

Melon thrips on potatoes

Melon thrips (*Thrips palmi*) were first detected in the Northern Territory in 1989 and in Queensland in 1993. The thrips mainly attack crops in the potato family and cucurbits. Losses of 50-90% have been reported overseas in a variety of crops including potatoes, capsicum, eggplant, cucurbits and beans.



Photograph courtesy C Freebairn, DPI Queensland

Research by Queensland Department of Primary Industries has recorded up to 30% yield loss in autumn potato crops as a result of damage from melon thrips.

Melon thrips damage potatoes by feeding mainly on the foliage with their piercing and sucking mouthparts and when there are low numbers there may be no visible damage. When high numbers are present they can produce silvery, yellowing and bronzing of affected areas. Leaves may crinkle and die and the overall effect is a loss of plant vigour and a reduction in marketable produce.

Melon thrips are small (1.3mm long) cigar shaped insects that can barely be seen with the naked eye. The pest is pale green to orange in colour and is most commonly found on the undersides of leaves.

The thrips usually survive about 20 days at 30°C and this is extended to 80 days at 15°C. Eggs are inserted into the plant and hatch in four to 16 days. The larvae emerge and feed on the plant for four to 14 days and then enter a resting stage as pupae, usually in the soil, for between three and 12 days. Winged adults emerge from the pupae and can live for seven to 30 days with the females laying an average of 50 eggs.

A project is currently underway to look at how to sustainably manage the pest. This is a collaborative effort between Queensland Department of Primary Industries, Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers Heavy Produce Committee, Sumitomo Chemicals and Horticulture Australia.

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Chips #16 Newsletter

The 10 largest potato producers

- 1 China
 - 2 Russian Federation
 - 3 India
 - 4 USA
 - 5 Poland
 - 6 Ukraine
 - 7 Germany
 - 8 Belarus
 - 9 Netherlands
 - 10 United Kingdom
- (34) Australia

Source FAO (2001)

Editorial

Welcome to the new colour era of *Eyes on Potatoes*. We anticipate that the move to colour will allow us to reproduce photographs with enhanced picture quality and detail for better readability.

We welcome your feedback on the change.

The drought we are still experiencing, despite some good falls, has been a defining factor for many growers and Jacqueline Balston, Climate Research Scientist for Queensland's Centre for Climate Applications says that forecasting weather patterns beyond the autumn period remains difficult.

However, growers can keep updated on weather systems across Australia through www.bom.gov.au/silo/ and www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au

On the price front, the drought has brought mixed blessings, with ware potato prices up in most states.

Looking to the future, Milton Rodda, former Chairman of APIC and Field Manager for McCains, offers his thoughts in this issue on future trends and opportunities for the industry.

Internationally, uncertainty seems to dominate the political and economic scene so we are all hopeful that 2003 remains peaceful and is a prosperous one for growers and the industry.

All the best for the year ahead.

Cathy Sage

Editor



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.

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Global grower network

Over the past three years John Rich, Executive Officer with the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association has been encouraging potato grower groups around the world to establish a communication network to consider common issues related to the French fry processing industry.

As a result of his efforts, John was invited to speak to about 300 National Potato Council and United States Potato Board delegates at their Winter Conference in Tucson, Arizona in early January this year. Delegates included some of the most influential people in the US potato industry and covered all sectors - growers, processors, researchers and government representatives.

John's message was to encourage grower groups worldwide to establish a communication network to consider a range of common issues.

"As the world's markets have become more globalised we have seen the development of larger and fewer processors, food service restaurant chains such as MacDonalds, Burger King and KFC, and supermarket buyers.

"It seemed logical that farmers globally should come together and explore areas where there was common ground," said John.

"Price is a key issue for producers, so there is common ground in discussing benchmarking input costs, looking at some of the technological aspects of potato growing and exploring elements of the contract system that could provide incentives for improvements on farms."

John suggested to Conference delegates that growers need to adopt a more formal approach to the network and form an organisation such as a World Potato Growers Alliance. This could be achieved using existing resources and by maintaining contact through email.

The following week John attended and addressed the Potato Marketing Association of North America Conference bringing together all the grower organisations in the US and Canada. With most of the grower groups in financial trouble with current prices and contracts, and concerned about their future, one of the main focuses of this association is to address the issue of price and contract conditions. For further information please contact

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Gary and Kathy Britza



Gary Britza and Barry Haase

New seed potato facility

in Esperance

The Esperance seed potato industry took a significant step forward recently with the completion of a state-of-the-art grading and storage facility.

The new facility which utilises overseas technology in potato seed technology was opened in February by Barry Haase MP for Kalgoorlie representing the Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator Judith Troeth.

The facility provides a modern cleaning, grading and storage service for local seed potato growers, improving the quality of their product for sale into the market place.

"This project represents a significant step forward in the seed potato industry with the establishment of a handling facility, which is a disease and dust free environment in which to grade and pack potatoes," said Mr Haase.

Gary and Kath Britza of the Western Australian Certified Seed Potatoes completed the facility with the support of the Federal Government's *Agriculture – Advancing Australia - Farm Innovation Program*.

Mr Britza has been trialling an innovative system of storage that has the potential to reduce the dormancy period of seed potatoes – that is the period between when the potatoes are picked and when they are ready to be sown again.

As a flow on benefit from this project, there is now potential for new seed varieties to be grown in Esperance enabling potatoes to be harvested twice yearly, fast tracking the production of those varieties and increasing local production.

For further information please contact Gary Britza on (08) 9078 2001 or Lara McIntyre on (08) 9071 5190.

For more information about other AAA-Farm Innovation Program applicants, please call 1800 686 175, or visit the web site: <http://www.affa.gov.au/farminnovation>

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Bill and Marie Gooch run a 2000 hectare cropping and livestock property near West Frankford in Northern Tasmania with son Beau who has recently returned from New South Wales to help run the farm. They run 140 Angus breeders and 1,600 breeding ewes as well as poppies, a forestry plantation and seed potatoes.



