

# EYES ON POTATOES

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

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## New APIC chairman



Queensland grower, Ian Rickuss, is the new chairman of the Australian Potato Industry Council, whilst Jeff Peterson has taken over from John Smink as deputy chairman.

On taking up his new role at the last APIC AGM meeting in November, Ian Rickuss said that he was looking forward to working with the other members of APIC in representing the interests of the national potato industry.

Ian feels that the strength of APIC is that it represents and brings together each of the grower, merchant and processor sectors of the industry.

Ian paid tribute to Wayne Cornish, who has been in the chair since the founding of the council in 1988-89.

*"Following in Wayne's footsteps will not be easy and as first chairman, he has done an excellent job in establishing APIC."*

*"I would like to thank both Wayne and John Smink, the former Deputy Chairman, for their efforts in APIC and I am sure they will continue to make a valuable contribution to the development of the potato industry."*

Ian grows potatoes and other heavy produce on an 80-acre farm at Gatton and is the Lockyer Valley heavy produce delegate to Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers.

Although he has been involved with heavy produce for 9 years, Ian feels he still has a lot to learn about the industry.

*"Having Jeff as deputy chairman will be a great asset in progressing APIC issues."*

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## More accredited seed laboratories

The Victorian Certified Seed Potato Authority (ViCSPA) accredits laboratories which produce minitubers and plantlets for sale to its Certified seed grower members. The aim is to ensure that only high quality plantlets and tubers are provided to ViCSPA growers to enable them to produce quality Certified seed potatoes.

The accreditation process is based on an agreement which sets out minimum facility, hygiene, virus testing and inspection requirements.

The ViCSPA accreditation officer is Roger Osborn who has 20 years experience with minituber production and was instrumental in developing the minituber process in Victoria.

Roger inspects each facility and each

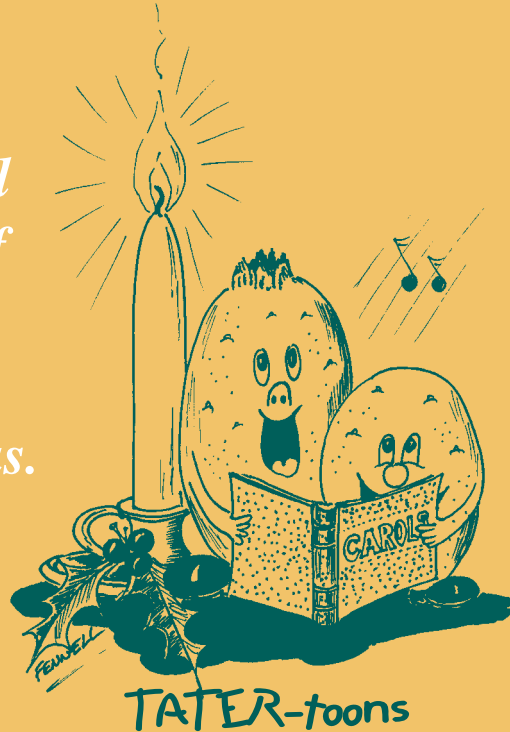
production batch and collects leaf samples for ELISA testing. All samples must test negative for the viruses tested, before being sold to Certified seed growers.

There are now seven accredited laboratories, one in NSW, one in Tasmania and five in Victoria.

It is hoped that the National Standards project will assist the development of a single accreditation standard for all schemes. This will simplify the accreditation process, avoid duplication and enable plantlets and tubers to be readily moved between states and be accepted by all schemes.

*Keith Blackmore, Manager, ViCSPA,*  
☎ 03 5957 1224

*APIC and the  
Eyes on Potatoes editorial  
team wish all members of  
the potato industry  
and your families  
a happy and safe Christmas.  
We trust that 1998  
will be a great year  
for you all.*



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Fisheries, Tasmania, on behalf of the  
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**EYES ON POTATOES**



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David Lewien resigned from the Victorian Farmers Federation in October to pursue other interests.  
The Editorial Team would like to thank David for his contribution to the Advisory Group and organising the  
distribution of *Eyes on Potatoes* and *Potato Australia* in Victoria. We wish him the best in his future endeavors.  
Andrew Henderson from Agriculture Victoria will takeover David's role and we welcome him to the team.

# A farmer's experience

## WITH IPM



I have been growing potatoes for a long time at Cora Lynn (on the KooWeeRup swamp) and more recently near Robinvale on the Murray.

Until about 5 years ago, I controlled insect pests with insecticides, like everyone else. Over the last 5 years, I have slowly cut back on the sprays as I found out more about IPM.

Last season, I tried out IPM on a larger scale with help from Paul Horne and Cindy Edward, entomologists from IPM Technologies. I didn't have to use a single spray on the crops that they monitored. That experience has convinced me to use IPM on all my crops from now on.

Even with Paul and Cindy monitoring, I was very nervous about the risk of insect damage and for me that was the biggest problem in using IPM. If they had not been monitoring, then I certainly would not have had the confidence to cut back on all those sprays.

Like most other growers in the district, I was initially very sceptical that IPM would work. So I only tried it on small paddocks and cut back on sprays slowly. Five years ago, I would not have believed that I could grow a crop without insecticides, particularly in a hot season like the one we had last year.

As it turned out, I didn't lose any yield because of insect damage. But I have had years under the normal spray program where I lost 2-3 tons per acre.

In fact using IPM meant that I was in the crop more often, checking for insects, and while I was there I could see how the crop was going and how the irrigation was keeping up. When I used to rely on insecticides, I would not go into the crop so often. That better knowledge of how the crop was growing, I believe, helped me to actually increase yields as well as improve insect control.

*Peter O'Sullivan  
Potato Grower-Cora Lynn Victoria*

*At Robinvale, monitoring starts about one week after emergence. In warmer areas such as this the higher temperatures mean that both pests and beneficial insects move through their life cycles in just a few weeks and populations can build up very quickly.*

*For your interest, this pivot has a radius of just over 400 metres.*



### Robinvale

*Peter O'Sullivan plants about 100 acres of potatoes each year at Cora Lynn on the KooWeeRup Swamp. These are destined for crisping and the fresh market. He is also involved in growing potatoes with centre-pivot irrigation near Robinvale in northern Victoria.*

*Peter's farm at Cora Lynn usually carries 120 head of dairy cattle on adjustment. He raises 20-30 friesian heifers each year and also keeps about 30 head of beef cattle.*

### Cora Lynn

# New seed technology set to change the industry

If you want to start a conversation with a potato grower raise the topic of seed. It is a sure bet that you will get some sort of response.

