

Eyes on potatoes

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Even crop uniformity with T-tape

Drip irrigation saves water in drought

Lyle and Val Grayson and son Peter have found that switching to drip irrigation from solid set has saved them 45% - 50% in water use. In last year's drought, the worst on record, using drip irrigation saved them from running out of water.

As a result, they expect to have their entire potato growing operation converted to drip by 2005.

The Graysons grow about 40 hectares of crisping potatoes a year on their property near Killarney in south-east Queensland.

They grow two crops, one early planted in August-September (harvested December-January), the other late planted in January-February (harvested May-June).

Maximising water efficiency

"In our area, we're very conscious of every litre of water we use; we've got to try to maximise the benefit we can get from it," Lyle said.

"Quite a few years ago, we used overhead spray irrigation, mainly with side roll lines using 5mm rain sprays.

"We found that by switching to solid set using 5cm aluminium irrigation pipes, one double-S sprays and a number eight jet, we got slightly better yields using less water.

"With side rolls, we put on 12mm of water an hour. Solid set brought that figure back to 5mm an hour."

The move to drip

Three years ago the Graysons decided to go to drip irrigation, feeling they could save even more water. They talked to T-tape Australia and the Water For Profit section of the Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers association who agreed to assist them with trial work.

"T-tape supplied the tape and the Water for Profit people set up the trial and provided tensiometers and Enviroskans, which Peter monitored," he said.

"The tensiometers measured soil moisture so we knew when and how much to irrigate and Enviroskans showed where the water went through the soil and whether it went past the root zone."

"If the water went past the root zone, we were overwatering and wasting water."

Lessons learnt

"We learnt a big lesson. The monitoring taught us to pay attention to the scheduling of our irrigation so we didn't over- or under- water. It's easy to get the amount or timing of watering wrong by not checking soil moisture."

According to Lyle, they were able to accurately compare the water used over the growing season by the solid set system and the drip tape through flow meters installed in both.

"We ended up making 45%-50% water savings using the drip tape," he said.

"The result really surprised us - we had expected around 20% savings."

Lyle said once they analysed what happened to the water, they could understand how they had made such a large saving.

"We ran the tape along the rows on the top of the hills, which were 81cm apart," he said.

"The water drips and soaks straight into the hill top down to the potato, not wetting the sides or ground around each hill".

"We figure this means we are not watering about 20% of the cropping land, but we are watering 100% of the potatoes."

Other advantages

"Water saving was one advantage, another was the evenness of the crop and potato size. We had less fungal disease because we weren't watering the plants as much as before and we were putting water exactly where we wanted it - at the base of each plant, not all over it or the paddock."

"Another advantage is fertigation. We can drip our fertiliser through the tape feeding the plant a bit at a time rather than putting it all on up

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Chips #17 Newsletter

ACCC - Fresh fruit and vegetables and the trade Practices Act

Syngenta - Potato Crop Solutions



L-R: Lyle and Peter lay T-tape on hills

front. We are expecting to make fertiliser savings in future."

"At the end of the day, despite the increased cost of putting in the tape which has to be replaced each year and the extra labour involved, all the work we've done better encourages us to keep going down this track."

"We've converted to 80% drip so far, but we plan to go to 100% by about 2005."

Lyle, Val and Peter Grayson

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Sad losses to the Potato Industry



The New Zealand Institute for Crop & Food Research is mourning the sudden tragic loss of Howard Bezar, Team Leader, Communications and six colleagues who died on 6 June in an air crash in New Zealand.

We join with them in remembering Howard, who was responsible for producing Chips, which appears as a regular feature in Eyes on Potatoes.

Howard's role in Crop & Food Research was to lead the corporate Communications Team, which he established. He was passionate about helping staff communicate with clients and colleagues, and about promoting the company's scientific and technological achievements to potential users.

Our thoughts are with Howard's family and the Crop & Food Institute at this painful time.



Albert Kadwell, well-regarded orchardist and potato grower from Crookwell, NSW, died recently after a long illness.

He was a strong supporter of the industry, reflecting that growing potatoes gave him the greatest satisfaction and enjoyment in his working life.

As a foundation member of the Crookwell Potato Association Inc., he was a thinker, participant, researcher, traveller and communicator for the industry locally and at state level.

His integrity and great consideration for people earned him the respect of all with whom he came into contact.

Apart from his work, Albert was a devoted family man and keen gardener, active in the Uniting Church and enjoyed social tennis and car racing.

Albert is survived by his wife of 42 years, Kaye, sons Peter and Garry, daughter Beth and six grandchildren.



Horticulture Australia

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Saving water in Vic's Central Highlands

Potato growers increasingly concerned about the economic, environmental and social implications of their irrigation methods have begun an exciting irrigation project in the Central Highlands north of Ballarat in Victoria. Although implemented on only a relatively small area and still in its infancy, the project using sub-surface drip irrigation has so far delivered water savings of up to 50% over conventional systems (rain gun and lateral move irrigation).

The project's impetus came from growers who identified they needed to investigate options to use water more effectively and grow more produce per litre of water. Their concerns were warranted, given recent dry years and depleted water supplies.

The growers were also increasingly aware that the methods they used to move and set up irrigators were very time consuming, impacting seriously on family and community lifestyles.

Grower funding

They took their concerns to their local Catchment Management Authorities and the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and secured funding from the Victorian Government's Water for Growth (WFG) initiative.

A cooperative of interested groups joined forces in late 2001 to investigate what could be done to improve the Central Highlands irrigation industry. A steering committee comprising members representing McCain Foods, DPI, local growers and Central Highlands Integrated Production Systems (CHIPS), set out to study sub surface drip and the latest solid set sprinklers.

McCain Foods were looking to trial drip irrigation on potatoes in various areas so it was natural that McCains and DPI should get together with the growers and investigate drip. Although drip had been tried before in the Ballarat area Drip irrigation and it had been used on potatoes in



Soil removed to expose tubers and sub-surface drip tape



Soil moisture monitoring was used to assist growers manage their irrigation



Dept Primary Industry staff estimating yield at Ken Labbetts trial plot 2003.



Solid set sprinkler irrigating Russet Burbank potatoes during the trial 2001/2002

other states, but it was unproven in our region. Our committee was concerned we didn't have any regional information to offer farmers about drip irrigation. We couldn't ask farmers to modify some of their irrigation infrastructure and practices on a commercial scale without offering them more information. The growers on the committee suggested four small-scale trials be established and the information shared amongst all growers.

Cooperative approach

With the help of irrigation contractors and suppliers, four irrigation trials were established around Newlyn in the 2001/02 irrigation season. The trials were established on local potato properties and managed by growers with assistance from DPI, McCain's staff and irrigation contractors. Two sub-surface drip irrigation trials and two solid set sprinkler systems were established.

These trials contributed information relating to yield, tuber quality, water savings and equipment installation costs. Estimates relating to ongoing operation and maintenance costs, the potential labour savings from the new systems, and how well the equipment can be reused next season were also made based on observations from the trials.

Water savings

The drip trials in the initial year showed that water savings between 50% and 30% over conventional systems (lateral move and rain guns) could be made using drip irrigation, and both drip tape and sprinkler showed potential to increase yield. Russell McKay who managed one of the drip trials had recorded significant fuel saving from running a low- pressure system (drip) compared to a high-pressure system (rain gun) and had reduced the labour associated with irrigating the crop. This, with the water savings, was enough information to expand the project in 2002/03. With support from the local steering committee, Water for Growth was able to offer limited financial incentive to potato growers wanting to trial the two irrigation systems on their properties.

