

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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L-R: Ted Forsythe (Chairman NE Potato Growers), David Addison (Committee person NW Growers), Lloyd Langham (Secretary, Simplot Seed Growers), Steve Beebe (President, J.R. Simplot Co. Boise, Idaho).

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Simplot impressed with their Aussie operations

During February several of Simplot's US senior executives visited Tasmania as part of their annual review of the Australian operations.

The visiting party included Ms Gay Simplot, Mr Don Simplot and Mr Scott Simplot as well as Mr Steve Beebe (President of J.R. Simplot company USA) and Mr Jim Munyon (President, Food Group). They were accompanied by Mr Walter Bugno, Mr Terry O'Brien and Mr Peter Wise of Simplot Australia.

The Simplot Family continues to be impressed with the Simplot Australia operations in Tasmania and have reaffirmed their commitment to continue further investments in the State. Evidence of this was their participation at the opening of the Montague Cold Storage Facility located at the Simplot Devonport facility.

Both family members and senior executives stated that Tasmania is without a doubt a world class growing region for potatoes and vegetables.

Simplot Australia is being positioned as a major future source of supply for products into Asia, with the process of turning over current US supplied Asian customers to Simplot Australia now underway.

Leanne Oosterhof
Corporate Communications and PR Manager - Simplot Australia

Below Pic L-R:

Graham McKenna (Chairman Simplot Pea Growers), David Hardstaff (Committee person NW Potato Growers), Walter Bugno (M.D. Simplot Aust.), Don Simplot (Office of the Chair J.R. Simplot Co. Boise, Idaho), Max McKenna (Chairman, NW Potato Growers).



Welcome...



...to this March edition of *Eyes on Potatoes*. As so often happens in this vast country of ours, farmers at one end of the country are battling to survive the ravages of drought whilst people at the other end are battling to cope with the excesses of flood.

Whilst we can do little about the extremes of nature, we can learn to better manage the water we have under our control. After all water is one of the most precious of our natural resources.

In this edition we take a broad look at the national water reforms that are being implemented in every state and a Robertson potato grower, Trevor Donovan shares his experiences with monitoring soil moisture levels in his crop.

The feedback we have received on previous editions has been very positive and we thank those that have taken the trouble to contact us. However we would like to hear more about the issues you would like to see covered in future editions. Please contact the editor or any of the advisory group members listed below.

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

EYES ON POTATOES



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Eyes on Potatoes is distributed free of charge to all participants of the Australian Potato Industry with assistance from the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation and the Potato Levy.



Trevor Donovan checking his tensiometers and rain gauge in his potato crop.

A Farmer's Experience with soil moisture monitoring.

I started using tensiometers in 1994 because I wanted to know if I was putting enough water on the crop and if I was putting it on at the right time.

During the 1995/96 season we were able to run the tensiometers along side an Enviroscan. The Enviroscan is able to automatically record soil moisture throughout the day and night for several weeks. This information is then downloaded onto a computer and the soil moisture readings are shown in a graph. I found this helped me understand what was happening down the soil profile, over a period of time.

The Enviroscan gave me the confidence to believe what the tensiometers were telling me. Traditionally we would look at the crop and scratch the soil surface to determine if we needed water.

I now use tensiometers rather than an Enviroscan because they are inexpensive, easy to move from early to late crops, and I can easily have a couple of stations to cover different soil types in one paddock.

I install the tensiometers about one week after emergence. I put in a 12, 18, and 30

inch tensiometer. The most important one is the 12 inch because it is where all the active roots are and where the fertiliser is. You need to have good soil moisture to ensure the fertiliser is active. The 18 and 30 inch tensiometers tell me how far the water I am applying is penetrating so I know if I have put on too much and wasted water or if I need to apply more. I aim to keep the 30 inch tensiometer constant throughout the season.

Through the use of tensiometers I applied less water but more frequently last season. This season I am applying more water because it is a hot dry year and we did not have good subsurface moisture before planting. This is reflected in the tensiometer readings.

Crop yields have increased by an average of 3 tonnes per acre through the use of tensiometers. I am also able to produce a more even processing crop by maintaining an even soil moisture.

I believe tensiometers to be a simple cost effective way for smaller growers to monitor soil moisture. Soil moisture monitoring is also the best way of saving water and better utilising it.

Trevor Donovan grows 90 acres of processing and fresh market potatoes with his brother Barry in the Robertson district of NSW. The Donovan family have been growing potatoes in the district for 30 years, with the main varieties grown being Sebago and Atlantic. The brothers also run 120 head of beef cattle.

- Sydney
- Robertson
- Canberra

PCN Update

The Victorian Potato Industry Potato Cyst Nematode (PCN) Working Group chaired by Geoff Biggs met twice in 1997 to review the Victorian PCN Policy and the proposed regulations within the Victorian Plant Health Products Act (1995), prepare an implementation strategy for agreed regulations within Victoria and to develop a plan to address any potential future "discovery" of PCN or other root borne potato diseases.

A technical review of the Draft Potato Cyst Nematode Policy and preparation of draft PCN Protocols by consultants should be completed by the middle of March 1998.

The draft protocols will include how to prevent the introduction and spread of PCN and its control and eradication.

The protocols will cover seed, ware and processing growers, packers, processors and bin recyclers. It will also include procedures for the disinfestation of machinery and containers, waste disposal and field surveys.

In areas affected by PCN the protocols will include procedures for the disposal of produce from infected land, disinfestation of machinery, containers and personnel, follow up auditing of infested sites, waste disposal for growers, packers, processors and bin recyclers, presenting information on the distribution of PCN and the treatment of infected sites.

Once the draft policy and protocols have been developed industry will have a chance to comment at meetings to be held across the state. This will pave the way for adoption of the PCN Policy and Protocols by the Victorian Potato Industry.

Russell Sully,
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Agriculture Victoria
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Water Reform

What does it mean?

There has been a lot of controversy over the Federal Government's plans to reform water management practices throughout the nation.

In this edition of Eyes on Potatoes we attempt to explain very broadly what the national reforms are about. Additionally, we have obtained comments from the state farmer organisations and summarised the major concerns being expressed to them by potato farmers.

In 1994, COAG (the Council of Australian Governments, consisting of the Prime Minister, the State Premiers, the Territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association) agreed to implement a reform process across both urban and rural Australia to achieve an efficient water industry throughout the nation.