The quality of seed is an ongoing concern for most growers and something our seed industry has been working hard to try and improve. New technologies starting to emerge are likely to accelerate change with the promise of significant benefits to potato growers.

Lloyd Langham, seed potato grower from Riana in Tasmania, said the potato industry and particularly the seed potato industry is undergoing very rapid change both in technology and agronomy.

Lloyd and other seed producers have seen many changes to the way seed is produced over the years.

“What we are ultimately trying to achieve is a cheaper product and a higher quality product,” Lloyd said.

Multiplying seed up in the field has its risks though, particularly in the buildup of disease. One of the aims of the seed industry has been to reduce the number of field generations prior to it being planted as a commercial crop. Instead of four to five field generations the new technology can hopefully reduce this to two generations with the second crop providing seed for a commercial crop.

Keith Blackmore, Manager of Victorian Certified Seed Potato Authority (VicSPA) explained that if you can produce a much cheaper product from the laboratory then we can reduce the number of generations in the field.

So through better techniques we have a cheaper product which can be bought in larger quantities and therefore requires less generations to multiply it up in the



field to produce a profitable seed crop.

Improvements in technology have provided us with not one but several products for using in this way. Lloyd Langham describes those he is familiar with.

“There are two or three different types of minituber production being used now and there are also plantlets being adopted commercially. People are going and planting plantlets rather than minitubers. I think they have their place but are more husbandry intensive. They take more

## HOW IT WORKS

National tissue collection



Plant tissue laboratories producing plantlets



Factories and glasshouses producing plantlets, minitubers and Technitubers



Seed grower multiplies up seed in the field over two seasons



Commercial potato grower buys seed to plant

looking after than the conventional minitubers.”

“And of course you have the Technitubers. Well, if somebody had said to me five years ago I would be planting them in commercial quantities or drilling potatoes with an air seeder I would have said they’d had too much to drink the night before. I would not have believed them.”

So from a system not many years ago, where only state departments provided certified seed growers with seed and later minitubers multiplied up from tissue cultures, we now have a combination of seed growers, government departments and specialist companies producing their own minitubers from tissue cultures, which are grown either in ground, hydroponically or in special potting mixtures. Specialist companies and government are also producing plantlets, and Technico the Technitubers.

Plantlet technology is also becoming more automated. An example of this is the plant biotechnology company ForBio which is using robots for tissue culture production. Who would have thought robots would have been used in the potato industry!

Ben Dowling is an extension officer with Primary Industries South Australia but will have left to join Technico, the company that produces Technitubers, at the time this newsletter comes out. He talks about some of the benefits the changes will have for growers.

*“By reducing the number of generations you can introduce new varieties or build-up seed stocks more quickly and reduce the build-up of diseases. This is particularly important in the fresh market where growers are striving for a very good skin finish and premium prices for their potatoes.”*

Keith Blackmore warns however that reducing the number of generations reduces the disease risk but seed diseases are easily transferred if growers are not careful.

“Keeping soil borne diseases down will be a challenge. The Institute for Horticultural Development at Knoxfield in Victoria has demonstrated how easily silver scurf can be transferred,” Keith said.

Many of the new technologies are undergoing field development and are still to prove themselves as viable alternatives. And as with any major change, there is a lot for seed producers to learn.

Lloyd Langham sums up his feeling on the matter.

“I think that the changes that are occurring in the potato industry and particularly the seed potato industry are huge. Quite unbelievable really the different technologies that are out there.”

*“I think it is a credit to the industry, quite visionary actually, to look at ways to minimise the number of generations. As I said if you minimise the number of generations you cut out a lot of disease problems along the way. Has to be a benefit.”*

**(Technituber is a registered product from the company Technico.)**



## Ben joins Technico

Ben Dowling recently joined Technico as its Horticultural Development Manager based in Mt Gambier, South Australia. Although a loss for Primary Industries and Resources South Australia, Ben will still be an important resource for the potato industry. Ben's new role will be working with industry to assist in the successful adoption of the new TECHNITUBER® miniature seed potato technology. From Ben's Mt Gambier office he will facilitate Technico's expansion in the southern production areas of Australia.

☎ (08) 8725 9085

# APIC BRIEFS

## Strategic Plan to guide future funding of R&D projects

A new strategic plan for the potato industry is being developed which will provide an important focus for research and development. The plan will require input from many people throughout the industry.

Richard de Vos of Richard Marketing has been asked to manage the development of the strategic plan and will be holding discussions and focus group sessions throughout Australia over the coming months.

## Cadmium result is a positive for the industry

The extraordinary amount of work put in from the potato industry has produced a favourable result. The Australian New Zealand Food Standards Council has ratified the changes as per the Australian Potato Industry Council submission. This now brings Australia in line with the International CODEX standard. The excellent work carried out by Dr Mike McLaughlin from the CSIRO Division of Land and Water was a real catalyst in our win.

The potato industry will continue to be an active participant in the cadmium minimisation strategy.

## National Seed Certification Standards

There has been agreement for a project submission to proceed for the development and implementation of national seed potato certification standards. This project will create common certification standards within

Australia which will reduce confusion both within Australia and overseas. The latter being particularly important if we are to develop markets for export seed.

## Commercialisation of new varieties from the national breeding program

High quality seed is the basis for a competitive potato industry in Australia as it allows the industry to efficiently supply potatoes which match market needs from a variety of production environments.

Currently APIC, HRDC and Department of Natural Resources and Environment Victoria are working to develop a policy for the effective release and commercialisation of new varieties developed by the national potato improvement program at Toolangi.

The issue currently being discussed is the mechanism for releasing new varieties under Plant Breeders Rights and licensing the production, marketing and distribution of them in a way which looks after the interest of all stakeholders, and is in the best long term interest of the Australian potato industry.

To deal with this important issue APIC has established a group to negotiate with Department of Natural Resources and Environment Victoria and HRDC to make sure that the best interests of industry and all its sectors are accommodated.