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Saving water in Vic's Central Highlands

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Grower incentives

The project has been well received in the region with 12 growers accepting incentives in 2002/03 to install solid set sprinklers on about 50 hectares and eight installing drip irrigation on about 55 hectares. According to Mr. McKay, an unforeseen benefit of the project is that it has provoked growers to talk more openly about their irrigation, which should lead to knowledge sharing and a stronger industry in the region.

The trials have also attracted the attention of other groups with an interest in agriculture. The region's TAFE farm apprentices have studied the systems, in 2002 the Australian Agronomy Conference arranged a tour of the trials for delegates and visiting groups from Japan and England have discussed the systems with farmers managing the trials.

Growers are currently harvesting this year's trials and the results are eagerly awaited locally and by groups across the state. Some indicative results from Ken Labbett's Clarks Hill property suggest yield for his seed potatoes should range between 45-55 t/ha with water savings of up to 50% over conventional systems. All results will be collated and used to assist the potato industry save water and increase future efficiency.



Tensiometers (left) and Neutron probe (right) were two soil moisture monitoring tools used to assist growers manage their irrigation



Rod Lay, McCains Agronomist retrieves tape Russell McKays tape trial 2002

However, potato growers considering using drip tape system should approach it with their eyes open. After two years we still need to perfect some issues to ensure tuber quality is kept to a high standard. These include system design for our soils, soil moisture monitoring and irrigation scheduling. Growers managing the trials have had to think on their feet to overcome some hurdles that drip irrigation has thrown at them during the season. Considering this, should the yields hold up, most growers will most probably increase their area under drip next year.

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Bennetts Irrigation retrieve poly pipe used in the solid set sprinkler trial at the CHIPS Demonstration Farm

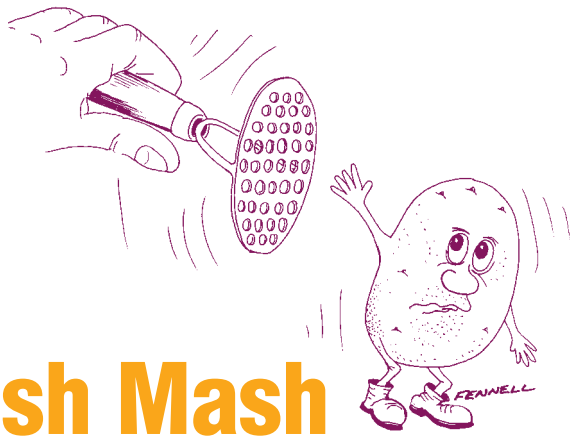


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Fresh Mash

- A WA Initiative



Fresh Western Pty Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Western Potatoes, began operations in 2000.

It was set up to allow Western Potatoes to become more involved in the industry's commercial activities, to offer greater added value through the supply chain from grower, through processor and distributor to retailer and consumer.

The initial aim was to work on developing value-added and ancillary products to increase fresh ware potato sales, distributing any benefit or profit back to licensed growers.

Market trends

Annual market research carried out by Western Potatoes suggested a trend to mashing as the most popular form of cooking potatoes in WA. This finding, given the global trend to convenient, pre-prepared meals, pointed to an attractive niche for a fresh mash product in the market. As a result, Fresh Western started focusing on developing a packaged fresh potato mash product.

After several months of product development and market testing, the mash product was launched into retail outlets in May 2001. Timing of the launch was important. Our assumption, which proved to be correct, was that the cooler months would provide the best sales opportunity for this type of product. The product was released under the name of Fresh Western Potato Mash with most stores preferring to stock the product in the fresh produce category of the refrigerated section.

An integrated marketing and public relations program ran concurrently during the launch phase to build brand awareness and acceptance. In-store merchandising also played an important role by ensuring the product had appropriate shelf presence.



In-store sampling of Fresh Western mash products

Use of regraded potatoes

The mash product uses regraded waste potatoes that previously offered no return to growers. Although these potatoes are quite suitable for human consumption, they cannot be sold as ware because of their size, shape and appearance. They used to be discarded but since the advent of our mashed products, they are now reclassified then sold to a manufacturer we contract, to be used in the mash production.

From a consumer perspective, there has been a trend in recent years toward fresh and healthy convenient foods. This was an important consideration in development of the mash product - it was critical to ensure the mash not only offered convenience, but - was perceived as different from existing powdered mash products, and was fresh and low in fat.

Nutrition awards

The final product successfully addresses all three criteria. It was the first product on the market to use fresh mash, is 97% fat free and can be heated in a microwave or oven and served immediately. It can also be eaten on its own as an instant snack, a meal accompaniment or as a meal ingredient.



In its first year of production, the product received two nutrition awards from the Health Department of Western Australia - Best New General Food Product and Veg Advantage. The awards recognise West Australian food manufacturers who produce new innovative and healthy food products consistent with dietary guidelines.

New lines

After a year on the market, there was obvious potential to extend the product range. Work began on developing new alternatives which resulted in two extra mash varieties being launched into the retail sector in June 2002 - Fresh Western Potato Mash and Gravy and Fresh Western Potato Mash, Herb and Garlic. Both new products have been well accepted by consumers.

Sales outlets are Woolworths, Coles and selected independent stores in Western Australia and plans are underway to tap into the wholesale market potential of the food service/hospitality industry.

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New ways to combat Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus

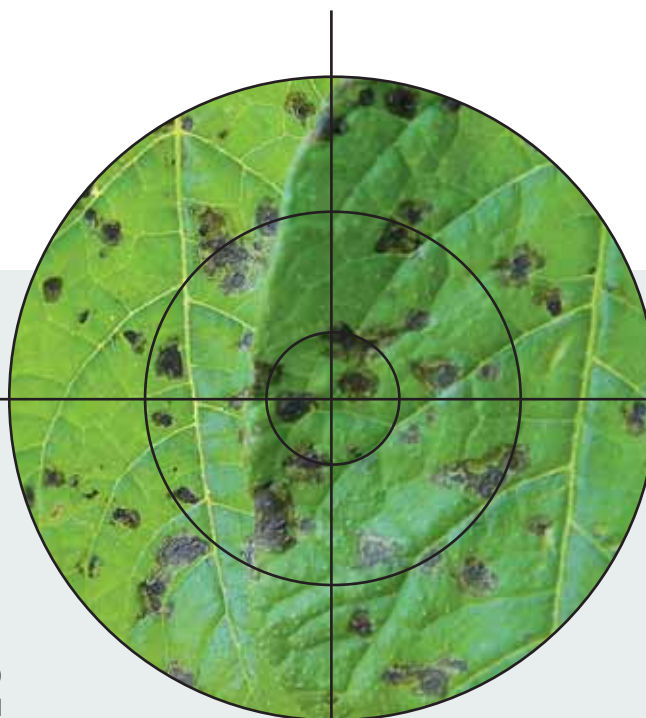
Tomato spotted wilt virus (TSWV) affects more than 900 known plant species. Sporadic epidemics have caused considerable losses in many crops including potatoes. The virus also affects many weed species.

The National Strategy for the Management of Western Flower Thrip (WFT) and TSWV is a group of projects funded by grower levies, Horticulture Australia and state governments. The Strategy has enabled monitoring of southern Australian potato crops in the past two seasons. This monitoring helps determine the roles in TSWV epidemics of potato seed health, weeds as virus sources, thrip activity, virus levels, weather and potato plant resistance.

The aim of the work has been to develop better management strategies and an early warning system for potato growers.

