

EYES ON POTATOES

A U S T R A L I A N P O T A T O I N D U S T R Y C O U N C I L N E W S L E T T E R

Volume 1 - June 1997

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Almost **\$2 million** in R&D grants awarded



HORTICULTURAL RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
The Research Arm of the Australian Horticultural Industries

The Board of the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation (HRDC) has recommended to the Minister of Primary Industry and Energy that \$1.9 million of funds be allocated in 1997-98 for research and development projects for the potato industry.

Thirty three projects received funding, mostly in the areas of variety improvement, crop management and pest and disease management. Many of these projects are ongoing from previous years, with the following new ones.

- **More economic and environmentally responsible use of phosphorus fertiliser in potato cropping on krasnozems soils in Australia**
- **Developing soil and water management systems for potato production on sandy soils in Australia**
- **Remote sensing as an aid to horticultural crop recording and husbandry**
- **Production and assessment of virus resistant potato cultivars**
- **National strategy for the management of western flower thrips and tomato spotted wilt virus**
- **Biofumigation - bioactive brassica rotations for IPM of soil borne pests and diseases**
- **Potato pink rot control in field and storage**
- **New chemical treatments for fungal diseases of seed potatoes**
- **The economics and agronomy of round seed potato production**

- **Development and implementation of National Seed Potato Certification Standards**
- **DNA fingerprints and cryopreservation of potato cultivars for improved quality assurance**

More details of these projects will be included in this year's edition of *Potato Australia*.

Of the \$1.9 million, \$1.8 million comes from the potato levy plus matching funds from the Commonwealth Government. The remainder is from matched voluntary contributions from growers and other sectors involved in the industry.

The APIC R&D committee met in March to consider the 60 plus applications requesting funds from the Potato Levy. The Committee made recommendations to the Board of HRDC taking into consideration the industry's R&D priorities and what projects would provide outcomes that would benefit the industry. The Board of HRDC met at the end of April to consider all applications for funding in 1997-98.

The Committee has had to make difficult decisions on which applications are recommended for funding. The income from the Potato R&D Levy has remained the same since its introduction in 1991 (\$900,000 per year) whilst the cost of doing R&D has increased over the last 6 years. With limited funds available, the Committee can only support applications which provide a maximum return and benefit to Industry from the potato levy invested in research projects.

Jonathan Eccles
Industry Program Manager
HRDC
☎ 02 9418 2200

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KEEP OUT! new pests and diseases

The recent identification of the pome fruit disease, fire blight in the Royal Botanical Gardens in Melbourne should serve as a reminder to all of us of the potential impact of quarantine pests and diseases on an industry.

Potatoes, like pome fruit, have a long list of pests and diseases, and there are still many serious ones that do not occur in Australia.

While the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) maintains a barrier to their introduction, it is still everyone's responsibility to make sure that plant material enters the country through the proper channels which minimises the risks of introducing new pests and diseases.

New potato varieties can be released from post entry quarantine in less than 12 months and you are sure of getting good, healthy stock. **Please do the right thing by your industry.**

For more information on importing new varieties contact your nearest AQIS office.

Lois Ransom
Quarantine Plant Pathologist
DPIF, Tasmania

Welcome!

The Australian Potato Industry Council (APIC) has been working actively to provide better information transfer across the potato industry. This newsletter has been initiated in response to industry members telling us they wanted more information, more frequently.

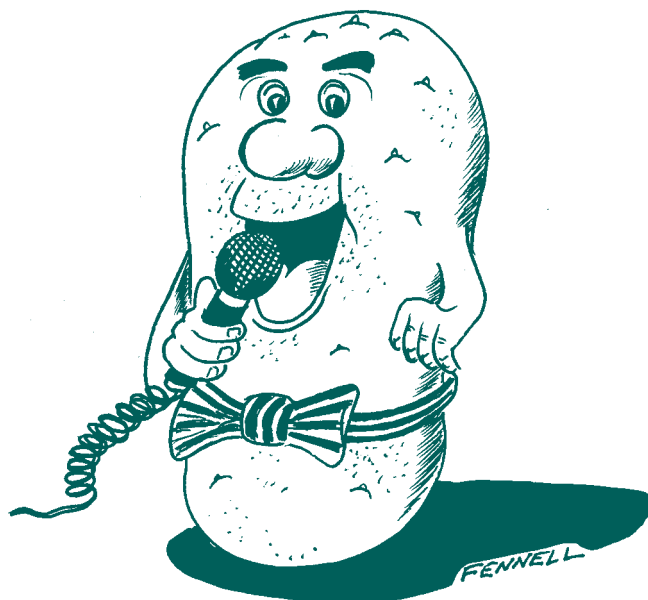
This is the inaugural edition of *Eyes on Potatoes* which will be produced three times a year so that, with *Potato Australia*, there will be a publication coming out each quarter. It's intended to compliment *Potato Australia* which will continue to be produced annually.

Eyes on Potatoes will be a vehicle to provide up to date industry news and comment. I hope you will find the publication interesting and useful to your business.

My congratulations to the editorial team for their efforts and I urge you to contact them if you wish to make a contribution to future editions or you are aware of anyone missing out on receiving *Eyes on Potatoes*.

Wayne Cornish
APIC Chairman,

TATER-toons



CommentTATER

Eyes on Potatoes is produced by the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries, Tasmania, on behalf of the Australian Potato Industry Council.

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EYES ON POTATOES



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Quality Assurance - a new tool for marketing your product

Gatton potato grower Barry Steffens believes that if we get better product on the shelf then the end result will be a better price.