A grower's perspective

Moving from travelling irrigators to centre pivots/linear move

Last season they made the move from travelling irrigators to a linear move for the irrigation of their seed potato crop. This season they are irrigating their entire 17 hectares of French fry seed potatoes using the linear move. The machine (a Bauer) incorporates linear as well as a pivot mode. It is fitted with a telephone communication device which is capable of sending a warning text message to a mobile phone should the linear stop unexpectedly. It also can send a message when it switches automatically from linear to pivot mode so Bill can roughly determine the progress of the irrigation cycle from a remote location.

Iain Kirkwood, Agricultural Officer (Potatoes) from the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment spoke to Bill and Beau about their new irrigation system.

Why did you decide to make the move from travelling irrigators to a linear move?

Our decision to develop a seed potato enterprise was what drove the move from travellers to a low pressure boom. We felt that the many advantages of the linear move for irrigating the potatoes would pay for the investment, both in improved lifestyle and in improved crop performance. The reduced labour costs, a more even distribution of water, ease of fertigation and remote operation were all factors that influenced our decision.

Are there any cost advantages in terms of running costs between travellers and low pressure booms?

The linear operates using a generator which consumes about two litres of diesel an hour as well as a pump to supply the water pressure (104 hp). However the pump runs at much lower revs than it did when powering the travelling guns, so overall fuel consumption is about the same as for a traveller. The linear has to operate at six bars pressure to prevent kinking of the supply hose which is dragged behind the machine.

Did you encounter any problems in the transition from travellers to the linear move?

We didn't encounter any major problems in the move although it did take some time to learn to run the machine. We used rain gauges to monitor how much water was being applied at different speeds and once we had mastered the basics the machine was very easy to operate. One issue we had to overcome in using a linear in a seed potato paddock was preventing the movement of disease from late generation seed to early generation crops. We achieved this by leaving all the wheel tracks unplanted so that there was no contact between the machine and the crop. We now also leave the wheel tracks area uncultivated to reduce wheel sinking and next season we will probably grass the wheel tracks.

Have you had any mechanical problems with the linear move?

The machine has now completed approximately 2,300 hours with only a few very minor structural problems which were very promptly rectified by the agent. Other than routine maintenance no major repairs have been required.

How do you schedule your irrigation?

This season we have been using a G-bug (data logger) attached to Gypsum blocks to record our moisture profiles. These were positioned at 20cm and 35cm depths and provide a continuous record of soil moisture in and below the root zone. We use this information along with regular auger samples to schedule our irrigation runs.

Do you have any comments on the costs of the change over?

The change over did not turn out to be as expensive as we first thought and was overall easier and less painful than we expected, which was a very pleasant surprise.

Have there been any unexpected benefits in the move?

The ease and accuracy of fertigation has been an enormous benefit of moving to a low pressure boom. This benefit together with the evenness of watering has produced a very even crop with very few variations across the paddock. However the biggest benefit has been in lifestyle - less time moving irrigators

Have your water use patterns changed?

We are using about the same quantity of water per hectare as we did when we were using travellers but we are now able to distribute it more evenly. We are now able to change the program to compensate for wet or dry patches.

How have you found moving the lateral from one paddock to another?

In a word - slow. We didn't have any major difficulties with the move but it was very slow and worrying process as it put some strain on the structure - we connected it to the tractor and engaged the slowest creeper gear and crawled it across to the new site.

Do you have any unknowns about the use of a pivot /linear move?

The biggest unknown is how long it will last. With the running the fertigation unit we are uncertain of the corrosion effects. We have budgeted for 12 years but that will depend on a number of factors not least of which will be our care and maintenance program over the coming years.

Overall have you been happy with the move from travellers to a low pressure boom?

We have been very happy with the move. The transition went more smoothly than expected and it has provided all the benefits and more than we anticipated.



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The missing Black dot photo

In Potato Australia the 'Black dot in potatoes' article by Robin Harding and Trevor Wicks on p38 was missing a picture. We held it over until now so it can be presented in colour. So this has been what you have all been waiting for – 'skin blemish caused by Black dot on Coliban potato'. Not likely to win any beauty contests!



Keep an eye on Nuffield Farming Scholarships

Nuffield Farming Scholarships make it financially possible for primary producers with no prerequisite qualifications other than vision, enthusiasm and determination to study overseas.

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You apply and then a State selection panel short-lists the applications. Applicants do not have to have academic qualifications.

Applications open on 1 March and close on 21 June 2003.

Initial selection is carried out by the State panels. These panels then send two applicants to Melbourne for final selection.

Winners are announced at a Presentation Day a month after the interviews are completed and they are required to take their scholarships up within the following 12 months.

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If you would like to discuss the Nuffield Farming Scholarships contact:

*Bryan Clark - CEO
The Australian Nuffield Farming
Scholars' Association
PO Box 1385, Griffith
NSW 2680, Australia.*

 (02) 6964 6600

 (02) 6964 1605

 enquire@nuffield.com.au

Internet: www.nuffield.com.au

Here are some of our potato industry scholars, past and present:

2002 Graham Ramsay
Bundaberg QLD

1996 Bernadette Clarke
Westbury TAS

1990 Robert Henry
Cressy TAS

1984 Russell McKay
Creswick VIC

1972 Ian Farquhar
Winnaleah TAS

1965 Peter Rose
Burekup WA



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Trends in Potato Products



The potato industry supports about 2000 producers nationally and represents the largest vegetable commodity we have. It is important therefore to be looking and planning ahead for a sustainable future and I will attempt to make some projections for our industry to think about.

To project forward we need firstly to look back and learn from history. Thirty years ago little of the Australian potato crop was processed. By 1980 it was 10% of the crop, by 1990, 35% and by 2000 about 65% of annual production was destined for processing into either Fries

or Crisps. It follows therefore that for the Fresh sector the market has declined from 100% to 35% of total sales in that same 30 year period. Back to one third of its former share in this time.

Within the processor sector we have four main players or purchasers of your product. Within the fresh sector similar changes have occurred with rationalisation resulting in fewer buyers for your product. Almost all process tonnage is now purchased under contract prior to crops being planted and the majority of product destined for fresh sale is sown on the basis of some pre determined destination even if not fully covered by a written contract.