To date, research has found that:

- In potatoes, the virus is spread through infected seed or by two species of thrips: onion thrips (*Thrips tabaci*) and tomato thrips (*Frankliniella shultzei*).
- Thrips acquire TSWV while feeding as larvae on infected plants. The virus is spread when infected thrips feed on uninfected plants.
- Disease symptoms in tubers vary according to potato variety. However, foliar symptoms are likely to be brown blotches and ring spots on stems and leaves. In susceptible varieties, scattered dark brown dead patches may appear inside tubers, making them unsuitable for processing or eating. In moderately resistant varieties or those where infection does not spread readily to the tubers (like *Russet Burbank*), only occasional internal spots and flecks may appear.



TSWV dark brown splotches on leaves

- Early indications are that Bismark, Russet Burbank and Coliban have good TSWV resistance .
- The low susceptibility of Bismark is due to its ability to deter thrips from feeding, rather than resistance to the virus itself. This ability could be useful in breeding programs and is being investigated.
- Varieties like *Shepody* and *Victoria* appear susceptible.
- In South Africa, researchers have conducted regional studies of the dynamics of TSWV epidemics, analysing all affected crops and vegetation. Results indicated that simple changes in crop rotation have stopped TSWV epidemics. The potential benefits of this approach to Australian growers battling TSWV are large, and similar studies within Australia should be considered.

A new website detailing this research and other information has recently been launched. The site includes management plans, monitoring tips and images of damage to help identification. Included on the website is information on Western Flower Thrips (WFT), an effective transmitter of TSWV in many crop species but not currently concerning in Australian potato crops.

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For further information, go to
www.nre.vic.gov.au/farming/horticulture/wft
then click on "Western Flower Thrips home".

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Changes in breeding and evaluation

Key changes in the new system

Under the new system there are seven major changes:

- Public core breeding program will be retained and funded through the levy system and Department of Primary Industries, Victoria.
- Evaluation of varieties is to be funded by industry and supported by Voluntary Contributions.
- The cost of seed will include a royalty.

Processing

- Processors will have the option of exclusive rights and be able to restrict access to the variety (ie. closed loops).
- Small processors can also establish a breeding program if they fund the evaluation through a Voluntary Contribution project and follow the necessary protocols.

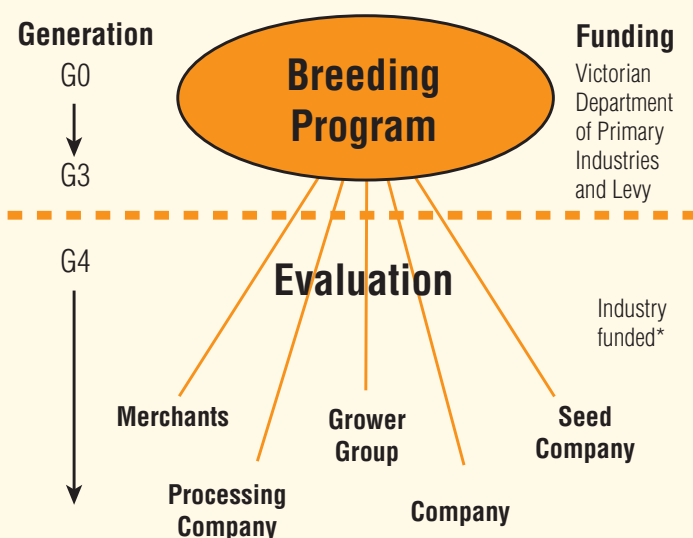
Fresh

- Fresh industry will have open access for farmers buying seed.
- Any group with the necessary skills that follows the Trial Conduct Protocols can carry out evaluation of fresh varieties.

How it will work

The Potato Industry Advisory Committee has set up two sub-committees, the Fresh National Evaluation & Commercialisation Committee (FNECC) and the Potato Processors Commercialisation Committee (PPCC).

These two committees will manage the evaluation and commercialisation of new varieties with the Breeder (Department of Primary Industries, Victoria) and Agriculture Victoria Services providing support on behalf of the industry.



*Funds can be matched as a Voluntary Contribution with Horticulture Australia



Grading a Crisping variety trial at Koo Wee Rup

Important background to the decisions

In 1998 a review was initiated by the Potato R&D Committee to look at how the program for breeding and evaluation of new varieties could be improved.

There were four main issues of concern for the committee:

• The need for better outcomes

Although varieties have been produced in recent years, they have not been strongly adopted by the marketplace.

• The need to contain costs

The amount of levy collected each year has remained relatively constant since its introduction while costs for the work have increased.

• Plant Breeders Rights or PBR was encouraging competition

PBR has encouraged the importation of more varieties from overseas breeding programs into Australia by private companies. Specialist seed companies have been established and existing agribusinesses have invested in developing and marketing overseas lines. The implications of PBR needed to be considered for the Australian program.

• Improvements to the program needed to be considered

The breeding program could be improved but to do so required additional resources.

The combination of the above issues highlighted the need for a review to ensure the program was well positioned to meet industry's future needs.

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Changes in breeding and evaluation

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Changing times

The introduction of Plant Variety Rights Act in 1987 and later its successor, the Plant Breeder's Rights Act in 1994, provided the mechanism for companies to become involved in breeding, evaluation and marketing in Australia through the provision of exclusive rights. Companies now had the legal framework to protect their investment in developing and marketing new varieties.

The late 1990's saw many changes in the industry as a result of introducing PBR. Companies became more interested in bringing new varieties into Australia from overseas breeding programs and actively marketing them. Some of these already existed such as Elders and Harvest Moon while others were new companies specialising in seed such as Technico and Southern Choice.

The Victorian Department of Primary Industries was also questioning its role in potato breeding. It had invested quite a lot of money in the program but benefits were not flowing effectively to industry. Nor was there any clear market failure – an important requirement for government participation.

It was a period of change in our industry and the question needed to be asked – was our breeding and evaluation program going to meet our future needs and if not how could it be improved?

It is an important question as industry invests in breeding and evaluation to develop new varieties that will improve yields, address quality issues and create new market opportunities. In short, growers and processors are looking for a return on their investment.

Cost and scope of the program

In considering what changes were needed, the Committee looked at a range of issues.

They debated the need for better disease screening, whether more agronomic information should be generated for new varieties to maximise yield potential and the number and location of evaluation sites.

There was also the issue of how to better align the program to meet changing needs in the marketplace. Marketing of varieties was also a concern as there needed to be groups that would have enough incentive to drive the marketing process by having rights to the varieties.

Although the cost of the program was not regarded as excessive, it was not cheap and was increasing as costs of doing the work rose.

Given the Victorian Department of Primary Industries was questioning its investment in the program, and the amount of money collected for R&D had not really changed significantly over the past ten years, the Committee had a problem with how to meet the cost of the program.

To make all the changes the Committee would have liked, would have made the program too expensive. The industry had to live within its means and there were a lot of issues that needed tackling by the R&D program besides breeding and evaluation.

It took longer than expected

Many in the industry probably wondered why the review took so long. When the review started, most committee members thought it would be a fairly straightforward process. Nobody thought it would take as long as it did.

Unfortunately differences of opinion, particularly with regard to exclusive rights, created some major divisions. The fresh industry representatives did not support exclusive licensing arrangements involving closed loops for new varieties when they were funded through a public breeding program.

If companies or individuals wanted to fund the breeding and evaluation through a separate commercial agreement with Agriculture Victoria Services Pty Ltd, that was fine and they could restrict access to the variety. However, in the case of the public program, this was not seen as being equitable given all levy payers had contributed to the program.

For processors and processing growers under contract, the issue was not so much a concern.

