for September 2003.**

The plan is to take a group overseas to investigate opportunities for value-adding potatoes. The tour will visit British Potato at Newark, a large event showcasing the UK potato industry, and include a major food fair in Rotterdam.

Many visits have already been confirmed with leading UK and Dutch potato supply companies and potato processors.

More details will be available in the new year.

*John Fennell*

☎ (08) 8389 8840

✉ [fennell.john@saugov.sa.gov.au](mailto:fennell.john@saugov.sa.gov.au)

# Grants and scholarships

**Over the next few issues we will provide information on a range of grants available to potato businesses and scholarships for growers.**

## AusIndustry initiatives

AusIndustry, the Commonwealth Government's business unit in the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources, provides a range of incentives for Australian businesses to foster investment and become more innovative and internationally competitive.

Through its state, territory and regional offices, AusIndustry delivers around 25 products with a total value of about \$1.7 billion to 9,000 customers annually.

AusIndustry helps businesses in:

- Research and development (R&D) and commercialisation of R&D
- Raising venture capital
- Intellectual Property (IP) issues
- Business regulation and information

Its services include:

## R&D

Tax concessions and offsets for companies conducting R&D on issues not readily solvable using existing information.

Competitive, merit-based grants and loans program supports businesses to undertake R&D and its commercialisation.

## TRADEX

Up-front exemption from custom duties and GST on imported goods intended for export or to be used as inputs to goods exported.

## COMET

Provides funding for mentoring and advice for businesses seeking to commercialise innovative products, services and processes.

*For more information call the AusIndustry Hotline on 132 846 or visit their internet site at [www.ausindustry.gov.au](http://www.ausindustry.gov.au).*

## AFFA initiatives

### New Industries Development Program (NIDP)

NIDP is a Commonwealth Government program managed by Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australia (AFFA). Its aim is to encourage and support Australian agribusinesses as they commercialise new market driven products, services and technologies.

Support consists of grants, scholarships and information, including:

### Pilot Commercialisation Project Grants

Grants of up to \$100,000 to help eligible Australian agribusinesses commercialise new agribusiness products, technologies or services.

### In-Market Experience Scholarships

Up to \$30,000 for agribusiness managers or emerging managers to develop skills and business opportunities that will help them commercialise agribusiness innovations. Up to 15 scholarships awarded annually.

*For more information and to discuss your proposal call 1300 884 588 (for the cost of a local call) or visit [www.affa.gov.au/agribiz](http://www.affa.gov.au/agribiz).*



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## Queensland retail liaison project

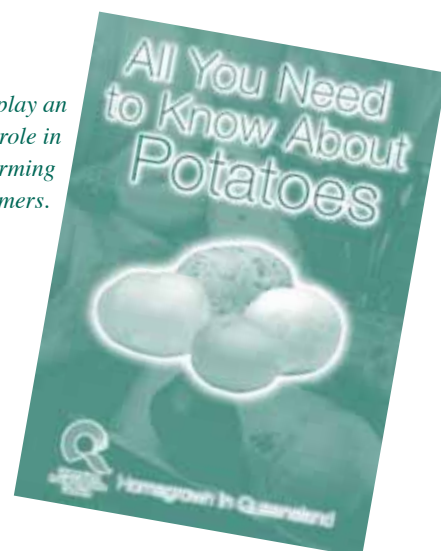
Improving communication along the supply chain is critical if retailers are to be able to market high quality potatoes to consumers. To help achieve this, the Heavy Produce Committee of the Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers (QFVG) initiated the Retail Liaison Project in August 2001.

A Retail Liaison Officer was employed to work with retailers and supply chain managers to provide support, address problems and identify and capitalise on marketing opportunities for heavy produce (potatoes, onions, sweet potatoes, pumpkins). This work complimented existing activities carried out under the Heavy Produce Promotional Strategy.

The project aims to increase sales through:

- Meeting with major retailers to discuss seasonal strategies, forecasts, promotion strategies and category issues
- Visiting about 130 stores to deliver information for retailers and consumers (recipes, fact sheets, posters), obtain feedback about products and grower related issues, gather information about consumer trends and needs, add value to store demonstrations and assist retailers gather product knowledge and information on handling techniques

Fact sheets play an important role in informing consumers.