“I’ve had problems with marketing and I want to improve quality and price. I think Quality Assurance might be just the tool we need to do this,” Barry says.

Barry is a member of a pilot group in Queensland that is looking at how Quality Assurance (QA) can help improve profitability for fresh market production. The group consists of ten growers from the Lockyer Valley, Bairds Produce, a merchant from the Brisbane market and Woolworths Queensland.

Like most growers, Barry has not had a lot of experience with QA in the past. However, with the other members of the pilot group, he is prepared to give it a try. The work being done by the pilot group will allow other growers around Australia to apply Quality Assurance principles more easily as a lot of the problems of adoption will have been sorted out.

Ultimately the group are trying to develop practical ways to approach QA for the production, handling and marketing of fresh market potatoes. The project initially focuses on the application of Quality Assurance principles which are common to all QA programs such as SQF2000 or ISO9002.

The group is being assisted through the process by Eric Coleman who has been funded by the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation, through the potato levy.

Eric will be working closely with groups in other states to avoid duplication of effort and ensure a consistent approach. This is important as several states are already promoting QA programs and some supermarket chains have already indicated to merchants and growers that they are moving down this path.

What does Quality Assurance mean in practice for growers?

Many growers already supply what is requested through their agents or merchants and do not feel they can have much influence over the marketing even though they know there are problems.

Negotiating product specification

According to Eric, the first port of call is the marketing end, to talk about what the customer wants.

“One of the best ways to get this going is to develop a common understanding of the product being bought and sold,” Eric says.

“This can be done with a simple written description of the product (often referred to as a specification) so both parties know what is being talked about. The product specification should be negotiated so that both parties are happy with the end result.”

This, coupled with the knowledge that the producer works in a systematic way employing the principles of Quality

Assurance, will add certainty to transactions and ultimately some value.

Negotiating price

If you are supplying what your customer requires you will be in a much better position to improve your own return.

By using a specification the negotiation of price can start before

harvest time instead of at the last minute when a small snapshot of price at the time either makes or breaks a growers return and is very dependant on supply and demand at the time.

This provides the grower with a price guide to work out cashflow and manage their business better.

A concern raised by some growers is what happens in a ‘bad’ year when the quality specification cannot be met.

Eric says that in a bad year it will be a matter of growers going to the buyer and indicating that they have been a good supplier and due to the season they need a temporary adjustment to the specification. The pair then negotiate on this new arrangement.

“It’s all about having everything up front and developing alliances with customers

based on trust, he says. “This is a giant leap for many growers and buyers working in the current system!”

Producing a consistent product

The next challenge for growers is being able to meet the specification by producing a consistent product.

QA does not mean producing a top product, it is about consistency and doing what you say you will do!

Eric says that a big part of the process is setting up a system of checks and balances which will help the grower produce the product described in the product description.

“People usually focus solely on quality control. This involves picking out potatoes that do not meet the standards such as size and appearance. This can improve the overall quality of the produce sold but does not address the cause for the poor quality in the first place,” he says.

Eliminating hazards

Eric believes that an important part of the project is coming up with a series of questions that will allow growers to identify food safety hazards so they can either be eliminated or controlled.

These hazards are anything that has the potential to cause illness or injury to consumers or contravene the law.

One hazard is the chemical contamination of potatoes.

“Where there is packing of potatoes there should be no chemicals stored - potatoes are a food product. So what do you do? Check every load of potatoes for chemical contamination **or** do you store the chemicals in a safe area away from the potatoes?” he asks.

“The commonsense approach would be to store the chemicals away from the potatoes. Hazard eliminated. Simple. Go onto the next hazard.”

“It doesn’t have to be difficult!”

Eric will work with the pilot group in Queensland and other groups in Australia to identify common hazards which relate to potato growing to make it easier for growers to get started on implementing food safety on the farm.

This article has only touched on some of the aspects of QA and the activities of the new potato levy project.

Eric would like to talk to growers looking at adopting QA or who are currently trying to implement a QA system on their property.

☎ 07 54621122



Paul Steffens, Eric Coleman and Barry Steffens discussing the Steffens family's involvement in the QA project.

Improving communication in the potato industry



Leigh Walters (right) discussing the merits of improved communication with Michael Cain (left) of the South Australian Farmers Federation

Being kept informed about industry developments, knowing who to contact about a problem and being able to access information on potatoes are basic needs of growers and many others who work in the potato industry. Satisfying those needs is not always easy.

Leigh Walters has been employed (through the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation) on a new potato levy project to improve communication in the potato industry. The major focus is on raising the awareness and adoption of new technology from research and development programs.

Visiting the potato growing regions

Since October, Leigh has visited most of the main potato growing regions in Australia and talked to a wide range of people such as growers, packers, consultants, researchers, extension officers, field officers from processing companies and technical staff from agribusiness groups such as IAMA, Elders, Primac and Growforce.

Leigh says that he has talked to around 150 people, mostly in a one-on-one situation.

“It seems a lot but the Australian potato industry is very diverse and the issues differ between areas and I wanted people to tell me about what is important to them,” he says.

The interviews were very valuable as Leigh needed to know how people obtained information, whether information was reaching those who

needed it, what forms of information were being used, what forms of information were needed and what information products were available to the industry.

“Besides issues directly related to the project there were a lot of points raised that will provide a focus for articles in our industry publications, *Eyes on Potatoes* and *Potato Australia*.”