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Crisping variety trial at Koo Wee Rup

The perspectives

In order to understand the outcomes of the review it is important to appreciate perspectives of the groups involved.

The large French fry processors are connected to overseas breeding programs so they can import lines and evaluate them in their own companies. The processors wanted to retain the capacity to breed in Australia but preferred to carry out their own evaluations. They also wanted exclusive licensing as an option.

The large crisp processors wanted to improve the genetic resources for the industry, to see a better investment in science, particularly in disease screening, and better links with overseas programs. Small processors particularly saw the need for a local breeding program. They also wanted to do their own evaluations.

For the fresh industry many growers wanted evaluation trials in their own area. They also did not want "closed loops" where growers could be excluded from gaining access to varieties coming from the public breeding program. They did not mind paying royalties (prefer not to if there was an alternative), just so they were equitable.

They also saw a need to ensure there was competition and a role for small growers. They recognised the rights of companies or other groups to bring in varieties from overseas and have them grown exclusively for themselves (ie. Closed loops).

The Victorian Department of Primary Industries wanted to reduce their input into the program over time with it eventually becoming self-sustaining. They would initially support breeding and management of the evaluation process but not evaluations.

They were also concerned that the national program was not truly market driven. There was a desire to fully leverage the potential of the breeding material by being able to encourage private programs to develop varieties with proprietary rights.

Horticulture Australia (previously HRDC) wanted the program to provide real benefits for the industry and the Australian community. They also wanted to see groups take responsibility for developing and marketing new varieties to ensure they reached their full potential. The current system falls short in this regard.

Further information will be provided in *Potato Australia*.

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Note: Agriculture Victoria Services Pty Ltd is the commercial arm of the Department of Primary Industries, Victoria.

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Changes in breeding and evaluation

continued from page 9

Closed loops

During the review process a term arose called "closed loops". This is a situation where the rights to new varieties would be exclusively licensed to organisations that could then restrict access to that variety for certain growers. This would allow companies to create a point of differentiation between themselves and their competitors and which they hoped would lead to a competitive advantage. This is a process all businesses seek to do in one form or the other.

However, restricting access to new varieties through closed loop arrangements was not something that fresh growers were particularly comfortable about. For processing companies it was not really an issue as growers are contracted to grow a particular variety or varieties for a company.

The reason for concern from fresh growers was the investment was coming from all levy payers and the government so the Committee did not believe a private company should be able to restrict access through closed loop arrangements. If a private company paid for the breeding and evaluation then they had every right to do what they like with any varieties from the work, which includes restricting access. Where levy and public money was involved it was not deemed appropriate.

Most agreed that the past varieties released would have been more successful if a group championed their cause.

Therefore, the committee supported the need for a group to take responsibility for a new variety (incl. Exclusive rights) to ensure its full potential was reached, but were not willing to support a system that potentially restricted access to new varieties preventing some people who invested in the program from benefiting.

Fresh National Evaluation & Commercialisation Committee (FNECC)

The committee has been established by industry to ensure that industry interests are adequately represented and that the future fresh varieties produced by the national potato program are of the highest value to growers right through to consumers.

The responsibilities of the committee are:

- ensure effective management and resourcing of the **Evaluation** phase of the Program.
- ensure effective coordination and management of the **Commercialisation** of fresh potato varieties derived from the Breeding and Evaluation Programs.
- provide advice, particularly based on market signals, on the direction of the Breeding phase of the Program.
- recommend **New Projects** to the Potato IAC that will enhance the fresh potato industry's investment in the breeding and evaluation program (eg. consumer research, new breeding technologies, pest and disease management strategies surrounding new varieties).
- review performance of the Breeding, Evaluation and Commercialisation phases of the Program.

The committee will consist of:

- six grower representatives – one from each state
- one DPI representative
- one Horticulture Australia representative
- the Breeder
- invited advisers on an 'as-needs' basis (eg. commercialisation, market research, etc.)

The committee will report to the Potato Industry Advisory Committee (Potato IAC).

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Potato IAC update

The Potato Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) replaced the Potato R&D Committee last year as a result of the formation of Horticulture Australia. The committee advises Horticulture Australia on how to invest levy funds for the benefit of the Australian potato industry and the Commonwealth Government.

The last meeting was held in March in Wellington, New Zealand. The committee meets with its New Zealand equivalent (ie. VegFed Potato Industry Research & Development Grants Committee) to discuss opportunities for joint programs as well as carry out its normal business. The location alternates between Australia and New Zealand.

Budget

The IAC is made up of processing and fresh sub-committees and these are allocated budgets proportional to the levy collected from these sectors. For this round of projects the breakup was 72% processing and 28% fresh.

Reasons for the difference between processing and fresh budgets are twofold. Firstly, the processing industry collects a dollar per tonne (50 cents from growers and 50 cents from processors) whereas the fresh and seed industries collect 50 cents a tonne. Secondly, the processing industry in Australia, like many other developed countries, is larger than the fresh industry.

This year's budget is quite small due to the size of ongoing projects. The amount of money available each year depends on receipts from the levy collection, which is quite stable, and the value and number of projects already drawing on the funds.

Joint meeting with NZ R&D Committee

There was extensive discussion on new, proposed and existing projects in New Zealand and Australia and opportunities for collaboration. These discussions provided the committees with information that helped their decision making when they met separately the next day. A number of potential areas for collaboration were identified and these will be further investigated.

Processing Group

Since introduction of the levy, the amount of money collected has remained fairly constant while costs for doing research have consistently increased. The end result has been less money in real terms to do research.

For the size of the industry, the Potato R&D program is quite small and there is a limit to what can be achieved. The committee is concerned that the resources are being spread too thinly, and this is having a negative impact on project outcomes.

A solution is to reduce the number of projects undertaken and put more resources into high priority areas.

Some of our more important problems are being under resourced and consequently not making the expected progress. To properly address some of these problems, we need more resources focused on these priority issues for a longer period of time. We also need to put together the best team for the job to maximise the chances for success.

Given that there was not a lot of money for work this year, the committee thought it a good time to refocus the research effort.

The decision they made was to focus most of the effort into three high priority areas:

1. **Breeding**
2. **Virus control**
3. **Common scab**

Over the next six months, there will be scoping studies and workshops to determine the nature of what needs to be done and who will do it. The aim will be to develop programs that will have the mix of skills to maximise the chances of success and to ensure benefits get back to growers.

continued page 12



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Potato IAC update

continued from page 11

Fresh Group

The Fresh potato sub-committee met to review the Strategic Plan, make a decision on the fresh breeding program proposal and go through the research applications.

Over the last year a small sub-committee led by Dom Della Vedova (WA) has been working on a business model for the fresh potato component of the breeding program. This has involved many people from different sections of the industry and considerable debate. The group believes it now has a workable model and will put this to AUSVEG for approval in May. (See article on Breeding and Evaluation in Australia page 7.)

Given the amount of money available this year and the commitment to the breeding program, the committee had very little to spend. The group prioritised the applications with the view of identifying possible areas of common interest with the processing group.

Due to the formation of the Potato IAC there was a need to revisit the Strategic Plan and look at short term priorities. This had become even more important as the Fresh group does not have a large budget and needs to make sure the work funded is high priority with definite outcomes. The review of the Strategic Plan yielded the following points:

Market development program – Recent market research clearly highlighted the need for a plan of action. The group recognised this whole area was the source of major debate but also saw the importance of marketing if the fresh industry is to grow and prosper. It was decided that a proposal be developed and put up to AUSVEG for consideration.

Reduce reliance on agricultural chemicals – High priority was given to the development of integrated pest and disease management programs to reduce the reliance on chemicals.