## Changes in APIC

At the May AUSVEG meeting new APIC grower delegates were elected with the changes taking place during the November APIC meeting. The new APIC grower delegates are Ian Rickuss from Queensland and Max McKenna from Tasmania.

At the November APIC meeting Ian Rickuss, the grower delegate from Queensland, was elected the new Chairman of APIC and Jeff Peterson, the processing delegate from Smiths, the Deputy Chairman. I would like to welcome both of them to their new positions.

*Wayne Cornish  
Former APIC Chairman*

# FARMPAY

the new way to do business  
at Melbourne Markets

## Farmpay commences 1 Jan 98

Farmpay is a new service which has been developed at Melbourne Markets to replace the old system of licences and bonds which will finish on 31st December 1997. Farmpay still offers individual growers access to bonds in respect of their transactions with wholesalers, but it is better than the old system.

- Farmpay is simple and
- Offers growers access to larger bonds than the old system

## How does Farmpay work?

- Growers send produce to a Farmpay Wholesaler in Victoria
- The Farmpay Wholesaler must pay the grower within a maximum of 21 days unless the grower agrees to extend
- If a payment is not made to the grower within the 21 days, the grower must notify the Registrar of non-payment within the next 14 days
- If notice of non-payment is not made by the grower within 14 days, Farmpay will not pay
- If there is a problem, the Registrar will investigate

## What will Farmpay cost growers?

- Farmpay will not charge growers for access to the service. Growers will not need to enrol or fill out any membership forms
- Farmpay will not get involved with commission rates and other charges agreed between Farmpay Wholesalers and growers

## All the Grower needs to do is:

- Deal with a Farmpay Wholesaler
- Keep an accurate record of transactions with Farmpay Wholesalers and
- Operate within the time limits of Farmpay

For more information about Farmpay, or to obtain a list of Farmpay Wholesalers contact the Melbourne Market Authority on (03) 9258 6100 or the Victorian Chamber of Fresh Produce Wholesalers on (03) 9689 3233.

# Understanding the CONSUMER

Wondering why sales of fresh potatoes in many states have been on the decline? This report provides a valuable insight into the attitudes of consumers towards potatoes and some of the findings may surprise you.

The market research was carried out in May 1993 in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide and highlights the importance of the potato industry being an active player in the marketplace if it is to maintain and increase market share.

This is an excellent report and well worth reading if you are interested in better understanding many of the issues which are driving the introduction of the Potato Marketing and Promotional Levy.

The report may be over four years old but the issues are just as relevant today as they were then.

Reports are available for \$20 by sending a cheque made out to "Horticultural Research and Development Corporation" to

Horticultural Research & Development Corporation, Level 6, 7 Merriwa Street, Gordon NSW 2072. With your request quote the report name and number PT201.



## Potato grower on cadmium Taskforce

Wayne Cornish, the former Chairman of APIC, has been asked to be an industry representative on the Standing Committee of Agriculture and Resource Management (SCARM) Cadmium Taskforce.

SCARM is one of the main advisory groups to the Federal Government and to have a potato grower as a member on the Taskforce is a real plus for the industry.

Wayne achieved this position through his chairmanship of the National Farmers Federation Farm Chemicals Committee and his long association with cadmium issues.

## Variety information

Are you after information on the different varieties grown in Australia? Although the booklet is targeted at South Australian growers, people in other states will also find it a useful guide.

The booklet contains information on variety descriptions, characteristics, end uses and cooking qualities which is relevant to growers in all states. Performance information and quality of processing varieties are presented for South Australian trials.

The 20 page booklet is available for \$7 by sending a cheque made out to "SA Potato Industry Trust" to Kathryn Baum, SAFF, PO Box 6014, Halifax Street, Adelaide SA 5000.



# AUSVEG BRIEFS

## Potato Marketing and Promotion Levy

The major issue at the AUSVEG Potato Group meeting in Melbourne on the 5th November was the proposed Fresh Potato Marketing and Promotion Levy.

Eighteen industry meetings were held around Australia as part of the consultative process to decide whether to introduce a levy. The reports from these meetings were reviewed by the Potato Group along with other information that had been collected. Whilst support for the proposal was not unanimous, the committee agreed that on the basis of numbers of growers and tonnages represented there was a sufficient level of support throughout the industry for the levy proposal to succeed.

A significant change in the proposal was a clear preference for a levy of \$5.00 per tonne rather than the 2.5% *ad valorem* as suggested.

After considering all the available information the decision was made to move to the stage of having a levy put into place and a Fresh Potato Marketing and Promotion Program established through the Australian Horticultural Corporation.

The next step in the process will be to establish an interim management

committee consisting of six grower representatives, one from each state, myself as Executive Director of AUSVEG and a representative from the Australian Horticultural Corporation. Each state will be asked to nominate a grower representative.

The first task of the committee will be to complete negotiations with the Western Australian Potato Marketing Corporation to ensure participation of the Western Australian industry in the national program. This is important as Western Australia is unique amongst the states in that they have the Potato Marketing Corporation and growers already contribute a significant amount to a state marketing program for potatoes.

In the negotiations two important issues will need to be addressed with the Corporation. These are that growers in Western Australia are not disadvantaged by asking them to pay additional levies and that developing a national marketing and promotional program will not be detrimental to the very successful program already being run in Western Australia.

It is hoped that the levy will be introduced sometime in the second half of next year.

## Need for common approach to food safety

Ensuring food is safe has become a major issue for the potato industry resulting in a range of programs and approaches being put into place. The diversity of approaches and differing demands by buyers has resulted in confusion as to what needs to be done and why. AUSVEG will be trying to bring state departments and retailers together to come up with a more uniform national approach to facilitate easier adoption of food safety programs by the vegetable and potato industries.

## World Potato Congress

The AUSVEG Potato Group has decided not to proceed with the bid for the World Potato Congress in 2003 in Melbourne due to the uncertainty of attracting enough local potato growers and delegates from overseas. Given the high cost involved and the uncertainty of local industry support the Potato Group Executive felt they had little choice but to abandon the attempt.

*Brian Newman*

*Executive Director, AUSVEG*

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## Did You Know?