The reform package revolves around several key principles, which are briefly summarised below.

- **Cost recovery and pricing**
Pricing will be on full cost recovery, not only to cover operating and delivery costs but also to allow for capital investment and infrastructure to be replaced.
- **Institutional reform**
The role of providing water services will be separated from the resource management, standard setting and regulatory roles of government.
- **Water allocation and trading of sustainable water entitlements**
Farmers who are able to save water will be able to sell it through a water market. Others will be able to buy additional water on the market.
- **Local management of resources**
There will be increased local management of irrigation schemes.

- **Environment and water quality**

The environment will be recognised as an important and legitimate water user and amounts allocated accordingly. This is to preserve the health and integrity of our river systems and to assist in overcoming environmental problems associated with use of the water resource.

- **Public consultation and education**

In implementing the reforms the COAG agreement requires state and territory governments to consult widely with local governments and water users in individual catchments. Whilst specific measures may differ between catchments, they must be in line with the broad principles outlined by COAG.

- **Considering the "big picture"**

Decisions on water management usually affect others and therefore the catchment concept will be used to assist better decision making and administration of the water resources.

Major issues concerning potato farmers

The following are some of the issues raised as concerns:

- **Allocation disagreements between users.**

The situation of setting an allocation for an area with the option of water trading sounds equitable when looking at an entire catchment. For individuals though it is causing a fair bit of concern. Businesses are developed based on the rules and the regulations of the time. When something new comes in, however equitable it may be for the whole community, it can result in a significant additional cost for an individual which can impact negatively on their business. On the other hand, some farmers who are not high water

users may receive a better deal than before and therefore see the change as a nice windfall.

- **Price increases to achieve cost recovery**

As there are moves towards cost recovery many farmers will pay more for water which increases the cost of production. When potato prices are low, price increases are particularly difficult to absorb. Even when prices are good, nobody likes increases in any of their costs.

- **Are farmers being asked to pay more than their fair share for water.**

This is a complex issue but there is concern that farmers may be being asked to pay more than their fair share for maintaining environmental flows. This is also tied up with the question of whether the general public is contributing their fair share to the cost of environmental flows and also the upkeep of the entire system from which they benefit.

- **Difficulty in obtaining an additional allocation to support expansion.**

As with land, there is a limit to how much water can be used for farming. In many areas we are reaching that limit. In some areas this will have an impact on future development which is of concern to farmers in areas affected.

We are right in the middle of the water reform process and there is a lot still to be done. The issues concerning farmers differ quite a bit from area to area. In this article it has not been possible to provide answers, as in many instances the issues

**COAG
adopts strategy
for water reforms
in 1994**

**States and
territories
implement
reforms**

**Water
reforms introduced
by 2001**

are still being discussed. In some cases the changes will only be of minor concern while in other situations there will be a significant impact on farm businesses.

Any major change, such as water reform, will result in winners and losers. Hopefully though the end result is a fair one for the majority of potato farmers.

For further information on the water reforms farmers can contact their state grower organisation or one of the following government departments:

New South Wales

Integrated Natural Resources Policy
Department of Land and Water
Conservation
Ph : (02) 9895 7819
Fax : (02) 9895 7845

Queensland

Regional Infrastructure Development
Department of Natural Resources
Ph : (07) 3224 8145
Fax : (07) 3224 2245

South Australia

Water Resources
Department of Environment, Heritage
and Aboriginal Affairs
Ph : (08) 8204 9111
Fax : (08) 8204 9144

Tasmania

Land and Water Resources Management
Branch
Department of Primary Industry and
Fisheries
Ph : (03) 6233 3856
Fax : (03) 6233 7559

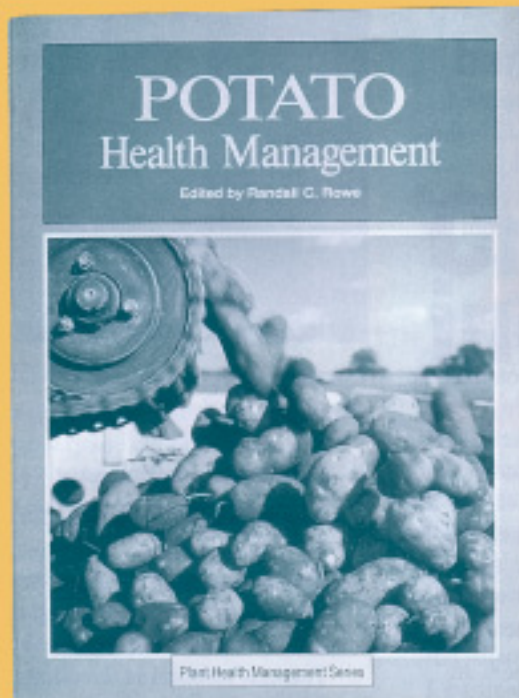
Victoria

Water Bureau
Department of Natural Resources and
Environment
Ph : (03) 9412 4658
Fax : (03) 9412 4360

Western Australia

Water and Rivers Commission
Ph : (08) 9278 0578
Fax : (08) 9278 0584

Eyes on Potatoes would like to thank the Department of Primary Industries and Energy for permission to use extracts from various Waterways newsletters in providing the above overview. If you would like to receive the Waterways newsletters and keep up to date with the water reforms phone (02) 6272 4084 or fax (02) 6272 4526. The newsletter is provided free of charge.



American Phytopathological Society

Although the name is a mouthful, this group has some quite useful information to offer the Australian Potato industry.

The group is based in the USA and has produced information on crop management with a strong emphasis on diseases. Although the information has been compiled for US farmers the publications have been used throughout the world.

When interviewing people from around Australia I found two of APS publications, Potato Health Management and the Compendium of Potato Diseases were quite commonly referred to by many people including some growers.

Potato Health Management is a step by step guide to raising a healthy potato crop from seed to storage. It is written in a language to be read by a wide reading audience and is about an A4 size book of 178 pages. In the back there is also a list of extension publications and where to obtain them from in the USA.

Compendium of Potato Diseases is currently out of print and a new edition is being compiled. It is

unlikely we will see this before January 1999.

