

# EYES ON POTATOES

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

Volume 6 - March 1999

ISSN 1328-6897

## Simplot trials Gopher™ in Tas

Simplot's Tasmanian Research and Development Officer, David Rann, has been testing an irrigation monitoring tool called the Gopher this season.

David says that the Gopher offers a lot of advantages over other soil moisture monitoring technology in its relatively low cost, speed and ease of use and its light weight.

Simplot has used the Gopher in the crops of over 20 growers this season. It has shown that most of the growers were a little late with their first irrigation, irrigated very well during the top growth stage of the crop but tended to over irrigate at the end of the season.



David Rann with the Gopher in a crop near Devonport.



The Gopher can graph water use patterns in the field.

According to David, the Gopher will, in less than a minute, give information in the field about the water availability of the paddock. If that information is combined with daily water use by the crop, then the timing of the next irrigation can be easily and quickly predicted.

More detailed information can be obtained when the information is downloaded into a computer, back in the office.

After testing a paddock, David sends each grower a graph showing the water availability over time and a prediction of when the next irrigation should be applied.

David says his growers have been very pleased with the information they have received and most have modified their irrigation practices as a result. Some have actually found they are applying less water this season than usual.

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## CENTRE FEATURES

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- Cadmium in Potatoes

The Gopher consists of a metal probe which is inserted down a PVC tube situated between two plants in the mould. The probe takes readings at intervals of 100mm as the probe is pushed down the tube. The readings are electronically stored in a small hand held unit and can give measurements of water availability immediately, provided the refill point and field capacity points have already been determined.

Depending on grower interest, Simplot are planning to expand this irrigation monitoring service next season.

Because of the relatively low cost of the Gopher and its ease of use, David suggests that growers with large areas of irrigated crops consider purchasing one of their own.

David can be contacted on  
☎ 0418 956 858.  
email: david.rann@simplot.com.au

# Welcome... Welcome... Welcome...

New information technologies such as the internet are having an enormous impact on the way governments and companies are looking at doing business in the future. Since the start of *Eyes on Potatoes* we have tried to expose you to some of the services available on the internet and how people are using them.

This edition we go one step further and try and give you an idea of the possible breadth of services - what is here now

and what might be possible in the future. This links into a project that will help define what, as an industry, we need to do to take advantage of these technologies.

In this issue you can request the new edition of the Potato Internet Starter Pak which will let you take a look at potato internet sites all around the world, without having to spend time searching for them. Leigh Walters has done a great job putting this together. It now contains over 400 sites and Leigh has provided a brief summary of what each one has on it to further help you find what you want quickly.

Ever had one of those days when nothing goes right? Well we had one of those months in December trying to get out the last edition of *Eyes on Potatoes*. A few delays and we got caught fair and square in the Christmas mail rush which meant some people did not receive their newsletter until January.

The printer was also delivered the wrong paper so rather than delay things even more we printed on glossy paper for that edition.

*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.



## Pinnaroo gains new packing shed

Potato Masters Pty Ltd was officially opened by the Deputy Premier of South Australia before Christmas in the South Australian Mallee near the Victorian border at Pinnaroo.

It is a new company formed by two potato growing families, David and Allyson Mason and David and Julianne Muster. The company has been supplying washed potatoes to the Eastern states under the brand name of Golden Sunrise.

**Potato Masters can be contacted on**  
 ☎ (08) 8577 8577.

*Above: Potato Masters' new 127 x 30 metre packing shed, office block and settlement ponds*

*Right: Potatoes being graded using the Accu-Pak a computerised digital camera grading system - the first of its kind to be used on potatoes in Australia. Pictured are (from left) South Australian Minister for Primary Industries, the Hon. Rob Kerin and Potato Masters Directors, David Mason and David (Joe) Muster.*



## -Wrightson- set to become force in potatoes

Wrightson have positioned themselves to become a significant player in the production and supply of seed and fresh potatoes in the Australasian region.

Late last year, Wrightson acquired the New Zealand based company Eurogrow Limited which has 25% of the NZ seed market and exclusive rights (in NZ), to material from Agrico and Hettema of the Netherlands. Eurogrow also markets fresh potatoes under the brand name 'Golden Potatoes'.