*Potatoes produce more protein per hectare than any of the grain crops*

*Potatoes - a healthy food*

Potatoes are virtually fat free, are low in sodium and are easy to digest

*(Source: Crookwell Potato Association Inc.)*

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*From the left Sandra Lanz (Consultant), Trevor Donovan, Tony Fisk, Todd Hill, Tony Strode, Jon Hill, Snow Donovan, Barry Donovan and Barbara Hill in the front.*

# ROBERTSON Group

Growing potatoes in the water catchment area of the biggest city in Australia creates some interesting challenges. The potato growers around Robertson thought that these challenges were best tackled with the united front of a grower group.

The group meets monthly during the season in the field or the local pub to discuss management issues. Often they are able to attract speakers from outside the area as was the case in October with Eric Coleman from Queensland who spoke to them about quality assurance.

The growers have been successful in obtaining funding from HRDC, potato levy, Sydney Water and the local council as well as putting in money of their own for project work. They now have a joint project with farmers in Dorrigo and Guyra. To assist in managing the project Sandra Lanz, a local consultant, is employed by the group.



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# What is HACCP all about

HACCP or Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points is about food safety or producing a safe product for the consumer. It is not about looks or taste. The process involves determining where hazards might occur, which are called the critical control points, and then putting a strategy into place to prevent them from happening. It is therefore about prevention not cure.

## Why are supermarkets and the industry looking at HACCP?

Surely potatoes are a safe product. In general, that is so, but there are hazards which could cause the industry problems if we are not careful. Think of the food poisonings in recent years. Those industries involved also thought they had a safe product!

HACCP is very much about prevention and focuses on putting a system in place that reduces the risk of problems developing.

So let's look at some of the hazards that a potato grower may come across and how these may be prevented.

## Chemical hazards

In the potato industry this is the area of greatest risk.

**Hazard** Chemical contamination of potatoes in the grading shed from stored chemicals.

**Solution** Do not store chemicals in the grading shed.

**Hazard** Chemical contamination of potatoes when being transported.

**Solution** Do not have chemicals or fertilisers on the truck when transporting potatoes. Clean down trucks, if necessary, prior to transporting potatoes.

**Hazard** Chemical residues from spraying.

**Solution** Follow label recommendations on use of chemicals, regularly calibrate boomspray and keep simple records on chemical use as proof of what has been done.

## Physical hazards

**Hazard** Glass in with the potatoes from beer stubbies.

**Solution** Walk along the side of the paddock that abuts the main road and pick up the stubbies before harvesting.

**Hazard** Glass from shattering lights in potatoes.

**Solution** Have covers on lights that are over the grading equipment.

## Microbial hazards (bacteria, fungi)

Not a big problem with potatoes.

**Hazard** - Microbial problems due to faecal contamination from pests such as rats.

**Solution** - Implement a pest control program in sheds and cool rooms.

*(Besides, who wants to eat a potato that a rat has been munching on!)*

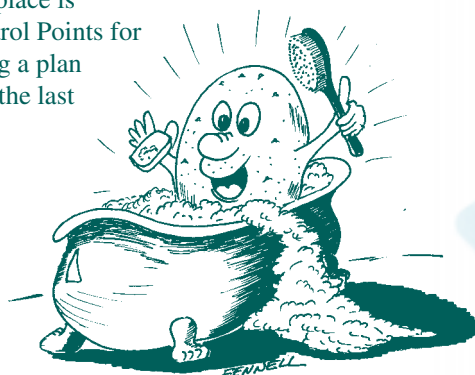
## Getting Started

The first stage of putting HACCP into place is identifying the hazards or Critical Control Points for your situation. The next stage is putting a plan into place to deal with the hazards and the last stage is carrying out the plan.

*Eric Coleman*

*Potato QA Project*

☎ (07) 5466 2222



# New blight strains hit USA, Europe

Particularly aggressive new strains of late blight, also known as Irish blight, (*Phytophthora infestans*) are spreading rapidly throughout the American continent and Europe.

Victorian plant pathologist, Dolf de Boer, had the opportunity to see this disease whilst on a recent study tour to Prince Edward Island, Scotland and the Netherlands.

Dolf said that he was alarmed because these strains are particularly aggressive and tend to spread through a crop more quickly than our current strains.

*“It occurs earlier in the season and can attack the main stems killing large parts of the plant quickly.”*

*“The new strains are more likely to attack the tubers and can then be spread by planting infected seed.”*

Dolf said that the other big problem with these new strains is that they are resistant to Ridomil®, the chemical currently used in Australia against our strain of late blight.

Dolf said that whilst the likelihood of these strains being introduced into Australia is currently low, we should be aware of its potential impact and be prepared.

The risks for us are that if these new strains do appear in Australia, then the disease will most likely become much more common in the traditional late blight areas such as in Victoria and Tasmania where it now only occurs sporadically. It can also potentially move into other production areas.

The disease will become more difficult and more costly to control and will affect seed production and certification.

Dolf says that if anyone notices that an outbreak of late blight is not responding to Ridomil, then they should contact their Department of Agriculture immediately.

*Dolf can be contacted on*

☎ (03) 9210 9222

# Most states are **EXPANDING** potato production

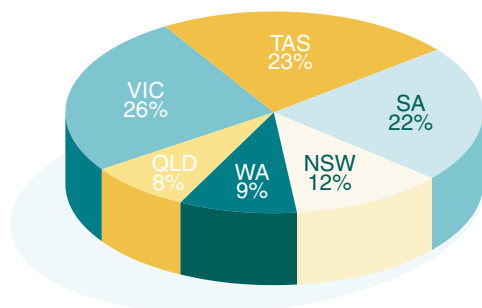
Production, area and gross value of ware and processing potatoes increased in all states except for Queensland for the period 94/95 to 95/96.

Some people have indicated interest in knowing the breakup between fresh, processing and seed potatoes. Unfortunately when I asked the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) they could only separate out seed potatoes.

In the process of that enquiry I also found out that the statistics that we had been supplied for the last edition of *Eyes on Potatoes* did not include seed. So for consistency and to enable comparison between seasons, I have kept the first table in the same format as last edition and presented the seed statistics separately.