To project into the future allow me to separate processing from fresh sales as the future for each is likely to differ. I do not have the experience within the Crisp industry that I have in French Fries but I believe that a fairly similar future awaits each sector.

Growth within the processing sector domestically has now very nearly levelled off if we measure by per capita consumption leaving the majority of future growth to come from increases in population or export. This will therefore mean an end to the past 30

year dramatic shift in potato consumption from fresh to processed. Rice, Pasta, Noodles and other alternate foods all pose a threat to our overall market and we can not sit in any comfort zone and assume that nothing will change to reduce or slow overall consumption.

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Trends in Potato Products (continued)

Increasingly now we are finding that while we must continue to launch new products their uptake does not necessarily translate to increased sales overall as on many occasions we are only shifting demand from one potato product to another.

Product development within the present framework of processed potatoes can be very rapid should it only involve a new flavour or cut type and can be easily managed utilising present equipment. It is difficult in the short to mid term to identify any potential new form of processed potato product that is likely to capture the public's imagination the way in which Fries and Crisps have over the past 30 years but nothing is impossible given our love of convenient food of the part or fully prepared kind. Microwave ovens for example open possibilities for alternate potato products but to date have not produced the results anticipated. Future science may open many opportunities for our industry but I am not positioned to attempt to identify what they may be.

Health issues and children's health in particular will see processors seeking healthier images for their products. This will involve them in exploring alternate substances for deep frying and possibly alternate methods for home preparation. Coupled with this will be the requirement that raw material, potatoes, are produced to the highest standard promoting the very best clean, green image that can be achieved. Organic or reduced chemical input production methods will have a place to play in this along with the promotion of an environmentally sustainable production system.

Grower numbers supplying processors is likely to continue to decline with the emphasis on economies of scale and more particularly quality history.

If we as an industry are to develop potato production into the future at a rate that exceeds domestic population growth then we need to either increase per capita consumption or more possibly develop export markets for our product. The rapid growth of western style fast food outlets throughout much of Asia accompanied by changing eating patterns has established the need for significant tonnages of processed potato products in these regions. The market is now there, it is growing quickly and it is significant in size. The issue for Australia now becomes one of competitiveness as we are in a battle with the rest of the developed world for a piece of this action.

The potential for increased exports of processed product into Asia is therefore very high and will be reliant on our being able to supply at a world competitive price. This in turn will be reliant on the value of our dollar and in our ability to contain input costs be they labour, freight, packaging, power or raw material. In support of this position I am able to tell you that New Zealand has achieved the economies that we are seeking and are now successfully exporting increasing volumes of Fries into Asian markets.

For fresh potatoes I am unable to confidently predict a major, ongoing increase in export activity. History would suggest that trade of fresh potatoes into Asia other than for processing, is difficult and while these difficulties are not insurmountable do

result in limited quantities of fresh product being traded. I hope I am completely incorrect in this belief but I suggest past experience supports my view. An excellent publication, "Potato Export Market Development. Australian Potato Export Opportunities - Bonanza or Myth," by David McKinna, available as a HRDC publication is well worth reading and gives a balanced appraisal that I believe also supports my position.

Coupled with this and supported by the increasing export activity of processed product into Asia I suggest that a shift is beginning to occur that, while less dramatic than that which we have witnessed here so far, will see a shift from raw consumption to processed. This alone will have the effect of reducing the requirement for fresh product.

If I am correct to this point then the remaining market for fresh production has to be domestic and it therefore becomes this market that we have to increase if we wish to market more product. This is a very competitive market given the products we are to go up against but one that offers great potential. Potatoes are a wonderful vegetable that are able to be produced year round of a quality that is very acceptable to the consumer. We need to retarget our sales effort if we are to become successful however as we can no longer expect that in every household nightly potatoes are boiled, mashed and served as part of a fully home prepared meal. Similarly we can no longer expect that the population busy themselves daily at heavy manual labour positions which require high volumes of wholesome food to recharge for the following days endeavour. We have become more adventurous in our eating habits while

also becoming very health conscious. We do not necessarily sit as a family nightly to consume a meal carefully prepared by a stay at home mother. Fifteen years ago fast food outlets such as hamburger and fried chicken outlets served 70% of their sales in house, today the position has reversed with 70% of sales leaving the premises to be consumed.

This opens up opportunities for us if we are able to find new, exciting and convenient alternate ways to present fresh or part prepared potatoes to the consumer. The demand for different, exciting food exists with price paid for such items being of minor importance.

Who is going to do this? I do not have the answer but under present circumstances it is unlikely to come from the grower sector. The merchant sector would have a vested interest in achieving such a goal but again this would appear outside their normal field. Where then are the entrepreneurs? They are everywhere and any of us would be only willing to jump onto a winner if one can be identified. This then begs the final question of who is to be charged with developing these exciting new lines and what will it take to encourage them to do so. The answer is easy - money.

Attempts have been made in the past to have fresh potato producers levy themselves for the purpose of research and development and more recently promotion. Research and Development via the APIC levy has been able to be funded and has concerned itself mostly with research on production issues with the likely outcome being improved production methods aimed at increasing productivity and therefore grower returns. With a static market this only becomes a solution if area produced decreases in line with

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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

productivity gains and can only ever continue on this path unless market volume increases.

Would we not be better to put this money towards developing new and exciting ways to present potatoes rather than towards producing more of something that may not necessarily have a market?

I suggest that the fresh market sector may wish to consider the redirection of this research effort as a way towards an improved future and if so need to clearly indicate to those representing them at APIC level that this is the path they wish to follow. We can not continue to do the same old things as in the past and expect a result at the end that will be acceptable because while we have failed to change, the consumer of our product has, and continues to seek new eating experiences.

In closing there are some industry issues that are likely to impact on all of industry and it is necessary that we are aware of these and position ourselves to deal with them.