Similar developments in the fresh market are planned for Australia.

This acquisition strengthens Wrightson's role in the potato industry in the Australasian region following their securing of exclusive rights to the Potex rapid multiplication technology (see *Potato Australia Vol 9*).

For more information contact

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## - Project update - National Standards to be established for Australian certified seed potatoes

A report recently prepared for the Australian Potato Industry Council paves the way for the development of a system of National Standards for certified seed.

The report, prepared by the Expert Foundation, has identified that a uniform system for seed potatoes will enhance the competitiveness of Australian seed potatoes exported under a national tag. This will give assurance to our overseas customers about the quality of seed from Australia and help them to understand what certification means when they are only dealing with one system.

At present, there are five certification systems in Australia, all with different standards and terminology to describe seed. Having one simplified system of describing seed will help customers and seed growers communicate about what is available and what is expected in respect of seed quality.

The new system will be developed in partnership with the potato industry over the early part of 1999 and will provide uniform rules for Australian seed quality to include:

- defect/disease tolerance
- generation
- seed size/quality
- variety
- uniform descriptions.

The new system will allow individual state schemes to operate under national rules and advisory body, and ensure that the developing role of biotechnology is recognised to meet the needs of seed growers and users.

One of the key features of the new system is that it will facilitate movement of seed within Australia and help Australian seed to become better recognised internationally.

The project will be drawing on the best parts of seed schemes in Scotland, Northern Ireland, The Netherlands, Canada, New Zealand, United States and the Australian systems presently in place.

The benefits are:

- enhanced export competitiveness
- better information for the Australian industry
- better quality seed
- free movement of seed around Australia
- a national tag and clear identity for exports.

**Rob Brown  
The Expert Foundation**

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and

**Russell Sully  
Project Manager for APIC  
Agriculture Victoria**

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# A farmer's experience with QA and marketing



## What's QA all about ?

When I first heard of QA, all I could think of was the waste of time it would be and the extra hassles it would create.

At the time when I started, the way everyone was talking, I thought it would become much more important a lot more quickly than it has. However I didn't really know what I was getting into, or what it was. The main thing that did appeal to me at first was the idea of having some proof of how you operate, this seemed like a good idea to cover your r's.

Once I got started I soon realised you didn't have to be a rocket scientist to do it. In fact you could still be an everyday spud farmer and handle it.

The main barrier to QA when I started was people's attitudes. Now that people are starting to see that its not as hard as they thought, they are accepting it more. My thoughts are that you have got to start somewhere. We need to start in our own backyard first to improve the entire industry.

## Cost of QA

Most people when they start on something new like QA are worried about the time and money aspects, as these two things are often what spud farmers lack the most. Over the last two years learning about QA and being involved in developing approved supplier guidelines for potato growers I have probably put in about two weeks off the farm. If you look at this in terms of labour lost to the farm, this has probably been the only major expense. This time has mainly been involved in learning about QA and food safety, doing HACCP training and learning how to keep records and why.

The ongoing time commitment is mainly in record keeping. On our farm it's probably about a half an hour a week keeping records organised and up to date. Records like spray diaries take no extra time as they are usually filled in while the spray tank is being filled up with water. The main thing is to keep things up to date and do it as it happens, otherwise it becomes a big hassle at the end.

## What type of system is required ?

In our situation we have only gone as far as setting up approved supplier requirements. For us an externally accredited quality system is not yet required. The decision to take this approach was made much easier, as the training undertaken helped provide a better understanding of what all these systems are about and what is really required.

At this stage we are not going any further and feel the implementation of the things to date and the training are a good foundation for further work if needed. The main reason for not progressing further is that our markets are mainly merchants and packers and we do not deal directly with the retailers.

## Changes

The implementation of QA hasn't really forced me to re-invent the wheel, or drastically change the way I farm. The biggest capital outlay was probably improving our spray equipment, but that was long overdue and QA just made us realise it.

The main change has really been in how you think and I guess I am now a lot more conscious of the quality of the produce from ground preparation through to when it leaves the farm. Especially

taking every opportunity possible to make it as good as it can be to meet the specification.