Leigh Walters ☎ (08) 8232 5555

**Production of ware and processing potatoes**



## Total production, area and value for ware and processing potatoes for the year ended 31 March 1996

State	Area (ha)	Production (tonnes)	Yield (t/ha)	Gross value (\$)
NSW	7,167.8	162,456.2	22.7	49,803,459
QLD	4,672.0	103,845.1	22.2	42,513,376
SA	8,114.9	282,568.4	34.8	102,735,591
TAS	7,565.2	302,034.8	39.9	66,828,408
VIC	11,456.5	335,648.8	29.3	114,237,152
WA	2,836.0	121,546.1	42.9	37,949,737

*Notes: Yield is calculated by dividing production by area*

*Gross value is an estimate by ABS. Final figures were not available prior to going to press.*

*(Source : Australian Bureau Statistics)*

## Production, area and value for seed potatoes for the year ended 31 March 1996

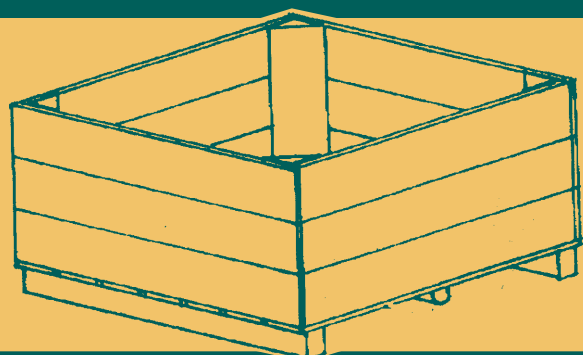
State	Area (ha)	Production (tonnes)	Yield (t/ha)	Gross value (\$)
NSW	1,055.9	19,365.0	18.3	7,746,000
QLD	359.5	7,306.8	20.3	2,922,720
SA	635.9	19,737.8	31.0	5,921,340
TAS	764.1	26,920.2	35.2	10,768,080
VIC	2,173.5	58,213.8	26.8	23,285,520
WA	297.8	10,247.0	34.4	2,966,199

*Notes: Yield is calculated by dividing production by area*

*Gross value is an estimate by ABS. Final figures were not available prior to going to press.*

*(Source : Australian Bureau Statistics)*

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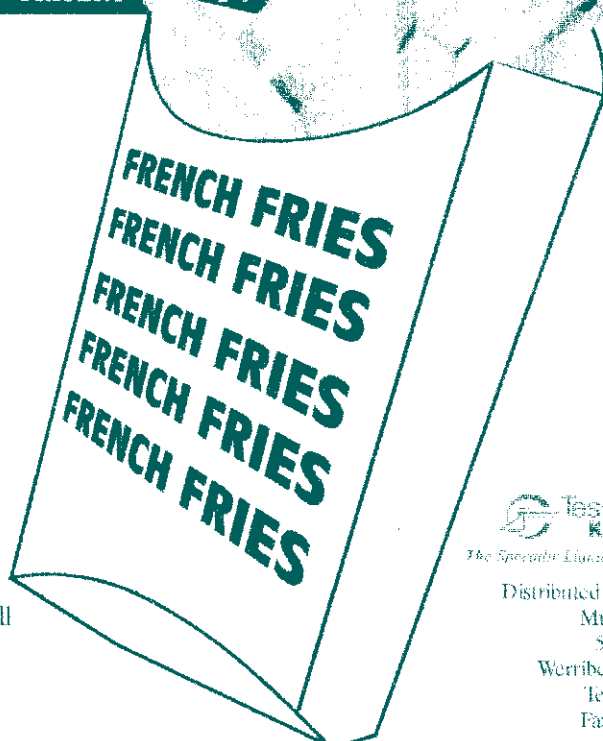
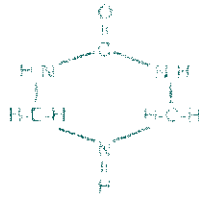
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## APIC R&D Committee

The APIC Research & Development Committee met in October in Melbourne to consider fifty first stage proposals submitted to the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation (HRDC) for research and development (R&D) by private and public organisations and groups.

This year a two stage process has been introduced where applicants firstly put in a two page proposal. These are considered by the committee and full proposals requested at the end of December from applicants with projects that show the greatest potential and meet industry priorities. The full proposals are then looked at by the committee and a recommendation on projects to be funded forwarded to the HRDC Board.

The successful applicants are notified in May with new projects starting in July 1998.



*Front row : Jonathan Eccles (HRDC), Jack Meagher (Chairman), Max Walker (Secretary), Max McKenna (Tasmania), Lawrie Shaw (Victoria)*

*Back row : Jeff Peterson (Smiths), Wayne Cornish (South Australia), Ian Rickuss (Queensland), Peter Hardman (Simplot), Les Horsfield (Merchant), Geoff Moar (New South Wales)*

*(A Western Australian representative was unable to attend)*

# Potato Internet Starter Pak



**Having difficulty finding potato sites? The Potato Internet Starter Pak is a collection of internet pages with links to potato sites all over the world. Just the thing you need to sort out what is useful out there in cyberspace.**

**To obtain a copy of the Starter Pak email [lwalters@saff.com.au](mailto:lwalters@saff.com.au) and put in the subject box Request for Potato Internet Starter Pak and in the area where you normally write your message, Request. It is important that the message is typed exactly as indicated for the subject box but**

**additional information can be entered into the message area. The return email is computer generated and does not tolerate mistakes!**

**For those of you who want it sent by snail mail send a cheque for \$15.00 payable to:**

**“South Australian Farmers Federation”  
C/- Leigh Walters  
South Australian Farmers Federation  
PO Box 6014  
Halifax Street Adelaide SA 5000**

## HRDC research information on the internet



Horticultural Research and Development Corporation and Elders have included information about potato projects on the internet.

Check out what is happening at:  
<http://www.elders.com.au>

## SCAB forum

A forum was held in Devonport, Tasmania in mid-June to give the potato industry an opportunity to provide input into the direction of the HRDC funded scab project. All sectors of the industry were represented.

The forum looked at the current status of scab research and the economic implications of scab for the various industry sectors. It was clear from the forum that the scab issue is still a number one priority for Tasmanian growers.

Dr Hoong Pung of Serve-Ag Pty. Ltd. outlined progress with an HRDC funded survey on common scab in Tasmania whilst Dolf de Boer, of the Institute for Horticultural Development in Victoria, discussed previous research on powdery scab.

Distinguishing between powdery and common scab in the field emerged as an important issue. Whilst usually the symptoms of each type are quite distinct,

sometimes they become confused, making field identification very difficult. This has important implications for implementing the appropriate management measures.