Public health and food safety issues are very relevant to our modern day society. We must promote the potatoes strength in being clean, green and natural and be very vigilant in our approach to its production and value adding. Chemical inputs must be carefully monitored, applied and recorded to support the claim that producers and value adders are acting responsibly and in the interest of the consumer and the environment. We must be extremely environmentally conscious in all of our endeavours, with the landscape and water source that we utilise being not ours to do with what we will, but seen by most as a national resource that must be

protected and used for the benefit of all. Water, its allocation and sustainability in particular, is and will continue to be an issue taken on by all of society and not just irrigators. It is seen as a national resource and in need of protection along with the resultant rivers and wetlands that it supports. Vegetation and more importantly native vegetation also falls into this same category and will be closely monitored as a result.

Genetic engineering of our food is possible with several possibilities for the alteration of potatoes already existing. It would seem that society is as yet unsure of the merits of such technology and I believe that the debate now occurring is needed and will be the correct vehicle to determine the adoption or otherwise of this technology. The potential for advances to be made using such methods is rarely questioned but society needs to arrive at a position whereby they

embrace it before this can occur. We must not attempt to force such technology upon the consumer.

Edited from a presentation by Milton Rodda, former Chairman of APIC and Field Manager for McCain to the National Potato Business and Marketing Conference in Mt Gambier in August 2002.

Milton Rodda

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The South African experience



Demographics		Potatoes		End Use	
Population	43,792,000	Production	1,655,000 tonnes	63.5%	Ware
Area	1,219,912 sq km *	Area	54,000 hectares	16.9%	Processing
* Bigger than SA but smaller than NT		Average yield	30.6 t/ha	13%	Seed
Source: FAO (2001) and area CIA (2002)				6.6%	Exports

A group of 21 Australians and a New Zealander attended the first Southern Hemisphere Potato Workshop and Study Tour of South Africa in September 2002. The tour was organised by AgTour in conjunction with Potatoes South Africa and led by John Rich from the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association. Support was provided by Horticulture Australia for ten participants, (eight growers, one agribusiness consultant, a researcher and John Rich as tour leader).

The workshop was held in Lambert's Bay and brought together potato growers, potato growers organisation representatives, processors, marketers and researchers from countries which included Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and South Africa.

This was an important event, intended to establish communication linkages and facilitate on-going exchange of information of mutual interest between representatives from the participating countries.

Prior to the workshop the group toured potato growing areas and visited farms north of Pretoria. Visits were made the Pretoria Fresh Produce Market, Freshmark, a major distributor of fresh produce near Pretoria, McCain Foods at Delmas and to the South African Foundation Seed production unit near Lydenburg. Visits were also made to Potato Laboratory Services and to the South African research and breeding facility at ARC-Roodeplaat.

The potato industry in South Africa is undergoing considerable change and faces many challenges in the coming years. The Horticulture Australia Final Report provides a very interesting summary of the industry and the issues being faced. It also contains details of the trip and observations from those who participated. To obtain copies of the report see p12.

The above information is from the Final Report unless otherwise stated. Items on Potatoes South Africa and Quality control are extracts from papers written by Dr DJ Theron.

Quality control

Product Control for Agriculture (Prokon) continuously monitors potatoes when they enter the fresh produce markets.

A sample from every consignment of potatoes sold through the fresh produce markets is inspected by Prokon every day. Old stock, unsold from the previous day and new consignments are also inspected. Product found to not comply with the industry standards as prescribed by Government regulation is reclassified.

Funding for this service is derived from a compulsory levy of 3 cents (approximately .005 Australian cents) per 10 kilogram pocket.



A Prokon inspector discusses his role with visitors – South African markets have three grades for assessment by Prokon; Class 1, 2 or 3. Any product graded below Class three is destroyed by burying. Grading and quality information is provided from Prokon to growers by telephone, fax or mobile SMS.



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The potato industry is labour intensive with approximately 65,000 farm workers being engaged.

Potatoes South Africa – a producer organisation

In 1993 South African potato producers arranged for the Government to revoke the Statutory Potato Scheme and disband the Potato Board. An umbrella organisation called the Potato Producer's Organisation was formed to serve the industry.

This organisation set out to provide an all-encompassing service to the industry with the formation of:

- **Potato Certification Services** to operate the South African Seed Potato Certification Scheme
- **Four potato laboratories** (private companies) in the seed potato production areas primarily responsible for the determination of the disease status of and variety authenticity of seed potatoes
- **Prokon** to render a quality assurance service for potatoes being sold on fresh produce markets

- **Potato Seed Production (Pty) Ltd** to produce virus free early generation nucleus seed potatoes

- **Naspal Ltd** to provide the potato industry with pallets for the transport of pockets between the farms and fresh produce markets.

In 1997, the constitution was changed to accommodate all interest groups and the name of the organisation was altered to Potatoes South Africa to reflect its new status. Potatoes South Africa represents the interests of ware, seed and processing potato producers and has three core businesses to manage:

- research, including the breeding program
- a program for market development and product promotion
- an industry information system as an integral part of industry services.



Tour participants

John Rich (Tour Leader), Liz and Aaron Haby (SA), Anthony and Judith Patterson (Vic), Brian and Valda Denney (Vic), Gavin and Suzanne Clark (Tas), David and Bev Tyson (Qld), Lyle and Valmai Grayson (Qld), Gary and Zeldia Jamison (Qld), Chris Williams (SA), John Marshall (NZ) and Andrew Hayton (SA).

Latest R&D reports

The following Horticulture Australia Final Reports were released in the past three months.

Factors affecting specific gravity loss in crisping potato crops in Koo Wee Rup, Victoria	PT01051
Pilot commercial crop monitoring for pests and diseases in WA seed potato crops	PT01040
Potato Industry Workshop and Pre-Tour to South Africa *	PT02005
Potato usage in the Australian food service sector	PT00035

* A delay may be 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:

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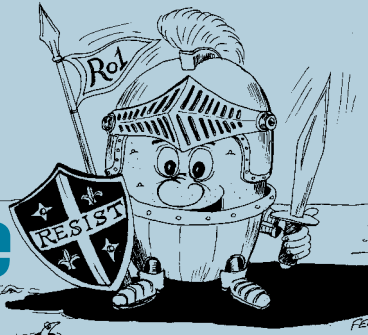
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PCN Plan Update



Potato Cyst Nematode or PCN is a major pest of potatoes that is not wanted in Australia.