As with any overseas information, care needs to be taken in how it is used. Not all diseases mentioned are present in Australia and sometimes the recommendations for those that are may not be appropriate for Australian conditions. Keeping that in mind, there is still a lot of interesting information that can be gleaned from the publications.

APS books can be obtained from
Johima Books
Ph : (02) 9687 1922
in Sydney or The Rural

Store Ph : (03) 5782 1118 in Kilmore, Victoria. These stores also have a range of other potato publications so, if you are interested, ask them to send you a catalogue.

Other technical bookstores may have the books as well and most can order them in if required. The books can also be obtained directly from :

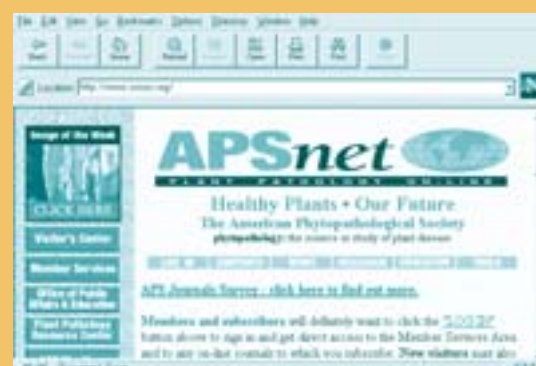
American Phytopathological Society
3340 Pilot Knob Road
St. Paul, MN 55121-2097
USA

Fax : 0015 1 612 454 0766
Email : aps@scisoc.org

Information on APS services can be found on their web page at -

<http://www.scisoc.org>

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QA in a packing shed

The washpacker Beta Spuds received SQF 2000^{CM} accreditation less than three months ago. According to Carlo Cociolone, the owner of Beta Spuds, the business has already benefited from the advantages of having a QA program in place.

These benefits include:

- 1. Incoming potatoes** – all potatoes are inspected on arrival, allowing premium product to be matched to premium grade orders. Potatoes that do not meet quality specifications are rejected at the delivery stage. This has prevented costly downtime, as previously inferior product was rejected at the grading table.
- 2. Staff morale** – staff members are happier due to a more organised, cleaner working environment.
- 3. Staff work performance** – performance levels have increased due to greater responsibility, accountability and decision-making being shared with staff.



Con the Fruiterer was impressed with the new packing designed by Beta Spuds as part of their SQF 2000 Certification

- 4. Production performance** – production has increased due to better coordination and training.
- 5. Washed potatoes** – all washed potatoes are checked against agreed standards before being distributed. This has resulted in a reduction of customer complaints.
- 6. Traceability** – all potatoes can be traced through the chain of production from the retailer to the seed producer, allowing customer complaints to be fully investigated. This traceability right back to the

grower is also critical in the event of a food safety problem.

The implementation of SQF 2000 has allowed the business of Beta Spuds to become more professional and easier to manage. Carlo is optimistic that the savings to be made from the QA program will far outweigh the auditing costs of maintaining the system.

Grant Wilson
Quality Development Officer
Western Potatoes
☎ (08) 9335 8999

Benefits of Quality Assurance

In order to gain a competitive edge, producers need to provide their customers with a safe, high quality product on a consistent basis. Quality Assurance (QA) is an effective way of achieving this.

Quality assurance can be a powerful tool to drive a business, whether small or large. It can assist in pinpointing potential hazards, developing strategies to prevent them from occurring and minimising food safety risks. The attributes of a successful QA program are that it should be simple, user-friendly and cost-effective.

Quality Assurance is not just another passing fad. In addition to ensuring that the taste, colour and size of produce meets set standards, it also includes important elements of food safety.

The Federal Government is proposing to introduce uniform food hygiene laws around Australia in 1998. These laws will affect approximately 99% of domestic food producers, including growers, packers and transporters. Hazard Analysis

and Critical Control Points (HACCP), the premier tool used to manage risks to food safety and quality, will be the backbone of these proposed laws.

Large companies such as McDonalds, QANTAS and Woolworths are not waiting for these laws to be introduced, making it clear that their suppliers need to be incorporating both food safety and QA as part of their business operation.

While QA is rapidly becoming an essential component of any business, many still consider the price of the product to be a greater concern. However, customer demands are changing and as a result, fresh produce buyers in the near future will have to address three basic questions – is the price right, is the quality acceptable and is the food safe?

The implementation of QA systems into the horticultural industry has been slower than in other industries. However, the situation is starting to change rapidly now, with progressive movement within many categories, including potatoes. Those businesses that choose to ignore the application of QA risk being left behind by their competitors and facing a possible reduction in future customer markets.

Implementation of SQF 2000 in the WA Potato Industry

In 1995, Agriculture Western Australia developed the SQF 2000 quality management code. Prior to its development, many companies were using the ISO 9000 Quality Assurance series. SQF 2000 is tailored to the horticultural industry and is easy to audit and requires a minimum of paperwork, compared with other quality assurance systems. Additionally, SQF 2000 uses HACCP as a framework to provide assurance of food safety.

Western Potatoes has successfully implemented an industry-wide initiative to introduce quality assurance into the potato industry which incorporates growers, washpackers and transporters. To date one washpacker, Beta Spuds, has already received SQF 2000 accreditation and several other operators have commenced the process of introducing QA into their business practices.

Grant Wilson
Quality Development Officer
Western Potatoes
☎ (08) 3358 9999

APIC BRIEFS

Release of new potato varieties

As reported in the last edition of *Eyes on Potatoes* a working group has been developing a policy for the effective release and commercialisation of new varieties produced by the National Potato Improvement Program at Toolangi in Victoria.

The group consisting of representatives from the Australian Potato Industry Council (APIC) and Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE) Victoria reached an agreement for the release of new varieties this season. Longer term agreements are still to be worked out.

The new agreement is in response to the need to increase investment and participation by private industry in the breeding program. Seed growers who grow the new varieties from September 1998 onwards will be required to pay a royalty. The exact amount and mechanisms for collection of the royalty are still to be worked out.

The introduction of the royalty provides a mechanism for private industry and other partners to gain a return on their investment. It also means that the breeding program can gain access to varieties from overseas that previously were not available to us because we did not have a royalty system in place.

The changes will make the breeding program more commercially focused and better able to respond to market needs. It also provides the opportunity for private industry to invest in the breeding and development of new

varieties and be more involved in their marketing which has been a weakness of the past system.