More frequent information

Leigh found a common concern of many people was that they were not receiving enough information about what was happening in the industry, and in particular, the research and development programs.

It became obvious very quickly that most people in the industry wanted to be informed more regularly.

“In general most growers were tending towards a simple easy to read newsletter that was not too large and came out regularly,” Leigh says.

A new newsletter established

“The need for a newsletter had already been identified by the Australian Potato Industry Council and Nathalie Jarosz, the editor of *Potato Australia*, had been approached to develop it.

The timing of my project was ideal as it was simply a matter of working with Nathalie to establish *Eyes on Potatoes*. The information gained from the interviews enabled us to refine the newsletter and hopefully result in a better product.”

“*Eyes on Potatoes* will come out three times a year and, with *Potato Australia*, provides the industry with a publication each quarter.”

Leigh also points out that *Eyes on Potatoes* is only one part of a bigger communication package being put together over the next three years.

Better distribution of industry information

The Australian potato industry does not have a central mailing list but relies largely on state grower organisations and NSW Agriculture to distribute information such as *Potato Australia*.

Problems identified by Leigh during his

visits have been raised at the last AUSVEG Potato Group meeting. As a result of the discussion the state groups will focus on ensuring grower mailing lists are kept up to date and Leigh will supply the distribution agents in each state with details for agribusiness and government.

“There needs to be a simple, reliable and effective way of communicating with the entire industry. The changes put into place will strengthen our ability to do this effectively,” Leigh says.

Information directory

Leigh is also developing an information directory. This will be a “who’s who” of the technical people in the potato industry. It will also include information on groups, industry statistics, industry bodies and the potato levy.

“The goal of the information directory is to facilitate communication in the industry. In a country as big as ours providing simple guides to aid communication is very important,” Leigh says.

Guide to potato publications

Leigh is also developing a guide to Australian potato publications.

He says that with so many groups producing publications it is often difficult to work out what is available. The guide should make this task a lot easier and provide important information on how to obtain publications.

Both of these are well advanced and will be sent out with either *Potato Australia* or *Eyes on Potatoes* later this year.

The above issues are only the start to understanding and addressing the communication problems within the potato industry. In a future edition of *Eyes on Potatoes* Leigh will talk about whether we are obtaining value from the potato levy and his work in developing a national code of practice for root diseases.

Leigh would like to thank all those people who took the time to talk to him over the last six months. “Your willingness to talk about the issues has been excellent and your views have provided a solid foundation for the start of this project.”

Leigh can be contacted at the South Australian Farmers Federation on ☎ (08) 82325555.

Market Information Services

Ausmarket Consultants provide a daily price reporting service for the Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide markets. The daily Market Price Reports can be sent anywhere in Australia by fax.

The Ausmarket Consultants group has been formed to meet a growing need for high quality information in the Australian fruit and vegetable markets. Its members operate individual businesses which work together under the name Ausmarket Consultants when information is required from more than one market.

The group provides a range of specialist independent services. To access any of these services or to obtain further information contact one of the following Ausmarket consultants.

Adelaide

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APIC BRIEFS

Potato Levy collection compliance

APIC is requesting the Levies Management Unit to undertake, with industry, a detailed check to ensure the potato levy is being collected in all situations, thus guaranteeing major compliance.

The Potato Levy is paid by growers and processors, based on 50 cents/tonne and is collected at the first point of sale. In most cases the levy is collected by market agents or merchants when potatoes are sold on the fresh market and by processors for potatoes destined for processing. Processors also contribute 50 cents per tonne for processing potatoes.

All collectors are legally required to forward the levy to the Levies Management Unit, a section within the Commonwealth Department of Primary Industries and Energy.

The levies collected are matched dollar for dollar by the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation, using Commonwealth Government funds, at the time the levy is spent on research and development.

Cadmium

The review by the Australian New Zealand Food Authority of the Maximum Permitted Concentrations (MPC) of cadmium in all foods including potatoes is nearing completion.

The Authority proposed that the MPC for potatoes be raised in accordance with the Australian Potato Industry Council submission. The submission was generated with strong support from both the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation and CSIRO Division of Soils. The proposed changes to the Australian Food Standards were made available for public comment with the period for submissions closing on the 14 May 1997. The change would bring Australia in line with the International CODEX standard.

The submissions will be considered by the Authority and a recommendation put to the Australian New Zealand Food Standards Council for ratification. This Council consists of Health Ministers from Australia and New Zealand. If the Council agrees to the recommendation the changes will be gazetted and become law. The potato industry will hopefully know the outcome by spring.

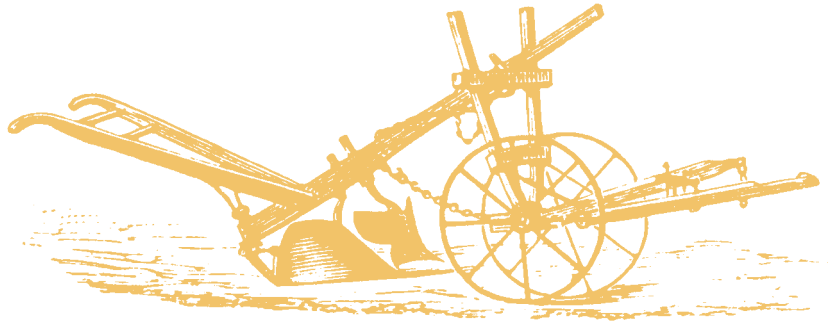
Wayne Cornish, APIC Chairman
☎ (08) 8232 5555.