- Carrying out training and information sessions for supermarkets as required
- Communicating issues back to growers through the Heavy Produce Committee Newsletter
- Communicating issues to wholesalers through the Heavy Produce Update newsletter
- Carrying out market launches with selected agents involving demonstrations and promotional packs
- Communicating issues back to the Heavy Produce Committee.

By facilitating better communication in the supply chain many problems can be easily resolved and not become major issues that impact on quality and sales.

*Brian Carmody and Gina Koumpis  
Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers  
Brisbane Markets*

☎ (07) 3213 2444

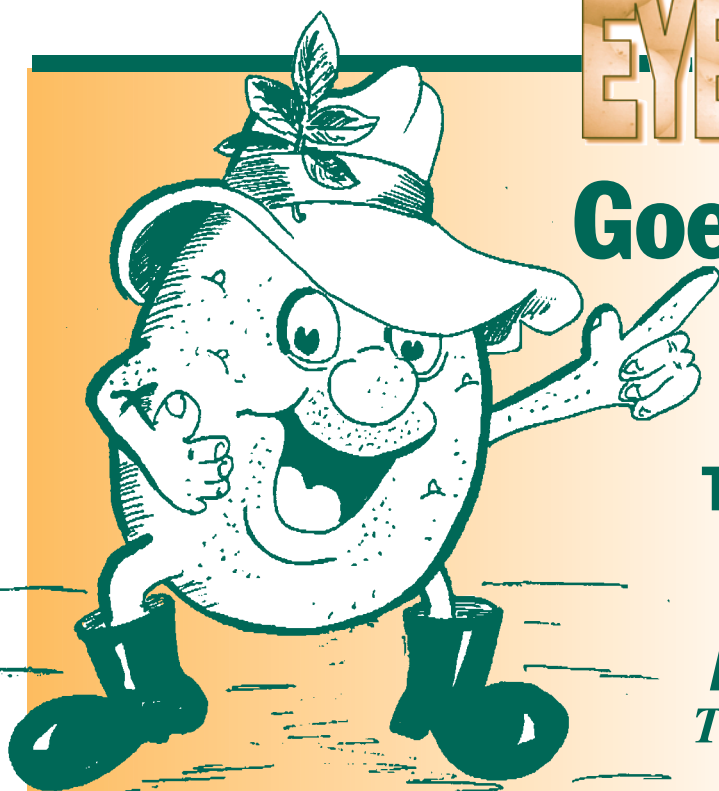
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## EYES ON POTATOES

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## New South Wales

Most of New South Wales has experienced drought conditions this year. Over the last four months many growers have faced water shortages, with reduced irrigation allocations or restrictions on ground and river pumping across the state.

Digging of the late crop started in the northern Tablelands in April and finished in June. Although yields were average, prices remained firm at \$18/50 kg bag (\$360/tonne) for red soil potatoes. The Maitland harvest started in May and ended in June. Despite good yields, growers received just \$14/bag (\$280/tonne). The Riverina harvest started in June and continued until late October. Riverina yields were average, while quality was excellent for the ground stored crops with the dry weather. Prices ranged from \$200/tonne in July to \$250/tonne in September and peaked at \$400/tonne in late October, when supplies of Queensland potatoes started to dwindle.

Planting of this season's early crop started in July at Maitland and in August in the northern Tablelands and the Riverina. Fresh and processing crop areas are similar to last year. With the dry windy weather most growers have had to irrigate their crops since planting. While irrigation allocations were down in the Riverina, growers have purchased enough water to grow their crops through to harvest. The early crop harvest started at Maitland in November, where below average yields are expected for the whole district. Digging of the early crops in the Riverina is expected to start in December, where only average yields are expected. In the northern Tablelands the irrigated crops are expected to produce good yields if water supplies can be maintained, while the remaining dry land crops will fail unless the drought breaks during November.

Sowing of the mid-season crop started in the Guyra, Orange and Crookwell districts in late October/early November. Seed areas are expected to be slightly down on last year if the drought continues. Most certified seed stocks have cleared although some orders were cancelled because of the drought. Despite the drought, many growers have enough soil moisture to begin planting their mid-season crops.

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

## Western Australia

### Department of Agriculture

Phil Ross, who wrote the last two WA *Round-Ups*, has left the agency to return to north Queensland to work on revegetation. Also Paul Mattingley has relocated from Manjimup to Perth and his work with potatoes will be reduced. Thanks to both for their efforts. Our potato pathologist, Ros Pilbeam, recently returned from the Global Initiative on Late Blight Conference in Germany. This valuable training means we can increase our "in-country" agronomy support for seed exports.