Mr Wayne Cornish, from APIC said "...the working group in reaching its decision on the release of varieties this season, took into account the concerns of the industry, particularly in respect to the expectation that all seed growers would have access to the new material and some seed growers had already entered into short to medium term commercial arrangements."

This arrangement will also ensure that all growers and tissue culture laboratories have ready access to these varieties.

During discussions the working group agreed that in the longer term the interests of the potato industry might be best served through exclusive license arrangements and therefore the present arrangements will apply only to the varieties to be released this year and any others resulting from crosses made prior to 1993.

Beyond this, it is proposed that the potato industry participate in further discussions on the future direction of the National Potato Improvement Program run out of Toolangi, options for the release and commercialisation of varieties from the program, and the longer term implications for funding.

"Potato varieties developed for Australian conditions and markets are key to the long term competitiveness of the industry. The effective development and management of the release of these varieties to ensure their high level adoption is an issue of critical importance to the Australian Industry," according to Russell Sully, Industry Manager Potatoes, Agriculture Victoria.

For further information contact:

Mr Wayne Cornish
Australian Potato Industry Council
☎ (08) 8389 1214

Russell Sully
Agriculture Victoria
☎ (03) 9210 9385

Did You Know?

One medium size potato contains:

- vitamin C
- vitamin B1
- niacin
- iron
- vegetable protein
- essential fibre

(source: Crookwell Potato Association)



undergoing change

Most people in the potato industry would have heard by now about the takeover of The Smiths Snackfood Company last November by the US company Pepsico Inc which owns Frito Lay Australia. The sale is subject to regulatory approval by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) which is likely to be finalised by the middle of the year. Until the sale is finalised both companies will be operating as usual. Any changes as a result of the takeover are unlikely to be known until later in the year.

Hygiene tip -

TARGET SPOT

“CLEANING UP AFTER HARVEST IS VITAL”

Target spot mainly survives on infected crop residues and on host plants such as nightshade and weed potatoes. Under normal weather conditions and with a three year or longer rotation, most of the disease in the paddock will die out, providing host plants are not present. Once this happens the only source of disease is from spores that blow in from neighbouring paddocks where potatoes or other hosts have recently been growing. *Therefore cleaning up all crop residues after harvest is critical in reducing target spot levels in the future.*

Potato Internet Starter Pak

LAST CHANCE



Are you interested in finding potato sites on the internet? Have you requested the Potato Internet Starter Pak? If the answer is Yes and No then what are you waiting for!

To obtain a copy of the Starter Pak email 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!

**coming
soon
Information
Directory**

A new information directory for the Australian Potato Industry will be sent out with the June edition of Eyes on Potatoes. Over the next three months it will be going through extensive checking by industry people in all states.

For those that are sent information to check, please reply promptly. This is your directory and the better the feedback the more useful it will be for everyone.

The directory will contain contact details for government and agribusiness services and information on how the industry works in Australia, industry statistics, the potato levy, industry groups and publications.

Leigh Walters
Australian Potato Industry
Technology Transfer Project
☎ (08) 8232 5555

**Can you help us with
a front cover photo for**

Potato Australia

Are there any budding photographers out there who would like to submit a photo or image for consideration for the front cover of this year's *Potato Australia*? If so please send it to the editor at the address on page two.

Our printer has provided the following specifications as a guide Specifications for supply of cover images for *Potato Australia*

Printed image size = 220mm x 220mm + bleed off

Please supply in one of the following formats

- **Photographic print at actual size**
or
- **Slide Transparency: high quality 35mm or larger (no negatives - convert to prints)**
or
- **Hires Scan no less than 300 dpi at actual size or larger saved as jpeg or tiff format.**

**Any queries contact Andrew Perry at
Sprinta Print (03) 6334 0595**



Expansion of seed industry with new venture

The Australian seed potato industry is set to undergo a multi-million dollar expansion with a new joint venture operation.

South Australian based Green Triangle Growers Australia have aligned themselves with forest biotechnology company Forbio to create a new company, trading as Southern Choice Pty Ltd.

With this arrangement Southern Choice will multiply and market minitubers produced by Forbio at its Gosford production facility.

Forbio is the world's largest independent forest biotechnology company and has a very large automated capacity to produce plants by tissue culture. It will be able to produce high quality minitubers from genetic material already in Australian and from international germplasm brought in through quarantine.

In practice this will work as follows.

Forbio will develop the minitubers using its automated, robotic system. The minitubers will then go to Southern Choice which will sell them to selected growers throughout Australia.

Southern Choice will contract to buy back the produce at the end of the season. This will be repeated for two more growing cycles at which time it is expected to have sufficient quantities of each variety to place on the market.

Using this protocol, Southern Choice hope to be able to produce three generations in two years.

Southern Choice is currently negotiating to recruit the services of an agronomic service provider who will support growers with all the agronomic advice they need to achieve the high quality product required.

Ware varieties will be marketed either in Asia or in Australia. There is an enormous demand for potatoes in many Asian countries but their capacity to pay is currently under question.

Southern Choice director, Malcolm Kentish said that as well as the fresh market varieties, they would also be multiplying a large quantity of processing varieties under contract to the processing companies.

Mr Kentish said that the company had initiated this venture to take advantage of Australia's capacity to export potatoes.

"At the World Potato Congress 3½ years ago there was a prediction that Asia would need four million tonnes of potatoes per year by the year 2000. Obviously there is an opportunity for Australia," Mr Kentish said.

The company then developed a business plan targeting this market with a grant from AusIndustry. The plan demonstrated good prospects so they went ahead, culminating in the joint venture with Forbio.

There is also development with two other projects. In conjunction with CSIRO, Southern Choice is working to develop a purpose designed shipping container for potatoes which is capable of good air control but maintaining high humidity.

In addition, CSIRO has developed a microwave pack which is licenced to Southern Choice. This cooks the potato evenly and browns it in just a few minutes. Potentially this will have big spin offs for the fast food industry, as well as consumers.

Mr Kentish said that as all these developments come on board, Southern Choice will be able to offer a fully integrated system from new genetic material through to potatoes on the plate.

Statistics mayhem

I thought after the last edition of Eyes on Potatoes we were back on course with the statistical information but unfortunately that is not so. I was contacted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in late January after they had reviewed the potato statistics. Since I started requesting the statistics there has been problems in interpreting what the totals actually represented. There are two corrections that need to be made to the December figures.