APIC industry delegates at the May 6 meeting in Melbourne

Philip O'Keefe (Simplot - Tas), Ron Cumming (Merchant - Qld), Mike Durkin (Merchant - Vic), John Smink (Grower, Deputy Chairman - Tas), Wayne Cornish (Grower, Chairman - SA), Jeff Peterson (Smiths Snackfood Company - NSW)

Other members of APIC not included in the photo are the government advisers Barry Philp (SA) and Rowland Laurence (Tas), and the Secretary/Treasurer Max Walker who was holidaying in Europe (ed. Half his luck!).



INVITATION TO FIELD DAY/BBQ

Tuesday August 5th, 1997 11.30am to 2.30pm

ALL WELCOME

*SA Mallee Potato Fresh Market Variety Demonstration
Run By Chris Williams SARDI and Matt Bennett, IAMA.*

A potato fresh market variety demonstration field day will be held at Kevin Stephenson's farm at Peebinga. Chris Williams and his team will dig 20 metre strips of tubers of each of 11 new lines or standard varieties. Examples will include *Shine*, (was 90-105-14) a white skin washing variety and *Ruby Lou* (was 90-40-1) a new red skin line.

RSVP TO:-

Matt Bennett, IAMA by JULY 25, 1997, for catering and/or bus travel.

Phone: 0887 623 433 (work)

Mobile: 0188 13357

Hours: 01887 648 168

TRAVEL: Buses may be available from Strathalbyn and Naracoorte if enough people notify Matt Bennett for transport.

Competitive Quality Potato

A major new initiative funded by the Victorian Government is set to benefit the potato industry, particularly with regard to exports. Known as ExpHORT 2000, the initiative will support projects on potatoes, other vegetables, apples, flowers and grapes, over the next four years.

The potato project is titled **CQ-Potato (Competitive Quality)** and the overall aim is to substantially increase the farm and factory gate value of the Victorian potato industry. The target is to boost exports from Victoria to \$20 million per year.

Issues such as market access, best practice, productivity and quality will be addressed and, although the focus is on exports, many of the outcomes will also benefit domestic production.

The Department of Natural Resources and Environment will be collaborating with all sectors of the industry, from grower to overseas consumer, during the project. It is expected that many of the project outcomes will be of national benefit.

*Andrew Henderson
Technology Transfer Officer, Potatoes
Agriculture Victoria*

Scope for export expansion

A recent study by the Centre for International Economics for Agriculture Victoria has identified that the potato sector has a great deal of potential for expansion into export markets.

There is scope to lower costs in growing and processing which will open up important market opportunities. Demand could increase by up to 50 per cent which would increase the value of production by around \$100 million per year and exports by \$80 million per year over the next few years.

Growing the potato market through exports will increase industry income.

*Russell Sully
Industry Manger (Potatoes)
Institute for Horticultural Development
Agriculture Victoria*

Did you know!
**McDonald's use 70 MILLION kg
of Australian potatoes each year!**

National Promotion Program for Fresh Potatoes

AUSVEG Potato Group in its meeting in Melbourne on 5 May 1997 endorsed a full proposal for the introduction of a national promotion levy for fresh potatoes. This was the recommendation from a successful strategy planning meeting held in Sydney back in March 1997.

The proposal will be widely discussed with industry over the coming months. The proposal addresses the need to develop a marketing plan for fresh potatoes with agreed strategies, including promotion and advertising. The aim is to raise the profile of potatoes amongst consumers and create a positive image of potatoes contributing to a healthy lifestyle. AUSVEG feels that these activities will help potatoes to maintain or increase their marketshare, which at the moment is falling.

Potato Congress 2003

The AUSVEG Potato Group has taken an 'in principle' decision to prepare a bid to hold the World Potato Congress in Melbourne in 2003. AUSVEG will explore the possibility of linking with New Zealand for this important international event. The 1997 World Potato Congress recently held in Durban, South Africa, attracted some 600 delegates.

Brian Newman, Executive Director, AUSVEG

Chemical residues in potatoes

The issue of chemical residue testing in potatoes is becoming of increasing importance to everyone involved in the fresh produce industry. The potato industry along with all other fresh produce sectors must address the issue of chemical residue testing as a regular and essential part of product quality management for both the domestic and export markets.

*Brian Newman
Executive Director, AUSVEG
☎ (03) 5790 5247.*



AUSVEG Potato Group at the May 5 meeting in Melbourne

Bruce Ure (Victoria), Kevin Stephenson (South Australia), Ian Rickus (Queensland), Brian Newman (Executive Director), Geoff Moar (Chairman, New South Wales) and Max McKenna (Tasmania)

Dom Della is the delegate for Western Australia but was unable to attend the meeting due to a transport strike.

Potato Information Kit

The Queensland Department of Primary Industries has recently launched a Potato Information Kit for Queensland potato growers. The kit is a comprehensive guide to potato growing which will be kept up-to-date by annual update booklets with a complete revision being released every two to three years.

The kit takes you through step by step from planting to marketing, solving problems as they arise and providing industry contacts and references.

The kit has been designed using the Agrilink approach which has been field tested for two years with growers and agribusinesses. The kit focuses on the critical information required for successfully growing a potato crop.

Kits are \$75 plus \$7.50 postage which includes annual updates until the next revised version is released. A refill pack will be available for purchase at a discounted price when the new edition becomes available.

Kits can be ordered through the Agrilink Hotline on 1800 677 640 or selected agribusiness stores and booksellers.