Provide information to industry – Strategies are being covered by existing projects. A need exists to review industry's communication needs in early 2004. A range of possible approaches for future work will be looked at.

Other areas were considered a lower priority.

Joint Processing and Fresh session

Except for the breeding program, no other project was funded at this stage until completion of the scoping studies and workshops.

This will undoubtedly concern many people, particularly researchers, but the industry really needs to focus its efforts on fewer tasks and ensure they are followed through to conclusion. Gone are the days where state departments will fill in the gaps.



As with the cadmium work, there may need to be several projects looking at different aspects of a problem but coordinated by a single person to guarantee the outcomes we need.

Processors staying with the levy

The Potato Processors Association of Australia has decided not to withdraw from the levy to give the new IAC structure a chance to work.

Enhanced detection of potato cyst nematode and bacterial wilt

John Marshall, a research scientist with New Zealand Crop and Food Research, reported on the joint Australian - New Zealand project to develop DNA based detection methods and predictive models for potato cyst nematode (PCN) and bacterial wilt.

John, who is focusing on the PCN component of the project, talked about the benefits of the new detection methods. These included improved accuracy, the ability to be able to identify both species of PCN more easily in the same sample and reduced reliance on visual identification, which enables greater throughput of samples in the laboratory.

The better tests will provide greater assurance and also be important in providing quarantine information for improving access to export markets.

Potato variety field day

Australian and New Zealand committees attended a variety field day at Paki-iti, Kimbolton north of Wellington on the North Island. This was organised by Corbett Bros and Morgan Laurenson Ltd. The trial had 49 varieties, some which were already in the marketplace. Private companies had imported several varieties and there were new lines from Crop and Food Research breeding program.

John Gallagher

Chairman

☎ (08) 9368 3151

✉ jgallagher@agric.wa.gov.au



Variety field day at Paki-iti, Kimbolton

APIC Briefs

Eighteen people attended the APIC forum in Melbourne in late May.

Potato processors stay with levy

The Potato Processors Association of Australia officially rescinded their motion to withdraw from the levy. The new Potato Industry Advisory Committee structure addressed many of the concerns that resulted in the initial decision to consider withdrawing.

Changes to breeding and evaluation

The new breeding and evaluation arrangements are now in place. See p7 for more information on the changes.

Both processing and crisping companies have been working with Roger Kirkham, the Potato Breeder, in the past few weeks to select promising lines. The changes to the fresh program were supported at the AUSVEG Potato Group meeting held earlier in the day.

A major benefit of the changes for the processing and fresh sectors will be that industry will have more input into the program's direction.

Review of the levy program

John Oakeshott provided a summary of outcomes from the levy program review. To obtain a copy of the report see p16 for details. A booklet is being prepared which looks at the outcomes of the levy program since its inception in 1991. This will be sent out to everyone in the industry.

Seed Potato Advisory Group (SPAG)

SPAG is a committee of APIC that I chair in my role as APIC Chairman.

At the recent SPAG meeting, it was decided that a list by area of certified seed varieties submitted for inspection would be published in Eyes on Potatoes. Data will be published for each public variety and a total area will be published for all of the proprietary varieties (ie they will not be listed by variety name).

SPAG strongly supports a proposed virus survey and research project aimed at establishing the effects of viral infection on performance for different varieties and regions. The proposed work will further develop the important survey work commenced in Tasmania this last season.

Changes to the standards were proposed by SPAG and supported by APIC. These changes will now go to Horticulture Australia who are custodians of the rules.



(L-R) Tony Imeson (Secretary) and Tony Gietzel (Chairman)

The standards will continue to be refined as required to ensure they meet industry needs. Most adjustments are fine tuning as a result of introduction of the new system.

HAL Update

Jonathan Eccles talked to the forum about the outcomes of the GMO workshop in Melbourne. See p20 for more information.

He also informed the Council of new six monthly forums recently introduced by Horticulture Australia on major industry issues. A forum was held recently on irradiation treatment of produce.

The forums will be linked to Industry Management Groups with the issues providing the basis of future cross industry projects. Topics will focus on the more difficult issues such as water.

GMO policy

The Council decided it was time to develop a formal policy on GMOs. A draft policy will be developed based on the industry's current position. This will be sent out for consideration by the sectors with the view to formalise a policy at the November meeting.

Young grower scholarship

The Council decided to write to the Potato Industry Advisory Committee to recommend the industry creates an annual scholarship for a young Australian grower.

Tony Gietzel

APIC Chairman

☎ (02) 9609 0418

✉ tony_gietzel@arnotts.com

Phase out of Methyl Bromide

Environment Australia is conducting an application process that allows industries using methyl bromide to apply for an exemption from the 2005 phase-out. Applications must be received by Environment Australia by 14th July 2003. Details are available on their internet site at – www.ea.gov.au/atmosphere/ozone

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AUSVEG Briefs

The AUSVEG Potato Group met in Melbourne in Late May.

Fresh Breeding Proposal

A proposal to evaluate and commercialise fresh potatoes was presented and supported by the Potato Group. An introduction to the changes, including those made by processors, can be found on p7. Extra information will be provided in Potato Australia.

Marketing Plan

Discussions in the Potato Industry Advisory Committee (PIAC) have highlighted the need to improve fresh potato marketing. The issue has been raised – what is the point of focusing on increasing output through greater efficiencies in potato production if demand continues to decline?

John Oakeshott from Horticulture Australia presented results from recent market research by Michael Brownlee and Jill Stephens in 2002. The work clearly showed that fresh potatoes have been losing market share. This built on earlier work and results from research carried out by Ian Lewis in 1993.

Anybody interested in the state of the fresh potato industry, I would recommend obtaining a copy of the Brownlee and Stephens report (PT01050) from Horticulture Australia (Ph (02) 8295 2300; see December edition of Eyes on Potatoes for summary). The issues raised are of importance to all of us in the fresh industry.

Given the market research results, the AUSVEG Potato Group would be avoiding its responsibilities if it did not relook at this issue. The Potato Group acknowledged the concerns by different sectors raised previously and the need to learn from past experiences.

The Potato Group therefore approved establishment of a steering committee to progress the issue of developing a marketing plan for the Australian fresh potato industry.

Distribution system

Leigh Walters raised the need to relook at the distribution system given the introduction of the new internet service later this year or early next year.

Our distribution system, which enables us to get information out to growers and the service industry, is the result of cooperation of State industry groups and NSW Agriculture working with Leigh.

At this stage the Potato Group only discussed the issue with the view of ensuring we have an efficient system. Leigh still has work to do with the State groups to come up with final proposal on changes.

The distribution system is important for the industry but so is the confidentiality of grower information. Any changes will need to take into account these two issues and implications of the new Privacy legislation.

Dom Della Vedova
Chairman

AUSVEG Potato Group

☎ (08) 9776 7248

✉ domdella@bigpond.com



New Image for AUSVEG

Heralding a new era of visionary leadership for the Australian Vegetable industry

Mike Badcock, Chairman of AUSVEG (formerly Australian Vegetable and Potato Growers Federation) launched a new corporate logo in Melbourne in early June.

The logo picks up on the dual themes of clean and green vegetable production and brands the industry as modern, progressive and environmentally sustainable.

The launch of the new logo coincides with the impending move of AUSVEG from an Incorporated Association to a Company Limited by Guarantee. According to Mike, "the new corporatised structure more aptly fits the broad range of activities AUSVEG must now be involved in to continue to represent vegetable growers in an effective way", he said.

"AUSVEG is focused on delivering positive outcomes for Australia's vegetable growers in its key responsibilities of representing growers interests in political, R&D, and broader policy areas".