The production figures for ware and processing presented in the December edition of Eyes on Potatoes represent total production and include seed. ABS have also indicated that the data for South Australia has been adjusted due to errors in their outputting. For year ended 31 March 1996 the Area (Seed potatoes) is 396.2 ha, the Production (Seed potatoes) is 10155.8 t, Gross value (Seed potatoes) is \$3,046,740, Area (Total) is 7875.2, Production (Total) is 272,986.4 t and Gross value (Total) is \$99,257,855.

If anyone wants to discuss this further please do not hesitate to contact me. Corrected data for the 1990's is currently being compiled for the Information Directory which is coming out with the June *Eyes on Potatoes*.

Leigh Walters
☎ (08) 82325555



Are you moving?

We have a regular flow of returned mail and in most instances we do not know where these people go. If you are on the move, let us know your new address. If you don't, you'll risk being removed from our mailing list.

APIC Potato Publication schedule

The Australian potato industry enjoys a regular communication forum with an annual magazine (*Potato Australia*) with all the latest developments in the industry. This is complemented by three editions per year of *Eyes on Potatoes*.

Publication Date
Eyes on Potatoes
March, June,
December
Potato Australia
September

Chips n' Flake

*I was in the takeaway the other night
doing what Australians do
"Two dollars chips and a piece of flake...
...better make it two."*

*The spuds were fresh, so was the fish,
it would take a minute to fry.
My mind drifted to dreamland
and I wondered why...*

*...Do Americans call chips "fries"?
We do that to eggs and bacon
And why do we call crisps "chips",
this is confusion in the makin'.*

*You can sell baked spuds in heat proof boxes,
Praties.... For five dollars each.
But why do "wedges" and "good sets" sound like
something you'd see on the beach?*

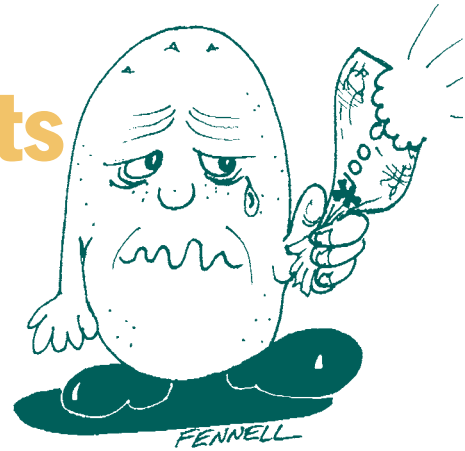
*There are new potatoes and old potatoes
and a variety called "washed red".
A washed white tastes like a brushed white
but costs a lot more instead.*

*Oh, the humble spud can be confusing, unnecessarily
complicate.*

*I snapped out of the trance hearing the words,
"do you want salt on your chips and flake?"*

Frank Mulcahy-January 1998

Exports and the Asian currency crisis



Mr David Hunt-Sharman, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Horticultural Exporters' Association (AHEA), advises that current problems with Asian exports lie in specific markets, rather than South-east Asia as a whole. The countries most affected are Thailand and Indonesia (which have both accepted International Monetary Fund solutions) and Malaysia.

The main messages from the AHEA are that the dynamics vary between markets and that the adversity of the current situation can lead to opportunity. For example, although fruit and vegetables sold in Australian currency are now very expensive, those sold in US currency are unaffordable. Therefore, there may be opportunities for Australian produce to replace that being imported from the USA.

Asian importers have decreased buying power and consumer confidence is low, which leads to a whole new set of market requirements (ie. the goalposts have shifted). Mr Hunt-Sharman urges exporters to visit their markets and identify the new requirements. He says that exporters need to be asking the following sorts of questions:

- Can I provide cheaper lines of the product I currently export?
- Will a different product be accepted as a cheaper alternative?
- Can I use a more economic unit of packaging?



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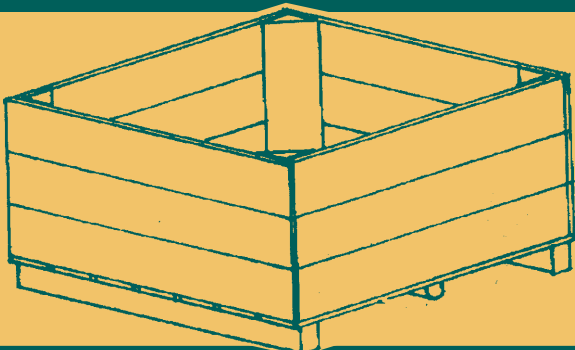
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Potatoes to 2004

Profiting from R&D

A meeting was held in Melbourne in mid February to develop a new plan to guide the industries research and development (R&D) activities for the next five years. The original five year plan was developed in 1991, before the levy was introduced and needs updating as there have been many changes in the industry since that time.

In preparation for the meeting, interviews were carried out to identify R&D issues with people from all sectors of the industry, growers, packers, wholesalers, processors and researchers. Market research into the needs of the food service industry was carried out as well as some national consumer research to see if there had been any changes to consumer attitudes to fresh potatoes from the work carried out in 1993.

The information from the meeting is currently being put together in a draft plan which will be considered by the APIC R&D Committee in late March. Once the plan has been finalised it will then be sent out to industry through Eyes on Potatoes.

Jonathan Eccles
HRDC Project Manager Potatoes
 ☎ (02) 9418 2200



Internet Book Shops

Working out what publications are available from government departments is not always easy. One approach that some organisations are using is the internet book shop. These sites provide information on publications such as leaflets, books, manuals, videos and kits as well as details on how to order them. If you still want to talk to a human being some sites have a toll free number to ring.

If ordering products from the internet be aware that security is still a concern, especially when sending credit card details. This should change when new security standards are introduced for credit card transactions. In the meantime, orders can be made by phone or fax once you have made your choice.

In Australia all state departments of agriculture and primary industries have internet sites with publication information. The internet addresses for these sites are in the Potato Internet Starter Pak (See page 8 for details).



Hygiene tip - CLEAN POTATO BINS

Many potato diseases, insects and weeds are spread by the movement of soil and crop debris. Potato bins are a potential way for these pests to be spread from farm to farm.