Participants said they found the initial findings of the survey (as reported in *Potato Australia* Vol 8 September 1997) were helpful and that they thought the survey should continue for another season.

Dr Pung also discussed Serve-Ag's work in evaluating a range of chemicals which have shown potential overseas in controlling common scab. Feedback from the forum indicated that there was strong support for this work to continue in order that some short term control measures could be implemented.

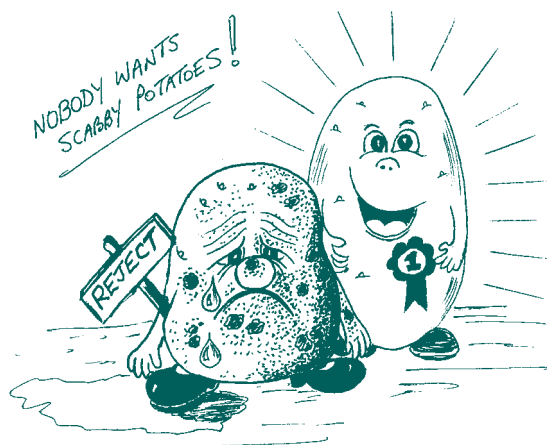
Scab has the biggest economic implications in the fresh market. In the processing industry, scab lesions are usually removed during the peeling process. However, the fresh market is increasingly demanding blemish-free produce.

Neil Armstrong, Managing Director of Harvest Moon, a fresh market exporter,

said that the growing interstate consumer demand for washed potatoes, which must be a flawless product, made potato scab totally unacceptable.

“The consumers don't want scab on their potatoes, they don't want any lesion on the skin of the potato. Rightly or wrongly, they determine the market place.”

Mr Armstrong told the forum that in South Australia, flawless product draws \$1000 a tonne, slightly blemished \$500 a tonne and the lowest quality \$200 a tonne.



# Growing Potatoes in Queensland

## Markets

The Queensland potato industry is valued at between 40-50 million dollars per year and on average produces about 110,000 tonnes annually.

Most produce is sold on the fresh market mainly supplying the period from late May to November. The major varieties grown include *Sebago*, *Sequoia*, *Exton*, *Red la Soda* and *Pontiac*. Plantings of *Rideau* and *Snowgem* have increased in recent years as the demand for a quality washed product increases.

About 30,000 tonnes of *Atlantic* potatoes are grown under contract for the five crisping companies. The Smiths company has a major crisping plant in Brisbane which predominantly sources potatoes from both Queensland and New South Wales.

## Yields

Yields in the winter growing areas of southern Queensland are on average about 25-30 tonnes per hectare and below that achieved in southern states.

This occurs for a number of reasons. Firstly, the short day length in winter reduces the incident radiation on the crop and hence its ability to produce dry

matter. Secondly, severe cold westerly winds which usually occur from late June to late August dramatically reduce the cropping capacity. In pockets protected from the wind yields in the order of about 50 tonnes per ha are achievable. Thirdly, seed can be on the 'young' side and this can reduce both emergence and yield.

## Cropping seasons

In the Lockyer and Fassifern Valleys two potato crops are grown each year. The first (spring) crop in the Lockyer is planted from early May to mid-July using certified seed from southern states; there being no seed certification scheme in Queensland.

This crop is harvested from mid-September through to early November. The smalls from this first harvest are generally graded out and kept under cold storage to be planted as whole seed in the second (autumn) crop.

The second crop is planted from late February to March and is harvested from late June to early July. Because this crop is growing into cold weather these potatoes can be held in the ground for some time. In contrast, harvesting of the spring crop is critical as this crop will not hold in the ground for long due to the hot stormy summer conditions which are conducive to tuber breakdown.

On the Atherton Tablelands and in the Brisbane region only one crop is planted

commencing in April. This crop is harvested from August through to October.

On the eastern Darling Downs where winters are more severe and frosts are a regular occurrence planting does not commence until late August and harvesting occurs from late December until February.

Most growing regions have suffered severe drought in the last 6-7 years. In particular the Lockyer and Fassifern Valleys have been affected and this has resulted in a large drop in production in these regions.

## Growing the crop

Since the majority of the Queensland crop is winter grown and only 40% of annual rainfall occurs in winter, irrigation is essential. Most growers use overhead sprinklers (generally solid set) and travelling irrigators. Solid set irrigation is a convenient means for preventing crops from frosting.

Apart from water availability, the major agronomic problems faced by growers would be soil borne diseases including *Verticillium* wilt, black dot and powdery scab.

Given the small farm sizes in Queensland short rotations have been adopted resulting in major problems with soil borne diseases. Target spot and potato moth although being problems in certain seasons are relatively easily controlled. The most common rotations with potatoes include forage or grain sorghum, sweet corn, oats and lucerne.

## Wind damage is also a major problem.

Weed control early in the crop is obtained through herbicide application and generally no weed control is conducted after this. A good weed stand at harvest facilitates potato digging, particularly in the heavier textured soils of the Lockyer and Fassifern Valleys.

Whether on the red soils of the Atherton Tableland or the black soils of the Lockyer Valley the native soils are inherently fertile. Over time, however, the fertility of these soils has declined to the point where large fertiliser inputs are required and applications of zinc and boron may be necessary for optimal crop production.

*Stephen Harper*

*Department of Primary Industries  
Queensland*

**Atherton** ●

**Charters Towers** ●

**Townsville** ●

**Rockhampton** ●

**Bundaberg** ●

**Darling Downs** ●  
**Lockyer Valley** ●●  
**Fassifern Valley** ●●

**Brisbane** ●●●

*In the south, the major production include the Lockyer and Fassifern Valleys, Eastern Darling Downs and rural farming land around Brisbane city. In the north, the Atherton Tablelands produces winter season potatoes.*

*Sporadic production occurs at Rockhampton, Charters Towers and Townsville and Bundaberg is becoming increasingly important for potato growing. In contrast the Redland Bay area, near Brisbane is becoming less important for potato production as prime agricultural land is absorbed by urban encroachment.*

# ROUND-UP

## State

### Western Australia

Simplex Australia's processing crops have been planted and the good news is that this includes 230 ha at Scott River. Last season, delays in planting at Scott River resulted in disappointing crops.