The first stage of the new vision is the development of a communication plan, followed by a thorough review of the levy collection mechanisms and performance of the Retail Grocery Industry Code of Conduct.

Further information can be obtained by contacting AUSVEG CEO, Mr. Euan Laird on ☎ (03) 9796-9166 or Mike Badcock, AUSVEG Chairman on ☎ (03)64282439.



AUSVEG APPOINTS NEW CEO

AUSVEG, the national representative body for Australia's vegetable and potato growers has announced the appointment of Euan Laird as Chief Executive Officer.

Mr. Laird comes to AUSVEG from the Amenity Horticulture industry with a highly successful background of ten years managing such associations. He has formal qualifications in Agricultural Science and considerable experience in rural extension and research programs.

Mr. Laird stated that his first aims are to familiarise himself with the many different interest groups, improve communication and encourage joint projects.

Mike Badcock, AUSVEG Chairman, stated that, "Euan Laird's appointment heralds the beginning of a new proactive vision for AUSVEG which will truly see it delivering outcomes for its constituent state association members."

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✓✓✓ Good control ✓ Limited control X Poor control

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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

Potatoes by the Sea, 2003

Portland Victoria

Third Biennial Seed Potato Industry Workshop & Trade Display

August 18-19, 2003

Portland Civic Centre and Precinct - Victoria

The focus of Potatoes by the Sea, 2003 is farm best practice and includes machinery and trade exhibits. A half-day field trip offers machinery demonstrations and visits to potato farms. An alternative program has been devised for delegates' partners, should they choose. The \$175 registration fee includes lunches, morning and afternoon teas, field excursion, conference papers, trade displays and conference dinner.

For further information, please contact Seed Potatoes Victoria. ☎ (03) 5623 4788

A full version of the program is available on the website:

www.vicspa.org.au



Latest R&D reports

Horticulture Australia

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

Effect of calcium nutrition on decay of summer-sown seed potatoes	PT98011
Improved herbicide management for increased yield and quality	VX99011
Influence of rotation and biofumigation on soil borne diseases of potatoes	PT96032
Managing bacterial breakdown in washed potatoes	PT98007
New chemical treatments for fungal diseases of seed potatoes	PT97015
Review of potato research & development program	PT02033

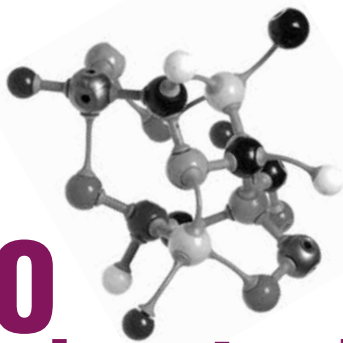
The reports are available from Horticulture Australia for \$22 in Australia or \$US30 outside Australia including postage. To obtain reports send a cheque or money order with a note quoting the project name/s and project number/s to:

*Publications
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Level 1
Carrington Street
Sydney NSW 2000*

☎ (02) 8295 2300

Fax: (02) 8295 2399

✉ publications@horticulture.com.au



The GMO snippets

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

Protein-rich potatoes

The latest GM product announced with enhanced nutritional benefit is also targeting developing countries. As reported in New Scientist magazine in January, Indian scientists have developed the 'protato', a protein-rich potato. The 'protato' contains a gene from the amaranth plant, a plant grown by South Americans, and commonly available in Western health food stores. The new gene allows the potato to produce a third more protein than non-GM potatoes, including the essential amino acid lysine. A lack of lysine can affect brain development in children.

The 'protato' research is part of an 'anti-hunger' plan developed in collaboration with charities, scientists, government institutes and industry, currently under consideration by the Indian government. The 15-year plan aims to combat childhood mortality by providing children with clean water, better food and vaccines. The 'protato' is in the final stages of safety, environmental and dietary testing before being submitted for regulatory approval.

Review of GMOs under research and development and in the pipeline in Europe

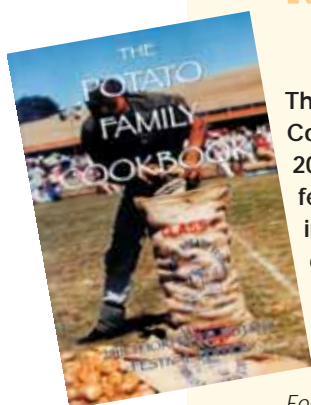
A report outlining GM research in the pipeline in European countries was released in March. Titled, Review of GMOs under research and development and in the pipeline in Europe, the report outlines GM products in the short, medium and long-term pipelines.

New legislation relating to gene technology research, field trials, labelling and traceability is currently under review by members of the European Union. It is envisaged that once clear laws are in place in this area, the defacto moratorium in place in Europe since 1998, will be lifted, and field trial applications will accelerate.

This report aims to be a resource for European policy makers, who will need to know what products are in the pipeline, what the research trends are, and what future GM products might offer EU agriculture. Horticulture products in the short term pipeline in Europe (five years) include insect-resistant potatoes and modified ripening tomatoes. Medium-term products (five to 10 years) include fungi-resistant fruit trees, virus resistant potatoes, tomatoes, melon and fruit trees, potatoes with modified starch content, and potatoes with modified protein content.

The report, jointly published by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission and the European Science and Technology Observatory, found that field trial notifications have decreased by 78 per cent since 1998.

For more information: Joint Research Centre - www.jrc.it



New Potato Cookbook

The Thorpdale Potato Festival Committee has released its 2003 potato cookbook featuring an array of interesting recipes. The cookbook sells for \$10 a copy, including postage, and is available from the Committee.

For further information or to order, please contact Kaye Dorling on (03) 5634 6217 or PO Box 78, Thorpdale, Vic, 3835.

Potato Congress in China postponed due to SARS

The World Potato Congress (WPC) in Kunming, China from 20th to 25th April 2003 was cancelled because of health concerns associated with Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) which is still present in China.

Due to the large number of people canceling their attendance, the Chinese organisers of the WPC agreed to postpone the Congress to a date yet to be determined.

It is understood that about 50 Australian delegates had planned to attend.

At this stage an alternative date has not been set due to uncertainty about the SARS situation.

Any potato industry people who have an interest in attending the World Potato Congress at a later date are invited to register their interest by contacting me at the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association.

John Rich
(03) 6331 6377
john_rich@bigpond.com

Final call for Value-adding potato tour: UK & the Netherlands, September, 2003

Final registrations are now being called for the value-adding potato tour to UK and the Netherlands this September, as only a few places are still available. To maximise the benefits of the tour and opportunities for each participant to communicate with our hosts, tour numbers have been limited to 20.

The tour includes visits to major events British Potato 2003 and AGF Totaal. A series of evening talks have been organised with experts in value-adding potatoes and other horticultural products.

The tour departs Australia on September 2nd and will travel through England, Scotland and The Netherlands, visiting farms, major packing companies, processors, research centres (British Potato Council's Experimental Unit at Sutton Bridge, Scottish Crops Research Institute and NAK in The Netherlands) and seed potato producers.

Participants will be eligible for financial support from Horticulture Australia, making this trip unbeatable value for money.

If you are interested please contact Natasha Wojcik (08) 8303 7247 or 0419 859 474 for details. Alternatively you can contact John Fennell (08) 8389 8840 or 0401 121 891.

Don't wait!!!!

John Fennell, PIRSA

☎ (08) 8389 8840

✉ fennell.john@saugov.sa.gov.au

BRITISH POTATO 2003

(Extract from British Potato Council
World Service Newsletter)

The biennial showcase event of the British potato industry will be held at Newark, Nottinghamshire, UK on September 3 and 4 this year. This year's event will be better than ever.