As well as spreading pests, unclean or broken bins can greatly compromise the quality of potato seed regardless of where the soil or plant matter originates from.

All farmers are advised to adopt a policy of only allowing bins onto their property that are as free of soil and plant matter as possible, and to be particularly careful to only use very clean, well maintained bins for seed.

FIELD DAY

TUESDAY MARCH 24th CROOKWELL,

10.30 am POTATO VARIETY DISPLAY
PLACE: David Carter, 'Cottle Wolly'
 Goulburn Road 7km from Crookwell
SPEAKERS: Roger Kirkham (Ag Victoria)
 Graham Liney (Willow Vale Potatoes)

23 potato varieties will be harvested and on display

- Crisping • French fries
- Main Market Fresh • Gourmet and Salad Fresh

**Followed by a potato lunch at
 Willow Vale Mill Restaurant, 12.30 pm
 (supplied by Graham Liney)**

The potato industry in Western Australia

Overview

Western Australia produces 9% of the nation's potatoes. Production of 115,000 tonnes is mostly for domestic consumption of fresh, French fry and crisp products. A local seed industry provides Certified and Registered seed. Potatoes are the largest horticultural crop grown in WA. The gross value of production is around \$34 million. Agriculture WA estimates that the value added component of the industry is worth over \$100 million to the state.

General characteristics of the industry are;

- it is located between Albany in the south to Gingin in the north. Equivalent latitudes in eastern states are between Adelaide or Wagga Wagga in the south to Port Macquarie in the north
- the industry is isolated, the nearest interstate crops being 2,000 km away
- statutory marketing for fresh production means the industry is well organised, there's a local research fund and a very active grower's association with a full time Executive Officer
- average yields are the highest in Australia
- production for fresh market is year round with potatoes being planted every month
- climate is Mediterranean, usually there is no rain during the hot period from December to April. Winters though are very wet but most years the coastal winter cropping areas are free from frost
- irrigation is used in all crops with winter rains reliably replenishing dams and underground supplies used for irrigation
- late blight, bacterial wilt and PCN are not found

French fry

38,000 tonnes of French fry potatoes are grown for Simplot Australia, the major processor. Production centres on Manjimup and Pemberton but increasingly product is also coming from the new area of Scott River. Some of the crops at Scott River are joint ventures between Simplot Australia and the land holders. Early and main crops are grown in all these areas. However there is potential for early crops to be grown north of Perth where the winter temperatures are similar to summer temperatures of northern Tasmania.

Production is set to rise and Simplot Australia have plans to increase production to 80,000 tonnes a year. *Kennebec* and *Shepody* are grown for early crops while main crops are planted with *Russet Burbank*.

Net profits from *Russet Burbank* crops at Manjimup are estimated to be \$1,500 per hectare with a yield of 52 t/ha and price of \$190 per tonne. Net profit was calculated as the gross margin less overhead and machinery replacement costs.

Crisp

About 14,000 tonnes are produced for domestic consumption while 7,500 tonnes are for export. The main variety is *Atlantic* but some *Cadima* is also grown for storage. *Denali* may replace *Cadima*. Most of the export is for crisp factories in Malaysia but 600 tonnes was also sent to Indonesia for seed.

Fresh

The 55,000 tonnes of fresh market potatoes are produced in a regulated market controlled by the Potato Marketing Corporation.

The Corporation's goals are to:

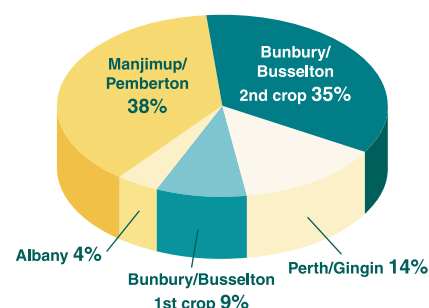
- provide a fresh, high quality product throughout the year
- increase consumption of potatoes
- provide a wider choice of varieties
- provide consumers with convenient methods of preparing modern potato dishes
- identify viable methods of value adding
- to develop and implement reforms acceptable to government and industry and to provide a long term future to all stakeholders in the industry

The Corporation achieves these goals through:

- regulating production of fresh potatoes
- encouraging and promoting the use of potatoes
- undertaking market development
- developing SQF 2000 systems for all industry sectors

Growers are licensed to deliver quotas during specified times or pools. The licence specifies the area that can be planted. Production is year round. The metropolitan area and Gingin plant from May to July to supply potatoes from September to mid November. The Bunbury and Busselton first crop is planted from June to July and supplies from mid November to December. Manjimup growers plant from September to January to supply January to May. The second Bunbury/Busselton crop is planted in January/February and supplies from June to September. The September supplies are from ground stored potatoes. The amounts supplied by these areas are shown below.

Western Australian fresh crop production by region
55,092 tonnes 1996-97



Growers sell through the Potato Marketing Corporation to merchants. The vast majority of potatoes are sold washed. Main varieties are *Delaware* and *Nadine*. A small amount of *Desiree* is also grown. Growers are paid according to three grades and they expect to receive \$370 - 470 for "Class 1" product. There are Premium and Class 2 grades also. These grades respectively fetch about \$150 per tonne above and below the Class 1 price. The Corporation costs are \$65 per tonne (1996/97), these includes promotion, administration, marketing and industry development costs. Packers pay from \$440 to \$550 per tonne of Class 1 potatoes. Merchants wash and pack the potatoes and their costs are estimated to be about \$150 per tonne. This results in retailers paying around \$600 per tonne.



Out & About

Net profits from summer crops of *Delaware* potatoes at Manjimup are estimated to be \$5,000 per hectare with a yield of 40 t/ha and price of \$400 per tonne. Net profit is the gross margin less overhead and machinery replacement costs.

The Corporation is active in promoting potatoes and their campaign cry of "What, no potatoes?" may be adopted nationally.

Export

Western Australia exports large quantities of vegetables to Asia. The potato industry is also striving to develop exports. Simplot Australia has plans to export frozen processed product. The industry recognises that there is also potential for high quality seed to be exported. Crisp potatoes for processing are being exported in reasonable quantities with around 7,500 tonnes being exported last year. Seed has been exported to Mauritius for many years but now new sales of *Atlantic* to Indonesia rival the established trade.