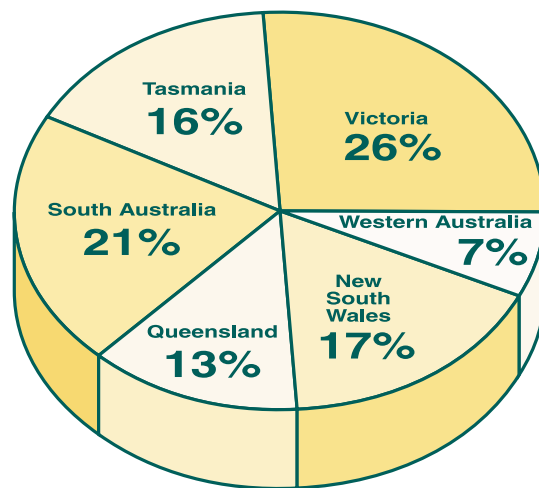
Which State grows the most potatoes?

These are the latest stats at the time we went to press. We hope to have the 1996 figures for the December edition of *Eyes on Potatoes*.

Production, Area and Value for the year ended 31 March 1995

State	Area (ha)	Production (tonnes)	Yield (t/ha)	Gross value (\$)
New South Wales	6,273.6	126,812.4	20.2	40,973,443
Queensland	4,781.6	109,004.0	22.8	47,340,451
South Australia	7,830.9	247,414.1	31.6	94,119,219
Tasmania	6,067.8	255,737.8	42.1	52,229,048
Victoria	10,135.3	279,876.1	27.6	105,907,780
Western Australia	2,553.0	103,572.5	40.6	37,300,766

(Source : Australian Bureau Statistics)



Area planted to potatoes

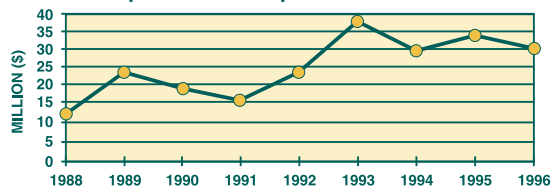
How many potatoes do we import & export?

Over the period from 1988 to 1996, Australia imported twice as many potatoes and potato products as it exported. Will the focus on export which is just starting to gain momentum, change this ratio?

Imports

The total value of imports of potatoes and potato products for 1988-1996 was **\$232,398,796**.

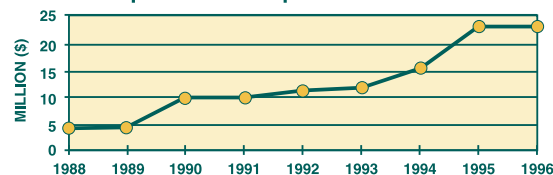
Total value of potatoes and potato products imported for the period 1988 - 1996



Exports

The total value of exports of potatoes and potato products for 1988-1996 was **\$113,364,382**.

Total value of potatoes and potato products exported for the period 1988 - 1996



New vegetable adviser at Manjimup

Mark Heap started last month as the new Vegetable Development Officer with Agriculture Western Australia in Manjimup. Mark is a welcome addition to the WA team and will have a strategic role in the development of the potato industry in south west WA, particularly with French fry opportunities. He will also work with cauliflowers and other crops with export potential.

Mark has a lot of experience with potatoes, having worked at Mt Gambier for 8 years on research and development of processing potatoes.

☎ (08) 9771 1299

Working towards a common goal

Agriculture Victoria is organising a winter meeting of all groups in Australia working on Best Practice, Monitoring, Quality Assurance and Quality Management programs for potatoes. The objective is to ensure all groups are working towards a common goal and identify deficiencies in current programs that require further attention.

National Crisping Industry Workshop

'Fine Tuning Crop Management'

July 21, 22 & 23 (Mon, Tues, Wed)

Toowoomba QLD

Enquiries to Tony Myers on (03) 5622 2227

GROWING POTATOES IN TASMANIA

Tasmania is ideally suited to potato production, lying about the same latitude south as Idaho and Washington (in the USA) are north. The climate is temperate with a predominantly winter rainfall ranging from 500 mm (20 in) to 1,500 mm (60 in) annually in the potato growing areas.

The main production areas for potatoes are the rich red krasnozem soils of the north west coast, with a pocket in the north east. The northern midlands area is increasingly being used for potato production; these soils vary from deep sands to duplex. Coastal sands along the north east are also being developed for potato production. The total area allocated to potato production is approximately 6,200 ha.

Tasmania's potato industry is worth approximately \$60 million annually (at the farm gate). The total annual production of potatoes is approximately 330,000 tonnes (25% of Australia's total potato production). Over 90% of this production is for French fries and associated products. Fresh market production is limited to the local market.

The French fry production is controlled by two players, McCain Foods and Simplot Australia. Factories are located at Smithton in the far north west (McCains Foods) and at Ulverstone in the north west and Scottsdale in the north east (Simplot Australia).

The processing potato industry consists of some 600 contracted growers, with an



Peter Hardman & Tracey Taylor at Simplot's Ulverstone processing plant.

average contract size of 500 tonnes. These growers achieve yields from 40 to 75t/ha, with the average yield being 50t/ha (20t/ac).

The *Russet Burbank* cultivar accounts for 90% of the potato production. *Kennebec*, an early variety, accounts for 5% of production, but because of poor processing characteristics, is being slowly replaced with *Shepody*. *Shepody* is a mid-season variety with some *Russet Burbank* characteristics.