A special Seed Zone will be one of the features and will bring together the best of the British seed potato institutions, researchers and companies. There will be presentations on how the GB potato industry is using seed physiological and chronological age to meet grower needs.

There are working machinery demonstrations and a special feature on how potato quality is maintained. A Quality Control laboratory will be set up on site showing the methodologies for testing. A separate display will demonstrate the latest in long-term storage technology and the researchers from BPC's Sutton Bridge Experimental Unit will be there to give their latest results.

Many of Europe's leading packaging, labelling and equipment manufacturers will have demonstrations at this event.

Participants on the Value Adding Potato Tour will be going to British Potato as part of their program.

For more information about BP2003 check the BPC internet site at www.potato.org.uk/bp2003 or bpcevents@tccgroup.co.uk



PrimeNotes (April 2003)

PrimeNotes is a CDROM containing 5,800 information notes (24,000 pages of text). It is produced by the Department of Primary Industries, Queensland in partnership with state and territory agencies including all the departments of primary industries and agriculture, and other groups such as the Centre for International Agricultural Research. The CDROM is updated every six months in April and November.

For growers, there is quite a bit of information on the CDROM specifically on potatoes (50 notes) as well as many other relevant items on a wide range of topics such as:

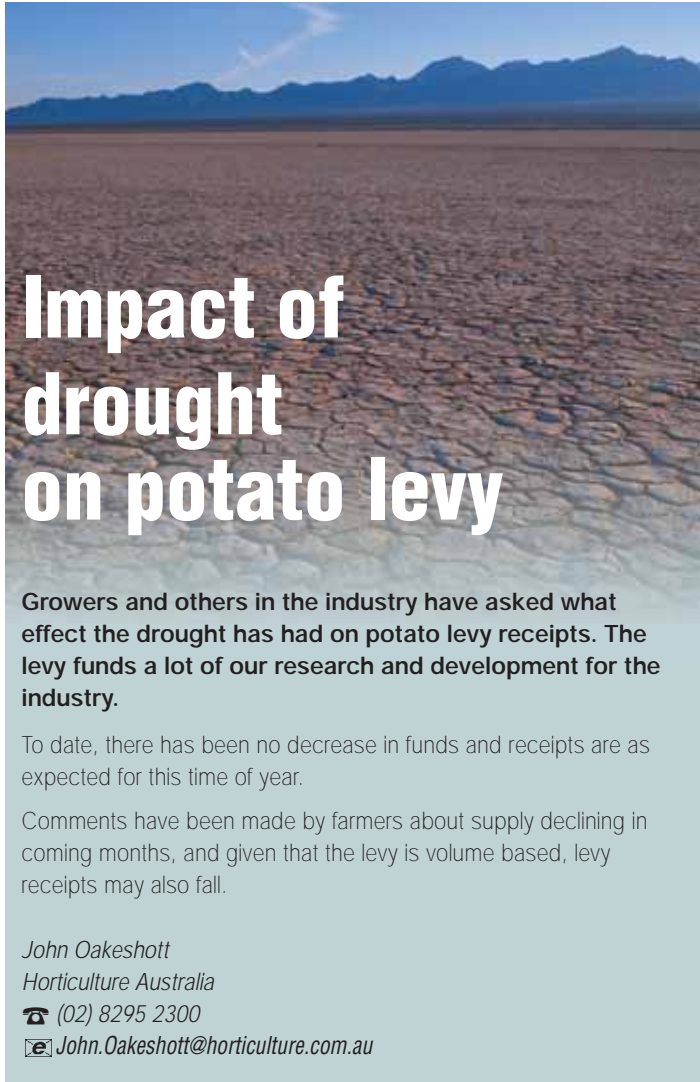
- finance and labour
- machinery
- fertilisers
- farm infrastructure
- weeds
- land and water issues
- chemicals



The CDROM is an excellent resource, reasonably priced and quite easy to use. Rather than keeping track of a lot of sheets of paper, the information can be searched for when you need it and only printed off if required. Great way to save space in the office!

To obtain a copy, phone the DPIShop On-line on 1800 816 541 (for cost of local call) or purchase on the internet at www.dpi.qld.gov.au. Other state department bookshops also stock the product.

The CDROM costs about \$34 including postage or just over \$25 (including postage) if you are upgrading from a previous version.



Impact of drought on potato levy

Growers and others in the industry have asked what effect the drought has had on potato levy receipts. The levy funds a lot of our research and development for the industry.

To date, there has been no decrease in funds and receipts are as expected for this time of year.

Comments have been made by farmers about supply declining in coming months, and given that the levy is volume based, levy receipts may also fall.

John Oakeshott
Horticulture Australia
☎ (02) 8295 2300
✉ John.Oakeshott@horticulture.com.au

NRA changes its name

The National Registration Authority or NRA has changed its name to the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority or APVMA.

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✉ contact@apvma.gov.au
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Where to now with GMOs

On the 12th March 2003, industry representatives met in Melbourne with Department of Primary Industries, Victoria and CSIRO scientists, and Horticulture Australia staff to discuss the possible release of genetically modified varieties and the ongoing research program.

The industry representatives clearly indicated they were opposed to the release of genetically modified varieties at this time. However, they did agree that research should continue and focus on producing genetically modified potatoes with clear consumer benefits.

At present, our work is focused on farmer benefits, in our case virus resistance to PLRV and PVY, which does not provide a good enough incentive for consumers to use a genetically modified product.

If any releases of genetically modified potatoes are ever to occur, they will need to offer something special to consumers to give them a reason to consider using the product. This may include health or environmental benefits. Marketing will be difficult due to consumer perceptions and therefore consumer benefits will be important in overcoming any concerns.

Industry representatives (ie. processing, fresh and seed) did not want the research to stop but thought that now was not the right time to release a genetically modified variety. Consumers were not ready to accept the technology.

The discussion highlighted a number of complex issues, particularly for researchers who were looking for an indication from industry as to how they should move forward with the technology.

Conclusions from the discussion were:

- not to release the current genetically modified varieties developed by CSIRO and Department of Primary Industries, Victoria for now
- continue with research to develop our skills in producing better varieties
- focus our work on developing varieties with consumer benefits.

Russell Sully

Department of Primary Industries, Victoria

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www sites of interest



YARN - Young Australian Rural Network

YARN.gov.au is an interactive website designed for young people in rural industries.



Herbicide resistant weeds

The website www.weedscience.org is an American site that has a lot of information for those interested in herbicide resistant weeds. At times it can become rather technical and given that it is focusing on the problem worldwide, not all the chemical or weed information presented is relevant to Australia. Nevertheless, there is a lot of useful and interesting information to be found. To get started, choose *By Country* and then *Australia* for a summary of herbicide weeds.



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State ROUND-UP

Western Australia

Fresh Market

Lets start with the good news. Returns to fresh market growers have been the highest for the last decade or more. Average payments are around \$500/tonne. Despite this, retail prices in Western Australia are lower than the national average. Produce quality has not suffered.

Roger States is a new recruit to Western Potatoes and will work with Brian Dixon as a Supply Management officer.

Export processing

There has been strong demand from Southeast Asia for processing potatoes in the past few months. Processing crops of Atlantic have produced well and this will help to supply increased demand.

Potatoes are being sent to Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. For the latter market, direct shipping services to Jakarta have been reduced and this is a cause for concern as the alternative is trans-shipment; that is, the potatoes pass Jakarta on the way to Singapore, then come back after several days: not good for a fresh, perishable product.