Seed

This industry relies on summer plantings along the south coast. The warm, dry weather and the prevailing on-shore winds provide a relatively aphid free cropping period. The seed industry is busy improving the quality of its product through adoption of Certified and Registered seed schemes. The first WA Certified seed was sold last season and the Corporation is working on developing of an SQF 2000 scheme for seed potatoes.

Future development

The future growth of French fries has already been indicated but further growth will occur when the industry becomes competitive enough to develop profitable exports. For the fresh market the Corporation's target of increasing sales by 2% each year has been exceeded over the last three years with an average sales increase of 3.3%. There is no doubt that, due to the efforts of all involved, the potato industry of WA will continue to expand and prosper.

Peter Dawson
Development Officer, Horticulture
Agriculture Western Australia
☎ (08) 9892 8461

Virginia field day

A variety and disease control field day was held on Barry Nicol's property in Virginia South Australia in January. Speakers included Roger Kirkham, the National Potato Breeder, Chris Williams, Trevor Wicks and Robin Harding, researchers from the South Australian Research and Development Institute and Frank McKenna from Biogenetic Laboratories in WA.



While in South Australia to look at other trials Laurie and Janice Eldridge from Cuthbert near Albany, Western Australia took the opportunity to attend the field day. They were photographed with Darren Applebee the SA Potato Co-ordinator for Elders.



New seed growers aspire to high standards

In February, a special interest tour of seed growers from southern Tasmania visited leading seed potato enterprises in the northwestern end of the state.

Led by Seed Potato Certification Officer, Frank Mulcahy, they visited a range of seed potato activities, from minituber production, research projects, several seed crops and a tour of the McCain factory at Smithton.

The growers, most of whom are new to the industry, welcomed the opportunity for exposure to the standards they can achieve when they do things well.

ROUND-UP

State

Western Australia

Harvest of crops for all markets is progressing at Scott River, Pemberton, Manjimup and Albany. Planting of autumn crops is complete or underway at Busselton, Bunbury and Manjimup.

Some French fry crops for Simplot Australia were affected by poor emergence. This is perhaps a minor setback in an otherwise good season. Quality of the early *Kennebec* deliveries have been best from east of Manjimup and the outlook for the *Russet Burbank* crop is good.

Prices for the fresh potatoes were reduced in January to compete with lower priced eastern states product. Growers price for Class 1 fell over \$100 per tonne.

Part of one crop, however, was given away. The grower missed his agreed delivery time to the Potato Marketing Corporation and was left with tonnes of potatoes he could not sell locally. The fate of these potatoes became the focus of the mass media. Finally the potatoes were given away at a weekend market.

Ware crops are now showing much better quality than in January when the Christmas heat caused some skin discolouration.

The new certified and registered seed schemes are gaining momentum. A training day for inspectors and growers was held and they were challenged with plots containing mixed varieties and diseased plants. This exercise showed that seed growers perhaps need to rogue their crops more heavily. The days were a big success and were organised by Agriculture WA, AgWest Seed Quality (the inspection service) and the Potato Marketing Corporation.

A wine grape industry may replace potatoes at Busselton. Potato farms with red ground and good water have sold for more than \$10,000 an acre. One hundred acres of licence has left the district in the last six months.

Peter Dawson
Development Officer, Horticulture
Agriculture Western Australia

South Australia

Rainfalls of 100 to 125 mm fell on October 30 in the Lower Murray, Mallee, Lakes, Adelaide Hills and Plains areas. This was followed by several days with maximum temperatures of 35 degrees one week later.

These conditions have been associated with outbreaks of powdery scab in several crops recently dug in the Lower Murray and Lakes areas. Seed piece decay also occurred in a small number of crops in the Adelaide Hills and lower south east, with a few crops having to be resown. Rainfall in the lower south east was less (60 to 75mm on Oct 30) and very patchy.

Since these storms, growing conditions have generally been good in all areas so that there is potential for good yields and quality. Total SA production is expected to be similar to last year. French fry contract prices are still being negotiated but indications are that a downward movement is likely to occur.

Fifty industry people attended a most informative potato variety/disease control field day at Virginia on January 9, run by SARDI and Elders. New varieties *Shine*, *Snowgem*, *Nadine*, *Ruby Lou*, *Norland*, *Crispa* and others were dug and shown to growers by Chris Williams and Roger Kirkham. Frank McKenna from WA spoke on biocontrol of common scab and rhizoctonia. Trevor Wicks reported on early dying research work. The 20 page bulletin on *Potato Varieties for SA* was released and was well received. Copies can be purchased.

A new initiative in the south east is set to begin. Green Triangle Growers Australia Pty Ltd has aligned itself with ForBio Ltd to establish Green Triangle Ltd. This new company will trade as Southern Choice Pty Ltd and will be a significant new commercial grower of potato minitubers employing the most advanced biotech and robotic technologies.

Chris Williams
Senior Research Scientist
South Australian Research and
Development Institute

Queensland

An unseasonal wet spring in the Lockyer Valley hampered harvesting of the spring crop and potatoes were still being dug in early December.

Despite the good rain received in the spring it was not sufficient to create flows in the creeks of the Lockyer Valley. The last major flow was in May 1996 and although water supplies are adequate, a further flow in the creek would be useful in replenishing underground water reserves.

Ground preparation has begun for the winter crop planting. Planting of this crop will commence in late February and early March. Current seasonal conditions have resulted in record high temperatures and high relative humidity. It is hoped that these conditions will not prevail for long as emergence in this crop is sensitive to such conditions.

At the time of writing, potato production in the highland areas of the Killarney district was nearing peak production. Harvesting in the lower areas is nearing completion.

The northern Queensland crop had a favourable growing season with slightly above average yields. Despite this, market demand was only just being met. Overall, prices tended to be good with some high prices received in November when rain stopped southern Queensland harvests.

Potato tuber moth became a major problem towards the end of the season. In seed being kept for an early 1998 planting, moth is proving to be a problem.

At the tail end of the season, high temperatures in early December did result in some heat damage to produce. Continual rain since Christmas has virtually stopped harvest of late crops. Export of processing potatoes to South East Asia has continued at a low level.

Stephen Harper
Development Extension Officer
Department of Primary Industries

Victoria

In the Otway/Portland region, crops are very dry, but are on schedule as far as harvest goes. No disease problems have been encountered.