### Fresh Market

Western Potatoes reports poor winter and spring growing conditions have reduced yields. Storms and very strong winds took a severe toll on many crops. Shortages of potatoes occurred in October, November and December. There is strong demand for exports of seed and ware. Enquiries have even come from Finland!

Dams are full and summer production should not be affected by the dry conditions found elsewhere in the country.

### Export seed

Export seed demand is increasing and the industry is gearing up to meet some of this demand. In the last *Round-Up*, mention was made of seed exports to Sri Lanka recommencing after a very long break. WA last sent seed to Sri Lanka back in the 1960s under the Columbo Plan. There are now two exporters supporting this market. Out-turns of seed so far have been excellent and, by the time you read this, the crops should be in full leaf.

Seed is also being sent to Indonesia and Thailand and new seed producers are being recruited to help with supply. Seed will be sourced from Scott River to Esperance while interstate supplies are helping to fill orders.

A joint project between Western Potatoes, The Department of Agriculture and Indofoods, the largest snackfood company in Indonesia, has received support from Horticulture Australia and all partners are looking forward to seeing WA seed perform well in East Java.

**Peter Dawson**  
*Development Officer*  
Department of Agriculture, WA

## Queensland

Dry weather has been a common factor throughout Queensland production areas. While water availability has been a concern for all, at the time of writing there has been enough available to grow out most crops.

Although the area planted to potatoes in the Atherton Tablelands was slightly down this year, good growing conditions on upper and lower tablelands have ensured the actual tonnage produced will equal 2001. In addition to quantity the overall quality produced has been excellent, with some growers stating these have been the best crops they have produced in years.

The dry weather meant that 'slimy stalk' (*Erwinia sp.*), a not uncommon problem, was virtually absent from all crops. Target spot pressure also remained low for most of the season. Early in the season aphid pressures were building, but the onset of cold weather reduced the populations and they did not build up again. *Helicoverpa* followed a similar pattern. Tuber moth pressures only started to build in mid-October and have been controllable.

The Tablelands also saw a slight increase in production of varietal lines. Varieties, *Nicola*, *Kipfler*, *Valor*, *Harmony* and *Kestrel* have all yielded well.

Bundaberg faced some hard growing conditions this year, with irregular weather patterns causing some very hot weather at the season start and finish. This resulted in yields slightly lower than average although quality was reasonable. Bundaberg has produced some good processing crops with very high specific gravities. Pest pressures have been high but controllable for most of the season.

The Lockyer Valley potato crop has had some ups and downs. The early plantings grew under favourable conditions and yielded well. In June/July cold weather affected a number of crops causing double tuber sets in some, while later planted crops were slow to get away, resulting in slightly lower than average yields. Prices have been good with some of the better quality washed potatoes commanding high prices.

Disease levels remained low all season. Aphid and thrip populations remained low throughout the crop. There was some pressure from *Helicoverpa*, which remained controllable. Potato tuber moth came in heavily mid to late September and has required vigilance to keep it under control.

# ROUND-UP

## State

The Darling Downs has suffered a hard season. It appears spring may have taken a holiday this year with the weather going from a cold winter straight into a hot summer. Yields are expected to be down as, while the crops have set plenty of tubers, they have not bulked up as expected. Disease and insect pressures have been low.

By the end of October many production areas across the state have had water restrictions imposed. Should summer rains fail, this will have an effect on next year's plantings.

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

## South Australia

Like many areas of Australia, South Australia is in drought. The Riverland and Murrayland areas are experiencing severe drought conditions and, while the Mid- and Lower-South East are in drought, conditions are not as severe as other regions.

The early planted ware crops in the Riverland and Murraylands have endured some frosts as well as wind damage. The dry and windy conditions have been relentless this season. The dry, loose soil has exacerbated the wind damage to potato crops. As a result, yields are likely to be below average. *Coliban* is continuing to be the main white variety planted. There appears to be no reduction in the total area planted to ware crops.

Lakes area crops have endured similar damage from the severe dry and windy conditions. Some banking has had to be repeated. Yields are likely to be slightly reduced.