Therefore it is important that industry has an agreed approach to dealing with outbreaks and managing areas previously affected while minimising the impact on trade.

To date there has been considerable effort in compiling a draft plan that is now being reviewed by the steering committee. At a teleconference of the steering committee in December 2002 it was agreed there were still several major issues to be resolved requiring a face-to-face meeting of the steering committee and other key stakeholders early in 2003.

The aim of the meeting will be to work through the draft plan and resolve as many of the issues as possible. One such issue currently under debate is the agreed mechanisms to demonstrate freedom from PCN required to enable market access.

The steering committee has asked that all producing states be represented at

the meeting and each state's delegation comprise of three people - one delegate from the respective plant standards group of the state departments of primary industries or agriculture and two delegates per state from industry.

It is hoped that resolution of the outstanding issues will allow revision of the draft to the point it can be widely circulated for comment.

PCN is an emotive issue, especially for those previously affected by outbreaks, but it is important that we gain consensus on how to deal with the problem for the benefit of all our industry. The process of gaining consensus may be difficult but hopefully it will be worthwhile in the end. This was never going to be an easy task!

Gordon Berg
Department of Primary Industries,
Victoria

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DIARY NOTE



European/UK potato tour 2003

A potato industry tour is being organised to England and the Netherlands in September 2003.

The tour will be led by John Fennell, Primary Industries & Resources SA and Natasha Wojcik, ARRIS Pty Ltd.

The tour organisation is also being assisted by the British Potato Council, Greenvale PL and Agrico, and will focus on value-adding opportunities for potatoes. Participants can choose the length of tour that they wish to go on to suit their needs.

The tour will include visits to the UK potato industry's showcase event, British Potato 2003 at Newark (www.potato.org.uk) and to processors and supermarkets to see how various forms of potato products are supplied. Additional topics will include organics, dehydration, ready-to-eat potato meals, seed potato production and other related businesses. Participants can then travel to the Netherlands if they wish to visit additional businesses and a major food fair in Rotterdam, AGF Totaal 2003 (www.agftotaal.nl).

This tour will be of particular interest to processors, merchants, supermarket personnel and growers who are looking for new business opportunities.

An application is being put to Horticulture Australia for funding support to reduce the cost of the tour for participants.

Numbers are limited, so please register your interest early. A brochure is available on request.



Further information
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The following is a brief summary from the November 2002 meeting in Sydney. As the meeting was late in the month the briefs could not be included in the December *Eyes on Potatoes*.

Processors position on levy

The Potato Processors Association of Australia has not made any final decision at this stage with respect to withdrawing from the levy system.

Review of levy program

Dr Bob Batterham, who was formerly the Associate Professor of Agricultural Economics at Sydney University, gave an update on the review of the levy program. Good progress was being made and Bob highlighted some excellent returns on the investment made by the industry in some programs. The project is due for completion at the end of April 2003.

HAL report

Jonathan Eccles provided an update on the progress of the Potato Industry Advisory Committee. He also indicated that there was now a Horticultural Emergency Plan template available that could assist industry in planning for major problems.

Retail Grocery Ombudsman

Bob Gaussen, Retail Grocery Ombudsman gave a presentation to the group about the role of his office. He also invited the potato industry to work with his office in developing a Code of Practice for marketing arrangements within the industry.

Potato Breeding review

Russell Sully and Jim Turley gave a report on progress. A meeting is planned for February between the Victorian department (DPI) and the processing and fresh groups. In the meantime the fresh sub-committee is consulting with industry groups to gain consensus of what needs to be done.

PCN Management Plan

Gordon Berg reported to the Council that a draft management plan had been produced and been sent out for comment. A workshop was being planned for early in the New Year to help finalise the plan. At this stage a number of issues are still of concern to the industry which will need to be resolved.

Elections


Chairman – Tony Gietzel
Vice Chairman – Geoff Moar
Treasurer – Milton Rodda
Public Officer – Milton Rodda

Max McKenna retiring

The Council extended their good wishes and gratitude to Max for all the work he has done over the years for APIC and the industry.

Milton Rodda

APIC Chairman (Past)

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 mhrodda@mccain.com.au

The GMO snippets

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

SAFF GMO Survey

The South Australian Farmers' Federation (SAFF) recently surveyed its 4,000 members on the issue of GM crops. Questions focused on moratoriums, information needs, the costs associated with being a GM free state, and GM canola and issues surrounding it such as pollen flow and weediness potential.

One quarter of SAFF members (1,000) responded to the survey. The full results of the survey have not been released, however results presented by SAFF spokespeople indicate:

- 70% of respondents believe there is too little information available on the subject
- 80% supported a moratorium on GMOs
- 66% were concerned about the market response of introducing a GM crop
- all respondents were supportive of continuing GM research.

For more information: www.saff.com.au

Market Research Australia

Federal Government agency Biotechnology Australia has released the results of a nationwide consumer survey of 1,000 people conducted earlier this year to gauge consumer perceptions of genetically modified (GM) foods across Australia with a particular focus on the difference between metropolitan and rural regions.

The survey follows the trend of other surveys over the past year. Perceptions of risks outweighing benefits remained stable, with 53% of respondents perceiving that the risks of the technology outweigh the benefits. On the other hand, there was a significant increase in those who see benefits outweighing the risks.

Findings of the survey comparing the results in rural and metropolitan Australia, and across the states and territories include:

Rural Victorians had the highest perception that the risks outweighed the benefits (55%), while only 20 per cent of rural South Australians believed that the risks outweighed the benefits.

People in the Australian Capital Territory (42%) and in rural South Australia (40%) had the highest perception of benefits outweighing the risks of GM foods.

Rural Australians were more optimistic about the future of GM foods, with 53% believing that the risks would decrease over time compared to 43% of metropolitan-based respondents.

Those in the ACT (68%) and rural South Australia (60%) and Western Australia (50%) were most optimistic about the future of GM foods.