Apart from the most common cultivar, *Kennebec*, fresh market varieties are not suitable for processing, resulting in very little crossover between the two sectors of the industry. Other cultivars for fresh market are; *Bismark* and *Pinkeye* for early harvest, and *Bintje*, *Brownell*, *Tasman*, *Pontiac*, *Desiree*, *Coliban* and a few other minor varieties.

Russet Burbank is ideally suited for French fry production due to its storing quality, shape and cooking characteristics (SG's, fry colour, chip length, shallow eyes). *Russet Burbank* has a growing period of 20 - 24 weeks, and is relatively disease-free.

Planting of the crop starts in early September for *Kennebec* and *Shepody*, with the main planting season for *Russet Burbank* being mid October to mid November. Planting later than this usually results in yield and quality losses.

The crops are grown under irrigation, with the main type being travelling irrigators of varying types and capacities. Although travelling irrigators are not the most efficient, they are the most suitable for the undulating land and farm size. There is a move in the Midlands and along the north east coast towards centre pivot irrigation systems.

Weeds are usually controlled through the use of chemicals, but mechanical methods are used by some growers, whilst others use a combination of both. As *Shepody* is sensitive to metribuzin (Sencor®, Lexone®), this chemical must be applied pre-emergent.

The major diseases influencing potato production in Tasmania are common and powdery scab, target spot (*Alternaria* spp), Irish blight (*Phytophthora* spp), pinkrot, blackleg, and *Rhizoctonia*.

Common scab is a continuing problem with *Russet Burbank*; currently there isn't an effective control available. Powdery scab is prevalent in *Kennebec* and *Shepody* (slight effect on *Russet Burbank*), but has little influence on processing as *Kennebec* are usually harvested immature.

Irish blight and target spot are well controlled by a preventative spray program, commencing at about row closure and finishing at early crop senescence.

Harvesting of the potato crop begins in January with the early varieties. *Russet Burbank* harvest starts early March, with storage beginning in early April, and continuing through until the weather breaks (usually in early June). Due to our wet winters, harvest often isn't complete until September/October. The red krasnozem soils are capable of storing potatoes throughout the winter months without too many problems.

The processors have the capacity to store 40% of their total tonnage in specialised storage facilities, most of which are located close to the factories.

Tasmania operates a Certified Seed Potato program, which is under the control of the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries (DPIF).

The seed is produced from minitubers grown by the DPIF; these are then sold to Certified Seed Growers who grow four generations of seed before selling it to the commercial potato growers. This scheme ensures that the commercial growers are supplied with seed of the highest quality.

The Tasmanian seed scheme has been free of potato leafroll virus (PLRV) for many years, and a survey for the last five years has not detected Potato Cyst Nematode (PCN) in Tasmania. Bacterial Wilt has also never been detected in Tasmania.

The Tasmanian growers have a strong voice through their organisation, the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association Potato Council.

**Peter Hardman and Tracey Taylor
Field Officers, Simplot Australia,
Ulverstone, Tasmania**

ROUND-UP

State

South Australia

South Australia produced some 247, 000 tonnes of potatoes in 1995 (ABS) valued at \$94 million. Production is estimated to be slightly down compared to last season because of the summer drought followed by a cool March.

Cold, overcast and wet conditions reduced yields of many fresh market crops last spring by 50%. Prices for premium crops of washed potatoes were some \$600 per tonne compared with \$200 tonne for poorer quality last spring.

Production of summer sown/winter harvested, washed potatoes has continued to expand in the SA Murraylands. Planting in the Mallee is usually on new ground, but the incidence of diseases is increasing, suggesting disease inoculum is being introduced by seed and machinery.

There was some evidence of sodium toxicity in soils under pivots in the northern Mallee and Francis areas, in the dry summer.

A south east project group have sent trial potato samples to Asia and have arranged work on modifications to shipping containers (to improve potato sea freight systems).

It has been a difficult growing season for summer processing crops, a stop/start season. Cool, moist conditions in spring followed by a very dry summer, heat wave in February and a cool March.

Several crisp crops in the Adelaide Plains and Hills experienced heat stress in February which caused smaller sized tubers and lower specific gravity and early maturity. For French fry crops, this has caused variable yields, with more smaller size tubers (and secondary growth in several *Russet Burbank* crops), but fry colour was acceptable.

Rhizoctonia, powdery and common scab were the main diseases recorded, with some instances of pink rot (in the South East).

Chris Williams
Senior Research Scientist
South Australian Research and
Development Institute
Lenswood

Western Australia

Despite forecasts of shortages in supply, overall production of ware potatoes in Western Australia has met target tonnage. It is now anticipated that supplies may be sufficient until the new seasons crop is harvested in September/October 1997.

Throughout the summer months the quality of delivery suffered from breakdown problems after washing. This was due to the heat wave conditions plus the high humidity. Even *Delaware* at times broke down as much as newer varieties.

With the advent of cooler conditions, sales have increased and overall could show an increase of up to 2% on last season.

The Marketing Corporation has decided to restrict the production of the new variety *Nadine* to 60% of license area. Though this variety has shown marked improvement in cosmetic appearance over other varieties, consumers are still wanting a larger selection of *Delaware* and other varieties.

There are many other new varieties showing potential in variety trials. These varieties will be fast tracked to enable sufficient tonnage to gauge consumer response.

Delivery of processing potatoes is expected to total 39,000 tonnes, which is approximately 6,000 tonnes below target tonnage.

Quality has been good apart from the smaller size tubers. This problem could have resulted from poor seed or seasonal factors arising from heat wave conditions during the early growing period.

There remains approximately 17,000 tonnes to be harvested and placed into storage before the end of May.