The planting of the processing crop in the Lower South East is well advanced. Dry weather conditions has helped by providing an almost trouble-free period. Some of the early crops endured wind and soil damage, until they became more established.

All growing areas will receive with joy any worthwhile summer rainfall, which will reduce the pressure on water supplies.

**Bob Peake**  
*Horticultural Consultant*  
*PIRSA Rural Solutions*

## Tasmania

Early planting of processing and fresh market crops has been delayed slightly by spring rains, resulting in a shortage of fresh market ware potatoes. However, planting is now progressing well. Seed quality out of store appears excellent and the Tecto, Fungaflor (at grading) and Nubark®, Maxim and mancozeb (at cutting) treatment, appears to be working well in terms of seed quality, although some concerns have been raised in relation to the occupational health and safety risks associated with these chemicals.

The incentives introduced last year for early seed harvest appear to be paying dividends in providing physiologically young seed for planting. The early (pre cutting of seed and return to cool store (prior to planting) is also working well. The only negative on the seed side is the high level of bruising from early harvested crops. Further efforts will be made this coming season to reduce bruise levels.

The McCains study tour to Canada and the US has resulted in a number of changes to be implemented this season. These include adjusting the mould shape, fertiliser placement and *Rhizoctonia* control. Growers are positive about the coming season and this has been reflected by excellent turnouts at recent Potato Focus Groups/Workshops.

Water supplies for the coming season are looking fairly good and growers and industry are confident that supplies will be sufficient. The introduction of the new water catchment management plans for certain rivers should not have a major impact on crops in the coming season.

Simplot is to invest \$30 million into its Ulverstone plant, with the introduction of a new processing line. However, this will mean the closure of the Scottsdale plant on December 31, 2003. Crops grown in the northeast will be processed in Ulverstone; transport arrangements and costs are being investigated to lessen the impact on growers. The potato stores and the field office in Scottsdale will remain open.

**Iain Kirkwood**  
*Agricultural Officer (Potatoes)*  
*Department of Primary Industries,*  
*Water and Environment*

## Victoria

The majority of Victoria has had a dry winter, with large areas in the north declared drought affected. DNRE has opened a new drought response centre at Kyabram to co-ordinate and act on requests for assistance from drought affected areas across Victoria; to contact the centre call 136186.

The main potato districts in the south have had reasonable winter rain, with the Otways and South Gippsland receiving good rainfall.

If normal summer rainfall occurs in potato districts, the crop yield should be normal. Ballarat has been unusually dry, with a few dams not quite full.

Taking the pessimistic view, if there is below-average rainfall crops may run out of water to finish off, resulting in a reduced yield, less pest and disease, and mechanical damage at harvest.

Most seed has come out of storage OK but there are a few problems. Rots were caused by either dry harvesting conditions causing damage or wet harvesting conditions when the autumn rain came.

Gippsland growers had dry conditions for their September/October plantings, with the majority being planted in November/December. Ballarat McCain growers started planting in the last week of October in dry soil. Most plantings take place in Ballarat, Colac and Portland in November/December.

VicSPA growers had a difficult year, but tonnage of certified seed was similar to last season. There was Atlantic seed left over from last year, with some (bound for South East Asia, mainly Thailand) being rejected for too much soil on the tubers.

The first certified seed crop inspection in Gippsland, at flowering stage, took place in the first week of November.

**Bruce Fry**  
*Horticultural Extension Officer*  
*Department of Natural Resources and Environment*

# CONTROL FREAK



*Rhizoctonia solani* is a serious fungal disease that attacks potatoes. It exists as different strains, divided into anastomosis (AG) groups.

RIZOLEX® controls the major strains of *Rhizoctonia* that effect potatoes in Australia<sup>1</sup>, giving you maximum protection against black scurf.

**Do you know which strain of *Rhizoctonia* you have present?**

**Comparison Study<sup>2</sup>**

Strain of <i>Rhizoctonia solani</i>	RIZOLEX	MONCEREN*
AG-3	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
AG-4	✓✓✓	✓
AG-5	✓✓✓	X

✓✓✓ Good control    ✓ Limited control    X Poor control

#### RIZOLEX 100D

- Simple to apply
- No wetting of seed piece
- **IT WORKS**

1. Balali et al. Anastomosis group and pathogenicity of isolates of *Rhizoctonia solani* from potato crops in South Australia. Plant Pathology 1995  
 2. Data on file



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