It's expected that 36,000 tonnes will be processed, including 5,000 tonnes *Kennebec*, 3,000 tonnes *Shepody* and 28,000 tonnes *Russet Burbank*. The reduction from last year's deliveries is due to a softer market.

New contracts have been signed and growers can expect to be paid a base price of \$185 per tonne (\$180 for *Kennebec*). Incentive payments are expected to lift this price to over \$220 per tonne for good quality crops.

Unusually, most of the seed planted came from Tasmania because of virus in the local seed.

Autumn planted fresh market crops have already been harvested and winter planted crops are now being dug. The winter was unusual with many frosts, which badly affected some crops. However the warm, dry conditions that prevailed afterwards meant that powdery scab has not been a problem, yields and quality have been good and production targets will certainly be met.

Beta Spuds potato merchants are the first to be accredited with SQF 2000, a quality assurance scheme designed for rural industries. Other merchants and sectors of the fresh market industry are also pursuing SQF 2000 accreditation.

**Peter Dawson**  
*Development Officer, Horticulture  
Agriculture Western Australia*

### South Australia

Production of summer sown/winter harvested washed potatoes continued to expand in the Mallee and Riverland. Heavy frosts in late May killed the tops of most varieties in the Mallee and yields of about 30 tonnes/hectare were obtained as crops were dug from July to October.

Unsettled weather, with strong winds and cool nights in October, delayed the growth of potato crops on the North Adelaide Plains.

*Coliban* remained the major variety grown for the washed, white skin market in all the fresh market growing areas of SA. Small areas of *Crystal*, *Exton* and *Snow Gem* were also grown.

In the South East very warm and dry spring conditions meant that ground preparation and planting proceeded unhindered. There was heavy rain on 31st October, ranging from 50-100mm, which resulted in some minor losses of just-planted potatoes. The warmer soil temperature meant that the earliest planted crops are further advanced than they were last season.

The area planted to French fry potatoes remained static, with 60-65,000 tonnes expected to be produced. Most fresh market growers were planting a similar area to last season. The Lower South East produces mainly red-potatoes, the main varieties being *Pontiac*, *Red La Soda*, *Bison* and *Desiree*.

The availability of irrigation water is a significant issue for the entire South Australian potato industry. There are changing regulations with respect to groundwater in the Mallee and South East, Murray River water in the Riverland and on the North Adelaide Plains with the future commissioning of the Bolivar pipeline.

There is some interest in drip irrigation, particularly from growers with traveling irrigators. One grower in the Peebinga region planted a trial area of five acres and another small block was planted in the lower South East in mid November.

**Ben Dowling**  
*Industry Development Officer  
Primary Industries and Resources  
South Australia*

### Victoria

In the Ballarat district, a period favourable for good soil cultivation was followed by some timely rain, which has set up good planting conditions. Planting may be completed early and, although some growers are a bit short of water, there is the prospect of a good season.

The major issue in the district, at the time of writing (in mid-November), is that the McCain's contract price had not been finalised.

South of Colac, the soil has been dry enough to allow slightly early planting, while around Portland, Thorpdale and the Otways things have largely run to schedule. On the Koo Wee Rup Swamp, some growers delayed planting slightly in anticipation of a little more rain.

At the same time, too much rain in Queensland has delayed harvesting and meant that some Victorian merchants are having trouble in sourcing potatoes.

This season will see trial plantlets produced by Potex/Wrightson technology field tested on properties in Victoria and South Australia. The results of these trials should help to clarify the likely impact of such technologies on the seed industry.

Another major talking point for seed growers is the release of new varieties under the Plant Variety Rights scheme. The Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DRNE) and APIC currently are developing a policy on this issue.

A representative Victorian industry group has recently been set up to develop and implement a revised policy with respect to potato cyst nematode. The aim is to remove PCN as a barrier to the trade of Victorian potatoes both interstate and overseas.

The results of benchmarking studies of financial performance, conducted in July-August by DNRE, will be discussed with seedgrowers and McCain's growers during the next couple of months. The studies will indicate to growers the aspects of production which they might change in order to improve profitability.

**Andrew Henderson**  
*Technology Transfer, Potatoes  
Agriculture Victoria*

## New South Wales

Meetings were held at Armidale, Crookwell, Finley and Windsor in September and October over the proposed introduction of a fresh marketing levy.

A cold, dry winter preceded the milder spring conditions across most of New South Wales. Digging of the autumn crop started in June. Yields were high in the Dorrigo district, average for the Sydney basin and down in the Riverina. In the Riverina high temperatures at planting followed by cooler conditions during the growing season reduced yields. Crop yields averaged 37 tonnes/hectare at Dorrigo, 25 tonnes/hectare in the Sydney basin and 18 tonnes/hectare in the Riverina. The quality of many of the Dorrigo crops was very good.

Growers received good prices over winter for the autumn crop, ranging from \$25 to \$27 a 50 kilogram bag in the Dorrigo area, \$15 to \$40 a 50 kg bag in the Sydney basin and from \$400 (dirty, bulk) to \$475 (washed, 10 kg bag) a tonne in the Riverina.

Wet weather during July delayed digging in the Sydney basin, when prices lifted to \$30-\$40 a 50 kg bag. Potato leaf roll virus also affected many crops in the Sydney basin. The autumn crop harvest finished in late October in the Riverina.

Spring crop areas are slightly up on last year, while summer crop planting has started in the Tableland's districts.

Sowing of the spring crop in the Riverina, Sydney basin and Dorrigo districts finished on schedule. Crop areas are slightly up on last year with higher processing plantings in the Riverina and fresh plantings in the Dorrigo district. Growing conditions have been favourable in all areas and disease pressure has been low.

Harvesting is expected to start in late November in the Riverina, mid December in the Dorrigo district and late December in the Sydney basin.

With the dry weather planting of the summer crop started on schedule in the Central and Southern Tablelands. Both fresh and processing crop areas in the Central Tableland's districts are expected to be slightly up on last year.

**Stephen Wade**  
District Horticulturist  
NSW Agriculture

## Queensland

With adequate water supplies and the expectation of a good price, the planting of the Lockyer and Fassifern spring crop appears to have been higher than in the previous 2-3 years. An extremely mild winter combined with minimal westerly winds resulted in ideal growing conditions so that above average yields are expected.