Export seed

Demand for export seed is growing. This market is still seen to have real potential for growth. For example this season new seed growers were recruited to help supply demand.

A study tour by the Jakarta based snack food company, PT Indofood, took place in February. The factory supply manager, senior agronomist and two leading farmers from West Java visited farms and factories. The potential for seed imports as well as raw material supply for the factory were discussed. This visit was part of a joint project between the Department of Agriculture, Western Potatoes, PT Indofood and HAL.

A five- person delegation from Vietnam visited in March. They came to see how the seed production system works in WA. The aim was to show them that specialist Vietnamese seed potato growers could become an important part of the potato industry in their Red River Delta. They could multiply imported Australian seed to provide Vietnamese farmers with large quantities of high quality seed. The delegation comprised three scientists from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development plus two farming cooperative leaders. The farming cooperatives can comprise 3,000 to 5,000 families. It was agreed that a business plan be developed to further the commercialisation of seed exports to Vietnam. This plan is to be finalised shortly.

Thank you to WA Farmers for the generous assistance they gave during these visits.

And the bad news to finish? Sorry, can't think of any.

Peter Dawson
Development Officer
Department of Agriculture, WA

Queensland

With the exception of Bundaberg growers, water issues have continued to be a concern for Queensland potato growing regions. In many areas, expected summer rains were late and well below average.

The Atherton Tablelands has seen an increase in early planted crops in expectation of good mid-year potato prices. It is interesting to note that a number of growers are now preferring to source round certified seed for the early planted crop rather than following the more traditional practice of keeping smalls from their previous main season crops. Crops on the upper tablelands have had adequate water and are looking good. While aphid pressure has been high it has been controllable, as has pressure from target spot.

Water restrictions for bores and creeks were implemented at the start of May, and irrigation channel water restrictions are expected to come into force in July. Farmers are now adjusting their cropping regimes to cater for these restrictions. Overall a slight decrease in the size of the main season crop is expected. The gourmet potato market appears to have remained constant, and there may be slight increases in Atlantic production for export and fresh market varieties such as Valor. This has come at the expense of the Sebago fresh market.

Bundaberg has had good rains and water supplies are back to 100% allocation, so normal plantings are expected. At this stage of the season (half way through planting), pest and disease pressures are low. Bundaberg growers have commented on the high quality of certified seed they have received this year (from most seed production regions).

Lockyer Valley plantings are probably only three-quarters of normal due to lack of water. This lack of supply has seen an increase in the number of growers trialling trickle irrigation. Until Easter, heliothis and aphid pressures were high but controllable and some areas had high levels of silver leaf white fly. Overall, crops are doing well and growers are looking at reasonable prices.

While Darling Downs crops have been grown under water restrictions and hot conditions, they have produced good crops of high quality. Processing crops have produced high specific gravities. Pest pressures were low to moderate, with target spot being the main disease issue. Water restrictions are still in place and there is some concern about availability of water for the summer crop.

Michael Hughes
Extension Agronomist
Department of Primary Industries

New South Wales

Although good rains in February have eased the drought situation in most parts of the State, future crop prospects remain uncertain until decent follow up rains are received in all districts. With little or no run off coming from most of these falls, growers are still facing shortfalls with their ground water supplies or irrigation allocations.

Fresh prices remained high over the autumn period with the poor to average early, mid- and late- season crop harvests. Digging of the early season crops finished during April around Dorrigo. Crop yields were average, with prices around \$550/tonne on-farm for grey soil spuds over March and April.

Digging of mid-season crops started in March in the Guyra, Wellington, Blayney, Cowra, Crookwell and Tumut districts. Crop yields were down, particularly with October sowings, which experienced the driest growing conditions. Ware prices in March and April averaged \$520/tonne on-farm, dropping to \$480/ tonne in May.

Wet weather in the northern Tablelands and a dry season in the southern Tablelands delayed the mid-season harvest. Seed areas and yields are also down on last season. This year's recommended price for Crookwell Certified Seed is \$550/tonne plus GST.

Digging of the late season crops started in May in the Maitland district. Yields were average, with crops requiring irrigation over the entire growing season. Digging will start in June in the Dorrigo and Riverina districts, where average yields are expected. Overall, late season production in New South Wales is anticipated to be down due to the drought and reduced crop areas.

Stephen Wade
District Horticulturist
NSW Agriculture

Victoria

Autumn this year has been dry - above average rain will be required this winter to fill farm dams for next year's crop.

Harvesting has progressed well. The dry summer conditions have caused some skin damage, but autumn weather has been ideal for digging. Harvest is ahead of most years. McCain growers started deliveries early this year so storage is nearly full. Almost all seed crops have been harvested except for some in the late districts.

McCain growers' yields are slightly down due to the hot dry growing season. The shape of *Russet Burbank* has suffered due to the dry summer. The results of the Water for Growth Trials were enthusiastically followed, with about 45 growers and industry people attending two field days.

VicSPA seed growers' crops have grown well in the dry season with at least average yields. The quality of seed in most cases has been good provided care was taken during harvest.

Fresh market growers enjoyed a good season with potatoes prices well above average.

Seed Potatoes Victoria invite all interested people to their third Biennial Seed Potato Industry Workshop in Portland Victoria on August 18-19, 2003. If you have not received a workshop registration form and would like to, contact Tony Pitt Ph: (03) 56223025.

Bruce Fry
Horticultural Extension Officer
Department of Primary Industries

South Australia

The main processing harvest is well under way with average yields and quality being reported. Thunderstorms caused some early disruption to harvesting in isolated areas on poorer draining paddocks. Generally the weather has been very kind with fine and mild conditions prevailing. There will be a very small amount, if any, of surplus contract production.

The Lower Murray and Lakes area reported slightly below average yields and quality with a variable tuber size range. This probably reflects a challenging irrigation season that included many hot and windy periods. The total planting area has remained constant and would appear to be so in the future as well. Some ongoing challenges for this area include water quality with regard to salinity levels in particular, water access with reduced river and lake levels, water allocation and policy management for the whole Basin in the short and longer term.

The Murraylands reported a challenging irrigation season from the combination of high temperatures and wind stress, with average yields but overall tuber size being slightly smaller and more variable in shape. Planting area for the short and long term appears to be roughly the same as previous years.

Bob Peake
Horticultural Consultant
Rural Solutions SA

Tasmania

After a difficult growing season due to the dry weather, processing and fresh market crop harvests are now progressing well. Heavy rain early in the harvest period slowed things down for a while and resulted in a rise in the level of soft and pink rots, but harvesting is now back on track. However, rain led to an improvement in the bruise- free levels compared to last year.


Early planted processing crops were slightly down on yield and showed an above average level of common scab. Late planted crops showed an improved yield and better quality. Crops have generally hung on well this year resulting in an improved tuber size compared to last year. Both processors report that storage of commercial potatoes should be complete by the end of May. Simplot reports the quality into store this year is slightly down on last year due to soft rots.

Both processing companies report they will meet their seed requirements this year. Seed harvesting started in mid-March in the north-east and most seed should be in store by the end of May.

The dry weather, combined with higher than normal levels of powdery scab and eelworm, has led to a difficult year for seed growers. Several paddocks were downgraded by the companies prior to tuber inspection, which resulted in more loads presented for tuber inspection passing compared to last year. The fewer loads presented for inspection has also eased the workload for certification officers.

Fresh market crops have performed well this year. Lower than normal levels of rhizoctonia and common scab have been recorded, and this is being put down to improved seed treatments. The strong price in the fresh market sector has resulted in a good year for most fresh market growers.

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



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