Those in metropolitan areas saw potential benefits of GM foods being less chemical inputs (15%) and improved yields (17%), while only 12% of those in rural Australia saw these as benefits.

Other results indicate that young people heard less about the technology, perceived less risk and were more confident in explaining the technology to a friend than their older counterparts, and males perceived higher benefits and lower risks from GM foods than females.

The survey of 1,000 adults was conducted in May and June this year by Market Attitude Research Services.

For more information: www.biotechnology.gov.au

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SPAG Briefs

A review of last season's seed certification process and suggested amendments to the national standards were discussed at the fourth annual Seed Potato Advisory Group (SPAG) meeting in Albany, Western Australia in December.

The meeting was attended by representatives of state certification authorities - Western Australia (Mark Holland - Secretary), Victoria (Keith Blackmore - Acting Chair), Tasmania (Iain Kirkwood) South Australia (John Fennell), and New South Wales (David Carter).

National Standard for the Certification of Seed Potatoes

The items for consideration were received from industry. These were then compiled by each Certification authority and distributed to SPAG members prior to their meeting. The SPAG committee discussed the issues, voted on them and now will take them back to industry for endorsement. The changes will then be taken to APIC for final approval at their meeting in May.

1. PROPOSAL: Rating 3 only for Certified generation

Seed that is not required for further multiplication of certified seed in a seed scheme shall be rated 3. There is no requirement for rating the final seed generation, however growers are encouraged to request that the crop be rated 1, 2 or 3.

Background

Seed Potato Victoria/VICSPA proposal to remove the requirement to rate crops submitted for Certification for sale to commercial growers as rating 1, rating 2 or rating 3. Rating 3 crops are accepted world wide as a suitable standard for commercial production.

2. PROPOSAL: Rating 2 tolerance for Foreign Varieties

That the second field inspection tolerance for foreign varieties, for rating 2, be eased from Nil to 0.01%.

Background

Seed Potato Victoria/VICSPA proposal. The Seed Potato Advisory Group meeting agreed that Rating 1 crops should maintain their "perfect" status. By having a small tolerance for R2 crops there is an option should a small problem occur. A percentage tolerance provides more flexibility across the different sized seed plots.

Other items of interest from the meeting

1. What diseases are included in field inspection?

A list of diseases under the category 'other diseases' be compiled by SPAG in consultation with pathologists.

Background

The aim of this exercise is to list both the diseases that are "counted" while field inspecting Certified seed crops and those that are not "counted" to remove any confusion. (eg. fusarium wilt is include while *Sclerotinia* is not counted as a disease.)

2. Tuber standards

SPAG is to review tuber standards of other overseas certification schemes for *Rhizoctonia*, silver scurf and black dot and report to the April teleconference.

Background

There has been considerable discussion about the acceptable levels of skin borne diseases. As they are very difficult to control one option may be to describe the levels that are present. (Many buyers do not take into account the level of these diseases in their storage areas and or soils.)

State delegates were also given the opportunity to review the Western Australian Seed Certification and Quality Assurance schemes and to visit several seed growers in the Albany swamps region. The delegates would like to extend their thanks for the hospitality shown by AgWest Plant Laboratories and the local seed growers during the visit.

Iain Kirkwood

Agricultural Officer (Potatoes)

Department of Primary Industries Water and Environment
Tasmania

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✉ Iain.Kirkwood@dpiwe.tas.gov.au

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AUSVEG Briefs

AUSVEG Potato Group met in late November last year – too late for the briefs to be included in the December edition of *Eyes on Potatoes*.

Horticulture Australia report

The new structure proposed by the growers and processors for the Potato Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) has been accepted by Horticulture Australia. The Committee met for the first time in September under this new arrangement. The IAC now consists of two sub-committees, one for fresh and the other for processing. For issues of common concern, the two groups will decide on together. (See December *Eyes on Potatoes* p13 for a detailed explanation of the IAC.)

Breeding Review

Jim Turley reported on fresh group's progress to date. The group is consulting widely over the next three months and working with DNRE (now DPI) to finalise the matter.

Consumer Market Research

Michael Brownlee from Creative Dialogue gave a summary of the outcomes from the consumer market research carried out for the industry. The research highlights many opportunities for the industry which need to be explored. (ed. A summary of the work was printed in December *Eyes on Potatoes*.)

World Potato Congress – China

John Rich outlined the arrangements for the Congress and expects a strong contingent to be going from Australia.

John also indicated that the Southern Hemisphere delegates would be meeting at the Congress to discuss a range of issues related to communication and cooperation. The group would also be considering a proposal for a Southern Hemisphere Congress. Brazil has already indicated they are interested in hosting the event.

Mt Gambier Potato Business and Marketing Conference

John Rich and Neil Perry reported that the conference was an excellent event with high quality speakers and very well organised. The attendance by growers though was very disappointing for the organisers and sponsors.

Elections

Chairman – Dom Della Vedova (WA)
Vice Chairman – Neil Perry (SA)
AUSVEG Board representatives – Dom Della Vedova (WA), Neil Perry (SA), Philip Beswick (Tas)
APIC representatives – Philip Beswick (Tas), Geoff Moar (NSW)



Brian Newman and Max McKenna

Max McKenna retires

Max indicated this would be his last meeting as delegate for Tasmania. Philip Beswick will replace him.

Max has been very active in furthering the interests of the potato industry in Australia for many years through his involvement in AUSVEG, APIC and the Potato R&D Committee. He has been an excellent representative for Tasmania.

Participation in groups such as AUSVEG and APIC is voluntary and members donate their time. People like Max were already heavily involved with their local industry so the national role was a significant additional commitment.

Max's contribution to the national industry has been greatly appreciated and we wish Max all the best in his future endeavors.

Last meeting for Brian

This will be the last potato group meeting for Brian Newman as Chief Executive Officer of AUSVEG. Brian's position will be filled in the New Year.

Brian has worked hard over the years with the AUSVEG group on a wide range of tasks to further the interests of the growers. It is a job that Brian has done very well.

I would like to thank Brian for all his support to AUSVEG over the years and his contributions to APIC and the Potato R&D Committee. On behalf of the group I wish him all the best for the future.