Production for the crisp industry is anticipated to total 14,000 tonnes in line with industry requirements. Though yields are down, over production has not suffered to the same extent as originally forecast.

Tom Carstairs
Executive Officer
Potato Growers Association of W.A.
Perth

Tasmania

Some years ago, we had a prime minister who used the saying, "*Life wasn't meant to be easy*," and the longer we live the truer it seems to be. Each year that passes doesn't seem to make growing a top potato crop any easier.

This season had its own bag of tricks. At planting time there was rain and some more rain and then some more. This, of course, caused delays all around with seed coming out of store in preparation for cutting and having to stand longer than usual.

As the season progressed, it was cooler than usual with a lot more wind than the long term average. A lot of crops this season had enough blackleg to reduce plant population especially *Kennebec*.

Another set back during planting was news that the tonnage required by Simplot had to be reduced.

In the bulking-up period conditions became drier and there was a very hot spell in January which showed up as incipient second growth in some crops, producing pear shape, dumbbell and knobby tubers resulting in reduced quality and yield.

Perhaps the most disconcerting happening for the season was the appearance of tomato spotted wilt virus around the state in both seed and processing crops. This is a disease which in the past had only been a problem in other vegetables. Everyone is hoping that it was a one-off occurrence.

To round off a tale of woe, both McCain and Simplot have cut some 10,000 tonnes from next year's contract. One must assume that these companies are also being squeezed by the super market chains and fast-food groups. You would hope that someone benefits - maybe the consumer?

Bruce Beattie
Senior Horticulturist
Department of Primary Industry
and Fisheries
Devonport

Queensland

With good rain in May 1996 underground aquifer levels in the Lockyer Valley have risen substantially and improved cropping prospects for the autumn 1997 planting.

This, combined with the current favourable market, has resulted in a slightly increased planting over that for the 1996 autumn crop. The present crop has experienced good growing conditions and harvest will commence in June and continue through to late July.

The first plantings of the Lockyer Valley winter crop are about to commence and it is expected that the size of this crop will be higher than in the past few years particularly considering the favourable growing and market conditions. The lack of available seed is causing some concerns.

A pilot group of 10 Lockyer Valley growers is participating in the development of a national QA program. Initially they have begun to keep detailed crop records and property maps and are about to market their first produce.

The Smiths processing unit in Brisbane is now fully operational. Although there has been an increase in throughput; the extra tonnage is being sourced from existing contracts in NSW.

The national crisping conference will be held in Toowoomba from July 21 to 23, the details of which will be available in the near future. The theme of this conference will be "Fine Tuning Crop Management". Although the conference focuses on crisping potatoes all potato growers will find it very informative and are encouraged to attend.

In North Queensland cyclone Justin brought drought breaking rain and most irrigation supplies are at or near 100% capacity. These crops were planted as early as April and under the current favourable growing conditions look good.

The late planting will be down slightly due to the lack of available seed out of Victoria and thus the overall size of the crop is likely to be down on last years.

The quantity going for export will also be down due to concerns with the price received for export potatoes; hence this product will be available on the domestic market.

Steve Harper
*Development Extension officer
(Heavy Vegetables)*
*Department of Primary Industries
Gatton*

New South Wales

Potato production in NSW was similar to last season, with around 130,000 tonnes produced on 6,300 hectares during 1996-97. Fresh market areas dropped a little, while processing production increased and seed production areas stayed the same.

Wet weather in August delayed the sowing of spring fresh market crops by a week. Yields were up in most districts due to the milder temperatures over the growing season. Digging of the spring crop started in December with yields averaging 30 tonnes/hectare in the Northern Tablelands and 35 tonnes/hectare in the Riverina. Prices firmed to \$250/tonne over December and January in the Riverina, while northern growers received between \$360 to \$420/tonne from December to March.

Planting of the main summer crop was on schedule with a cool, wet spring providing ideal growing conditions for crops and the dry weather in the later part of the season assisting harvesting operations. However the milder conditions did favour the build up of potato moth in some highland districts. Crop yields averaged 40 tonnes/hectare in the Central West and 37 tonnes/hectare in the Southern Tablelands. *Sebago* prices averaged \$340/tonne over March and April.

Sowing of the autumn crop in the Riverina was delayed by the very hot weather in mid-February. The high soil temperatures increased seed breakdown losses in the area, particularly in *Coliban* crops. Potential yields are expected to be down on average due to poor crop establishment and the cool growing conditions during autumn.

NSW growers produced 23,000 tonnes of crisping potatoes during 1996-97. Crisp contract prices remained static, with slightly lower base prices being compensated for by better bonus payments. Production expanded due to increased contracts in the Central Tablelands and the favourable growing condition experienced across the State. A temporary oversupply during Christmas resulted in potatoes being cool stored before delivery to processors. Surplus crisping potatoes were also exported to South Korea for processing during 1997.

New South Wales growers also supplied 7,000 tonnes of potatoes to the McCain Foods factory at Ballarat for French fry processing. Contract prices ranged from \$178 to \$208/tonne on-farm depending on the time of delivery to the factory.

Technico Pty Ltd continued the commercialisation of its Technituber™ seed technology with the expansion of its Southern Highlands production facility and the commissioning of two production units in North America and Mexico by its Frito Lay licensee. Agreement was also reached with Frito Lay to establish a further production unit in China to supply the South Asian markets.