This area has recorded above average early spring rainfall with falls occurring at roughly fortnightly intervals. On its heavy textured black earths, harvesting was delayed for at least one week after each rain. The reduced supply helped maintain a healthy market price over a period in which prices were expected to drop substantially.

This good early season rain will relieve some of the pressure placed on underground water supplies, particularly as we enter the summer season.

However, it has also meant that potato crisping companies have experienced some difficulty in obtaining supplies, particularly as the Lockyer Valley is the main supply area in this period. Some potatoes have been sourced early from districts that were due to supply at a later date.

Frosts in August contributed to low S.G.s and depressed yields in many crisping crops. There is virtually no carry over production from other areas, which has further tightened supply.

The Queensland DPI is currently evaluating new potato varieties in both northern and southern Queensland. Of these varieties *Red Ruby*, *Ruby Lou*, *Shine* and *Crisper* show good potential.

The group of Lockyer Valley farmers developing a QA system with the assistance of Eric Coleman, have now completed their second market trial. The first trial highlighted consumer preference for a quality and consistent product. Additionally, packaging in 20 kg light weave hessian bags resulted in excessive greening and drying. The pilot group has now completed chemical user training including spray rig calibration.

Soil borne diseases have come under close scrutiny in this year's crops. All production areas in southern Queensland were found to have the fungal pathogens associated with early dying (*Verticillium* and *Colletotrichum*) as well as *Rhizoctonia* and *Fusarium*. Producers in these areas should bear in mind these diseases have alternative hosts often grown in rotation with potatoes.

**Stephen Harper**  
Development Extension Officer  
Department of Primary Industries

## Tasmania

In the first edition of *Eyes on Potatoes* I made reference to a well-known quote about life and was subsequently taken-to-task about its use. With a little more searching I found that the full quote should have been "*Life isn't meant to be easy my child but it certainly can be exciting*" and it came from the play "*Back To Methusela*" by George Bernard Shaw. I don't know that the full quote changes what I had written very much, except I don't think I would describe the ups and downs of Agriculture as exciting.

Another comment concerned the lack of correlation in the tonnage of potatoes produced in Tasmania. This occurred partly because the figures quoted were for 94-95 whilst Peter and Tracey used an estimate for the 95-96 year. Also the ABS stats did not include seed, as explained in the stats article on page 10 of this issue. As you know, "*there are lies, damned lies and statistics!*"

I'm always happy when I receive some feedback about an article as it shows the recipients are reading what's printed.

This past winter was rather dry in most areas but even with some heavy frosts the weather was not cold enough to cause losses through high sugars. From time to time low temperatures produce tubers with high levels of reducing sugars which ultimately result in French fries that have a brown hue and of low value. Most properties appear to have reasonable quantities stored, but as is always the case, rain will be needed as only about 60 percent of requirements are stored.

This season plantings have been delayed because of slow sales and the carry-over in storage of tubers which will be used to start the 1998 processing season. To-date I haven't heard of any seed disasters, although last week a sample came in which appeared as though it had suffered from oxygen starvation and the typical blacking of tissue was evident. This is a reminder to all who cool store seed to ensure that adequate aeration occurs throughout that time.

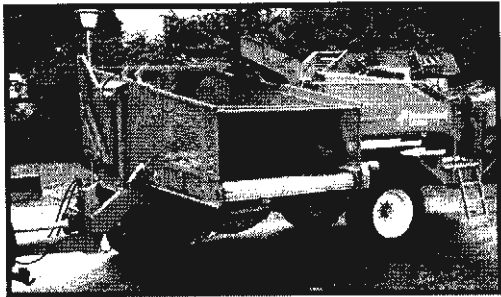
By the time you are reading this copy, irrigation will be under-way. So remember to use a suitable system to determine how much water to apply and when, because water is your most valuable asset and resource at this time of the year. Of course be a good scout and be prepared for the twin foliar diseases target spot and Irish blight!

To all growers and your families, I wish you happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

**Bruce Beattie**  
Senior Horticulturist  
Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries

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## Jersey Royals on King Island

Continuing its tradition of producing fine foods, King Island is the first area in Australia to commercially grow *Jersey Royal* potatoes.

This is a very old variety and has been grown in the Jersey Islands since the 1860's for European markets.

*Jersey Royal* is a gourmet potato, reputed to be very flavoursome, particularly when harvested and eaten "new" or immature, that is before the skins have set and when the tubers are about the size of an egg.

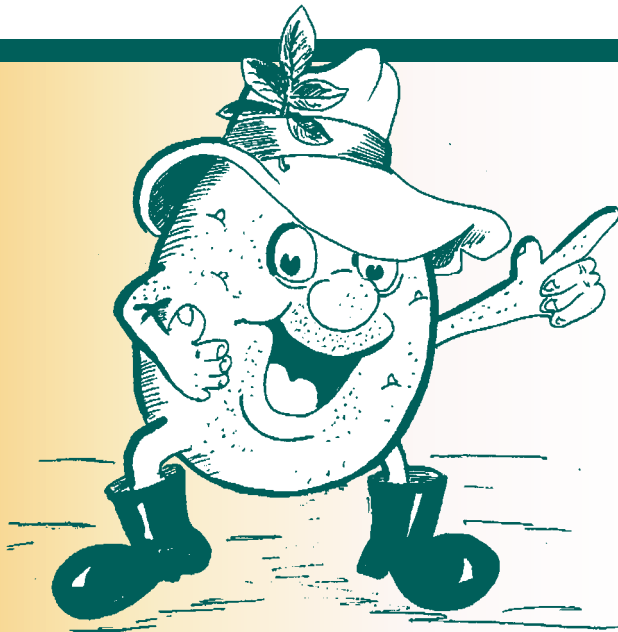
*Jersey Royal* was introduced to Australia in a joint venture by Graham Liney of Willow Vale Potatoes and Andrew Baker of Sunrise Agriculture and marketed in conjunction with Woolworths.

King Island, in Bass Strait, was chosen to grow the variety because of its similarity to the Jersey Islands, its potential for year-round production, its disease freedom and its reputation for fine foods.

This year 150 tonnes were harvested, with production expected to increase to 1000 tonnes within two years.

*Jersey Royal* is a white skinned and yellow fleshed variety and yields about 17-19t/ha without irrigation.

Andrew Baker can be contacted on ☎ (03) 6427 8553



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