Dom Della Vedova

AUSVEG Chairman

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domdella@bigpond.com

DPI replaces DNRE

Remember the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment or Agriculture Victoria? Those days have gone and now we have the Department of Primary Industries.

Just before Christmas the Victorian Government split the old Department of Natural Resources and Environment (which included Agriculture Victoria) and created two new departments – Department of Primary Industries and the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

Although there is still work to be done on splitting the old department it appears at this stage that all the potato people will go into the Department of Primary Industries.

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Searching the web



Search engines do not all operate in the same way and can give you different results for the same search. Once you find a search engine you are happy with it is a good idea to read the search tips. These will explain how the searches are done and provide some useful ideas on how you can improve your searching.

A good example of the difference between search engines can be found when searching for late blight. If you only want occurrences of late blight some search engines require you to put your query in inverted commas, "late blight", otherwise it will search for all occurrences with late blight, late and blight, producing a lot of irrelevant matches. Other search engines such as Google only search for all terms entered and ignore the inverted commas while other search engines look for exactly what you enter so look for late blight with inverted commas.

When entering a query, many search engines ignore the small words such as - the, a, of, in, etc.

Despite the above differences search engines have come a long way in only a few years - which is just as well!

Potato stats

The following are the latest statistics from the 2000/2001 Australian Bureau of Statistics census.

Area, production, gross value and number of growers for 2000/2001

State	Area (hectares)	Production (tonnes)	Gross value	Number of growers
NSW	7,250	165,381	\$74,303,568	232
QLD	5,329	117,710	\$47,748,686	295
SA	9,751	335,500	\$128,398,470	221
TAS	8,276	355,512	\$78,792,122	651
VIC	12,265	351,912	\$140,258,706	531
WA	2,367	87,107	\$35,447,211	165
Total	45,238	1,413,122	\$504,948,762	2095

Yield, Return and Production change calculated from the census and survey statistics

State	Yield (t/ha) #	Return (\$/t)*	Production change from previous year (%)
NSW	22.8	449	-2.5
QLD	22.1	406	-2.1
SA	34.4	383	+13.4
TAS	43.0	222	+22.8
VIC	28.7	399	+0.2
WA	36.8	407	-9.1
Average	31.2	357	+6.9

Production divided by area * Gross value divided by production

Calendar

March Potato IAC Meeting to evaluate research proposals

Contact: John Oakeshott

☎ (02) 8295 2300

May World Potato Congress in China

Contact: John Rich

☎ (03) 6331 6377

AUSVEG Potato Group meeting

Contact: Dom Della Vedova

☎ (08) 9776 7248

APIC Meeting

Contact: Tony Imeson

☎ (03) 9689 3233

September European/UK potato tour

Contact: John Fennell

☎ (08) 8389 8840



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State ROUND-UP

Western Australia

Fresh Market

The regulated supply and marketing of potatoes in WA faces its toughest obstacle in the form of the National Competition Council (NCC). The NCC has requested the WA Government review the statutory marketing of potatoes.

The NCC belief is that domestic statutory marketing restricts competition as farmers lose choice in how they operate their business, what they produce and how they market their production.

In return farmers expect to benefit from higher net income over the long term.

The Productivity Commission believes that restricting competition in the domestic market may be in the public interest if the following benefits can be achieved (and their costs do not exceed their value). - that is, allowing consumers to make informed product choices, supporting consumer confidence in product safety, promoting equitable dealing with small business, and assisting small businesses to become more efficient.

The State Government review supported continuing statutory marketing of fresh potatoes by Western Potatoes as it found a net public benefit. However the NCC wants this finding reviewed, believing the case for public benefit not strong enough.

The NCC has the influence and ability to recommend that Federal funds be withheld from the State Governments. Jim Turley, Potato Growers Association, reports the NCC recommends that \$7 million dollars annually in Federal funding be withheld from WA if statutory marketing of potatoes continues in 2003.

The NCC is also reviewing WA trading hours and liquor licensing. Non compliance could mean a \$70 million loss in Federal funding.

The WA Potato Growers' Association is lobbying to have the public benefit of statutory marketing recognised by the NCC. Meanwhile, in the horticulture industry, debate has become public with the popular press picking up on the story.

What drought?

The South West of the state, whilst having a dry year, should produce its usual crop. Producing regions have good irrigation supplies and growing conditions have been good.

Seed

The new potato protection zone at Esperance was proclaimed in late January. New regulations under the Plant Diseases Act restrict entry of potatoes into the shire to give seed growers improved protection against exotic pests and diseases.

Code of practice launched

A code of practice and a "Best Environmental Practices" manual was released by the Potato and Vegetable Growers' Associations last August. This manual will assist the industry become more environmentally sustainable and protect its reputation in domestic and export markets.

Peter Dawson

Development Officer

Department of Agriculture

South Australia

This season is proving to be very challenging for South Australia. In the South East the processing crop was planted with ideal soil and moisture conditions. The windy conditions caused some damage at emergence and establishment. Since then, the extremely dry weather has meant that irrigation systems have had to work at optimum efficiency to maintain soil moisture levels. If a system has had any inefficiencies the effects have been visible very quickly within the crop.

Harvesting of the early varieties such as *Shepody* and *Kennebec* has commenced with average yield and quality being reported. The main *Russett Burbank* harvest is several months away. If the present climatic conditions continue, then both yield and quality are expected to be only average after such a promising start.

Prices in the ware market are very good. Murraylands, Riverland and Lakes growers are reporting a very challenging season, particularly in managing irrigation to maintain adequate soil moisture levels. The very windy, dry and prolonged hot periods have meant, once again, that irrigation systems have had to operate at maximum efficiency. Any weaknesses in the irrigation management have been highlighted very quickly in visual plant responses, as the plants have been easily stressed in such circumstances. Pest and fungal challenges have been minimal.

Yields will be slightly below average with many crops producing smaller tubers of average quality due to the tough climatic conditions. These conditions should combine to maintain high prices for some time yet.