Stephen Wade
*District Horticulturist
NSW Agriculture
Finley*

Victoria

Victorian potato growers faced their most difficult season for some years, with parts of the State experiencing record high temperatures and periods without rain. As a result, crop yields were down by as much as 60 percent. However, fresh market prices rose after a slump in the previous year.

With conditions favourable to its life cycle, potato moth numbers were very high and it was potentially a bad year for insect damage to crops. However, growers who adopted an IPM approach were able to control the pest with minimal insecticide use. Some growers (especially seedgrowers) had to apply insecticides at the end of the season because the shortage of water did not permit the use of irrigation to prevent soil cracking. Loopers were observed in some crops along the Murray River, but aphid numbers were generally low.

Powdery scab was found in some early-planted Thorpdale crops and was quite severe in some cases. The dry season allowed fusarium wilt to develop in a number of crisping crops, while pink rot occurred in crisping crops (and a few *Russet Burbank* crops) which had been overwatered.

Rhizoctonia was a problem in *Russet Burbank* crops around Ballarat and, combined with the stressful weather conditions, resulted in high numbers of mis-shapen tubers. There were also instances of late-season-wilting (possibly related to *Rhizoctonia*), which was severe in some areas. This was evident either in individual plants or as bare patches of 1-2 m diameter.

The area of certified seed crops passing inspection in 1996-97 was 1930 ha, marginally higher than for the previous season. *Atlantic* was again the dominant variety grown, ahead of *Sebago*. *Coliban* and *Russet Burbank* were the other major varieties, while *Desiree* continues to replace *Pontiac* as the main red-skinned variety.

Demand for seed has been very high and it has been difficult to obtain some varieties. Seed exports have increased markedly, to well above 1,500 tonne. It has been decided that the recommended price for Victorian seed will remain the same as for the previous season.

The crisping season started well, with most crops being planted within a fortnight of each other. However, there were some problems at harvest, with dry conditions making the crop susceptible to bruising. To avoid this, it was generally necessary to water crops before harvest. The lack of water meant few problems with oversized tubers and a fairly uniform size sample was obtained, although yields were generally lower. Specific gravity measurements varied widely, but cooking colour was satisfactory.

In August 1996, McCain Foods made the major announcement of an expansion in their factory operations at Ballarat. The increase in capacity of McCain's French fry factory from 90,000 tonne to 150,000 tonne was good news for growers around Ballarat and in a few other districts, who will be supplying the extra 60,000 tonne required.

Andrew Henderson
Technology Transfer Officer (Potatoes)
*Agriculture Victoria
Knoxfield*

PROMPT PAY

The Future in Fruit & Vegetable selling through Sydney Markets

The NSW Farm Produce Act 1983 will cease to have effect from 30 June 1997. It will be replaced by the

industry based and voluntary **Prompt Pay** scheme. **Prompt Pay** is a more flexible and responsive scheme that offers:

- prompt payment to growers
- prompt follow-up of complaints and penalty provisions for wholesalers who default
- grower insurance and a disputes mechanism to protect growers and wholesalers

If you are not in it, you are not protected!

From 1 July, 1997, only registered growers selling consignments to participating wholesalers will be covered by the new **Prompt Pay** scheme. After that date, registered growers are still free to consign to other wholesalers but such consignments will not be covered by the scheme.

For further information write to:

Prompt Pay
Freepost Number F55
PO Box 6
Sydney Markets NSW 2129
☎ **Prompt Pay (02) 9764 3244**

Sports Potato SWAP CARDS



This month sees the launch of Sports Potato, a series of collector swap cards designed to boost sales of prepacked potatoes by making potatoes more appealing to kids.

The cards depict cartoon potato caricatures competing in men's and women's sporting events. On the back of each cards is the names of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd place-getters of the relevant Olympic event, nutritional information and the slogan

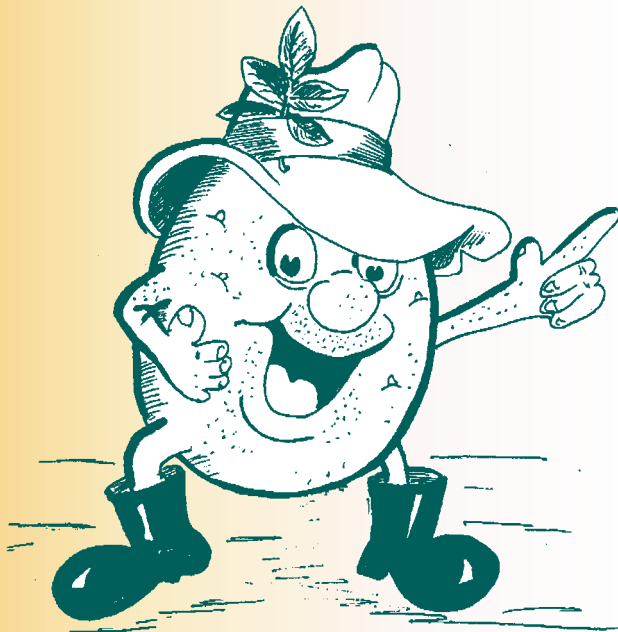
"Eat More Potatoes" Its Healthy...It's Fresh

The cards are inserted into specially designed, 6-colour potato bags at the packing stage. This first series depicts summer and winter Olympic sports, with negotiations underway for future series on Aussie Rules, rugby, soccer, netball and other high profile sports. The aim is to encourage kids to ask for more potatoes.

The concept has been developed from scratch by Bill Jenkins and Brian Doyle of Jendoy Creative Marketing in Queensland.

For more information

☎ **Bill Jenkins on 07 3274 2882**



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