Around the Koo Wee Rup Swamp and Thorpdale, crops have been looking good and the harvest of early seed has begun. The seed size is apparently down a bit on previous seasons, perhaps due to the dry conditions. Fusarium wilt has been evident, as well as some spotted wilt at Koo Wee Rup; again, the dry conditions are the likely cause. Early *Atlantic* crops have been harvested and are in the factory, slightly ahead of the usual schedule.

Ballarat crops have probably suffered less from moisture stress and are generally looking good. There has been some variation in growth due to a 10-day planting break caused by rain (some of the held-over seed was affected by diseases). However, once the crops established, disease incidence has been minimal.

Over the past few months, seedgrower discussion groups, organised jointly by the Victorian Certified Seed Potato Growers Committee and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, have been established in the Gippsland and Otway/Portland regions. These are proceeding successfully and it is hoped that a Ballarat group will be formed in the near future.

A number of varieties developed under the National Potato Improvement and Evaluation Scheme are to be released at Toolangi in early February. As in the past, these will be available to all growers, but will now attract a royalty payment.

McCain's growers have reached an agreement on price with the company. The price will be \$193 per tonne, a decrease of \$7 per tonne, but with a bonus paid for reduced bruising.

Workshops to report on the results of the financial performance study of McCain's growers in Victoria and South Australia were held in December 1997. The study, a part of Agriculture Victoria's "CQ-Potato" project, provided some interesting results. Two interactive workshops were well-attended and feedback indicated that most participants benefited from the exercise. Similar workshops for the seedgrowers' study are planned for early February.

Andrew Henderson
Technology Transfer, Potatoes
Agriculture Victoria

Tasmania

This season will be remembered by all growers because it has been so dry. The absence of rain has certainly taken its toll in Tasmania with streams running dry and reduced water allocations.

This was difficult enough but most people weren't prepared for the high (for Tasmania) evaporation rates that occurred in December and January. In the central north losses of 8-10 mm per day were quite common and only those people on centre pivots had a chance of keeping up! Elsewhere losses of 5-6 mm were experienced.

Harvest commenced at the beginning of February with early crops expected to perform well. Later crops which bore the brunt of the dry conditions will probably suffer yield reductions.

Certified seed potato yields will be down in Tasmania this year. With the dry year an estimated 90% of normal annual production is expected. Crops were extremely healthy at the beginning of February and it is probably better if the warm dry weather continues until senescence. This will help avoid late infections of disease and prevent secondary tuber growths on crops which have been grown dry or with insufficient irrigation.

This year, there has been a long drawn-out haggling over prices. Simplot growers completed negotiations in November but (at the time of writing) McCain growers are still battling for an acceptable price, despite crops being ready for harvest.

The Simplot growers have accepted \$8.00 per tonne reduction but have negotiated a cash advance of \$20 per tonne once a contract is signed. This is intended to assist with cash flow during the period leading up to harvest. The contact is set to apply for two seasons; 1997-98 and 1998-99.

The ability of growers to reduce costs of production is more difficult with each passing year but hopefully the outcome of the current appraisals of practices and costs may win a way forward in the future.

Bruce Beattie
Senior Horticulturist
Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries

New South Wales

New South Wales experienced very hot, dry conditions over the summer with daily temperatures in the low forties recorded in many Tableland areas. Only the occasional, scattered thunderstorm provided temporary relief from the hot weather.

Digging of the spring crop started in mid-November in the Riverina, early December in the Dorriggo/Robertson districts and early January in the Sydney basin. Yields were down following the dry weather, with crops averaging 30 to 35 tonnes a hectare in most districts.

There were no major disease or insect problems in the spring crops. Dry matter contents were down in some crisping crops. Most areas finished digging by early February.

Fresh market prices have remained weak over the last few months. Potato consumption dropped with the hot weather, while the markets were well supplied due to the dry digging conditions and a surplus of crisping potatoes being sold on the open market. Prices stayed around \$16 to \$20 per 50 kilogram bag for Dorriggo growers, but dropped from \$150 to \$100 a tonne in the Riverina over the Christmas holidays.

Digging of the summer crop started in early February at Guyra and Canowindra. While the yields of early sown crops are average, the production of many late sown Tableland's crops is expected to drop with the dry weather. Crop areas are unchanged from last year. White fringed weevils and Rutherglen bugs were the main pest problems in the summer crops.

With prices falling to \$9 - \$13 per 50 kilogram bag in early February as Thorpdale crops entered the markets, a slow fresh harvest is expected in the Tablelands.

Sowing of the autumn crop started in February in the coastal, Tableland and Riverina districts. Crop areas are expected to be similar to last year, although the dry weather may delay planting in the Tableland areas. Murray growers only received 67 percent of their irrigation allocations, but water transfers between growers will enable crop areas to remain the same.

In the processing sector, the McCain's French fry contract prices for the 1989-99 season will drop by \$7 a tonne.

Stephen Wade
District Horticulturist
NSW Agriculture

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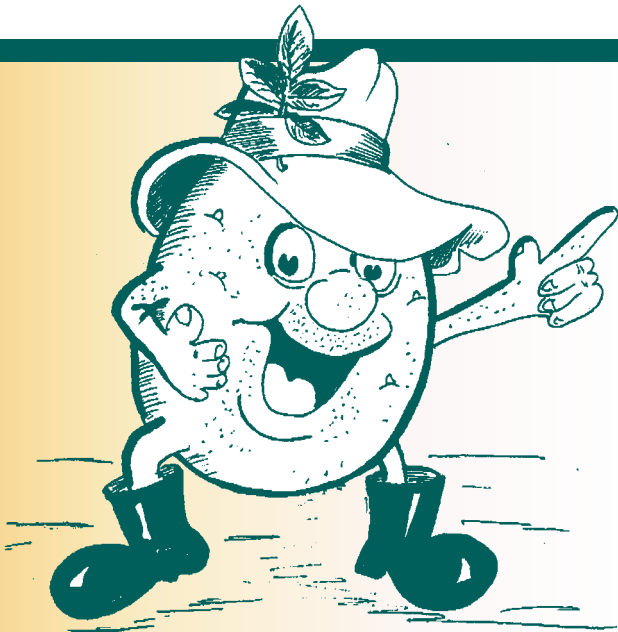
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