Robert Peake

Horticultural Consultant

Rural Solutions SA

Tasmania

Most processing crops were planted on time and appear to be progressing well. Good levels of sunlight throughout the season are, so far, producing good specific gravities. Although water supply has not been a major issue yet this season, many growers have struggled to keep the water up to their crops. Recent rains have helped growers catch up, while high winds and high temperatures throughout the State have caused some damage to crops.

There have been few reports of foliar disease problems with no late blight and minimal target spot; however, high levels of both powdery and common scab are causing some concerns. High levels of *Rhizoctonia* have been reported in some areas.

Processors have started harvesting early crops of mostly *Shepody* and some *Kennebec* although it is too early to determine how they are yielding.

Fresh market crops have performed reasonably well this season with average yields expected. Strong pricing should see good returns.

Iain Kirkwood

Agriculture Officer (Potatoes)

Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment.

Queensland

The dry conditions written about in the December issue of Eyes on Potatoes 'State Roundup' have continued throughout the state and most of Queensland's potato producing shires are now drought declared (Atherton, Boonah, Clifton, Echam, Gatton, Herberton, Laidley, Redlands and Warwick).

Some Atherton Tableland growers were placed on water restrictions in October and consequently suffered reduced yields. Growers without water restrictions continued to produce good crops of high quality and received favourable prices. Early indications are that there may be an increase in summer planted potatoes by tableland growers with adequate water supplies.

In the Bundaberg region growers had a moist Christmas and were able to prepare their ground. However it has been dry since then and they are waiting for planting rains. Hopefully these will come from cyclone Beni.

Due to the hard dry finish tonnage was down in Lockyer Valley crops. The quality produced was high and crops generally commanded good prices with some washing lines receiving excellent prices.

Hot dry conditions on the Darling Downs resulted in a 30-40% reduction in yield of ware and processing crops. Until February this area had received only light scattered rain and consequently planting has had to be delayed.

The availability of water will play a major role in determining the level of potato production this year. While the summer rains have been delayed growers are still hopeful the rain will arrive and are looking ahead with a positive outlook.

Michael Hughes

Extension Agronomist

Department of Primary Industries

New South Wales

The drought in New South Wales has continued into the New Year. Over the past nine months growers have faced dry weather and water shortages, with crops requiring irrigation over the entire growing season. Ware prices have firmed with the light supplies which will remain tight until the drought breaks.

Digging of the early crop started at Maitland in November. Despite the drought, crop yields averaged at 35 tonnes a hectare. Fresh prices ranged from \$440 to \$480 a tonne on-farm for grey soil potatoes, \$120 a tonne more than last year. At Dorrigo the digging went from December to late January, while the Ebor and Tyringham harvest began in mid-January and will continue until Easter. Crop yields were variable, ranging from 25 tonnes a hectare for dryland crops to 45 tonnes a hectare for irrigated crops. Ware prices were good, averaging \$620 to \$680 a tonne on-farm for red soil potatoes and \$540 to \$600 a tonne on-farm for grey soil spuds.

The Riverina early crop harvest started in December and ended in January. While small areas were lost to sand storms most fresh and processing crops had only poor to average yields. Prices remained high over the harvest with growers receiving \$520 a tonne on-farm for sandy soil ware potatoes. The Robertson growers commenced digging in mid-December and will continue harvesting until July. Early yields were average to good with ware prices around \$720 a tonne on-farm for red soil potatoes.

Sowing of the mid-season crop in the Guyra, Orange and Crookwell districts finished in late November or early December. Certified seed areas are down by 30 hectares on last year. Harvesting of the mid-

season crops will start at Guyra in early March with only poor to average yields expected. If the high prices for ware potatoes continue then supplies of seed are likely to be tight.

Planting of the late crop started at Maitland and Dorrigo in January and finished in February. Sowing of the Riverina crop began in February and was completed in March. Many growers are concerned whether there is enough irrigation water to finish off the late crops. Overall late crop areas in New South Wales are down on last year due to the drought and the departure of a major grower from the industry.

Stephen Wade

District Horticulturist

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The area to be submitted to VicSPA for certification in Victoria in 2003 is expected to be similar to that in 2001/02, which was down 12%. The tonnes certified in 2002 were also down, from 34,000 tonne to 32,000 tonne.

Main varieties continue to be *Atlantic*, *Coliban*, *Russet Burbank*, *Sebago* and *Desiree* with plant breeders right varieties making up a substantial volume, last year 3,200 tonnes

Dry conditions and high thrip numbers this season have favoured tomato spotted wilt virus over potato leaf roll virus which has only been observed in small amounts.

Gippsland seed crops were planted slightly earlier this season and will finish early due to the hot dry summer and dwindling water supplies. South Gippsland dry-grown crops will require good rain to finish off this year. In Portland, Colac and Otway, the season started well with plenty of moisture. Otway growers planted late after 75ml of rain in late November. Crops are growing well but the hot dry conditions will determine how they finish.

The area planted with McCain French fry potatoes in Ballarat is similar to last year. Rain on New Year's Eve was welcome but with the hot dry windy summer, growers are pressed to keep water up to the crops. While crops are growing well, with diminishing water supplies, growers would appreciate rain to finish off the season.

This season will be a good test for the Water for growth project trials in Ballarat. Growers are trialing drip tape irrigation systems and solid set sprinklers on PVC piping. The trial crops are growing at similar rates at this stage but with labour and pumping cost savings. With potential to water more regularly, we expect to see crops grown under the new systems finish well in a dry year.

In the Koo Wee Rup swamp crusting growers started digging at the end of January. While the season made for a difficult growing year, yields are good with excellent quality.


Thorpdale fresh market growers supplied Sydney, Brisbane and Newcastle in January, in February they will be in full harvest and are experiencing the best prices for several years.

VicSPA ran a seed certification officers' workshop in tuber inspection and field crops inspection in January at Toolangi Research Station. Certification officers from the southern states attended the workshop. Now the National Standards are in place, certification officers across Australia need to start speaking the same language and set a consistent standard across seed schemes.

Bruce Fry

Horticultural Extension Officer

Department of Primary Industries



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