Its much easier working to an agreed specification and has made us sort out lines of potatoes which better suit different customers needs. Also if you know what your customer wants you can change things around in growing, like different seed spacings to try and get out more saleable product.

Without a specification you get a bit complacent and don't worry if there are a few big ones or small ones getting into the bags. But at the end of the day, you are shooting yourself in the foot as the customers won't then be happy with what they buy.

Some of the QA I have found useful and have not had trouble keeping up to date, especially the spray diary and the property map. Also taking particular notice of the labels on the chemicals has helped in the application and timing of chemicals and fertilisers, achieving better results with less costs.

## Training

The training performed in things like HACCP is definitely good to do as it gives you a new outlook and helps you see things normally not seen or regarded as hazards. By learning about HACCP you then have choices of ways to overcome individual problems.

## Market acceptance

Some buyers now require parts of our QA information. They tend mostly not to want the actual record sheets but mainly to know they are available and can be accessed if they need them. Things like spray diaries, property maps and good practices like light covers in sheds and pest control in sheds are the most requested things.

## Potato marketing

As far as marketing goes, my biggest concern is that commitment at the selling end of the market isn't as strong as people make out and might not be strong enough to improve our industry like we need to. This is proven at the farm end in our district with a premium rarely being received based on product quality. Premiums only coming when product (often of a poor quality) is in short supply. This in turn is a major bone of contention for growers as the bloke down the road does what he wants and gets the same money as someone doing a better job.

This is especially disappointing when our research shows that in a niche market you can achieve premium prices for providing what your customer wants. However, broadly speaking, it is yet to be seen in our market what will happen.

## Quality, quantity and demand?

In my opinion the money is out there in spuds but you need to look for it and work hard for it. The biggest thing stopping growers like myself is our lack of ability as individuals to supply consistent quality product over an extended period of time. Often when you get too big you can lose sight of the specification and what the customer wants.

Through our research and experiences in the marketplace, it often appears that enthusiasm to provide continuity of supply means a lot of people are sacrificing quality more often than not. It is important to juggle the two but quality of the product has to be the most important.

There is a lot of talk about specifications and meeting them but not all players in the marketing chain are yet prepared to do this. The work I have been involved in shows that when all parties in the chain work to the specification and don't waiver, the consumers come back to our product and buy more. But as soon as you take your eye off the ball the consumers turn away and go and buy something else instead of potatoes.

Possibly our biggest challenge in the future will be to work out better ways to communicate with major customers like the supermarkets, so we know what they really want. And similarly between the retailers and the consumer.

The work I have been involved with has shown that if these obstacles are overcome we can improve grower returns and potato quality which in turn stimulates demand for this healthy and nutritional vegetable.

*Shane Litzow*  
*Potato grower - Mulgowie, QLD*

*Shane Litzow grows potatoes, onions, sweet corn and green beans on his family farm at Mulgowie which is located in the Laidley Valley, which in turn is part of the greater Lockyer Valley. Mulgowie has deep alluvial soils and a very good underground water supply.*

*Shane is one of the growers in the pilot potato QA project running in the Lockyer Valley.*



## New potato officer at Mt Gambier

Primary Industries & Resources SA has appointed Mr Robert Peake to the position of Senior Consultant - Potatoes at Mt Gambier. In this role, Robert will have responsibility for project development and technical coordination in potatoes across South Australia. He replaces Ben Dowling who left the south east potato position to join Technico.

Robert comes to the position with more than 20 years agronomic experience working with a range of crops. He has considerable experience in plant nutrition, technology transfer and project management.

*Robert Peake can be contacted at PIRSA's Mt Gambier office on*

*☎ (08) 8724 2921 or 0418 849 913.*

*Email: [peake.bob@pi.sa.gov.au](mailto:peake.bob@pi.sa.gov.au)*

# Powdery scab

## - no simple solutions

At a recent industry workshop, it became clear that there were no simple solutions to control of this disease. The workshop was organised by Agriculture Victoria, Knoxfield, and was designed to bring grower and industry representatives up-to-date on the latest developments in the control of powdery scab of potatoes.

Dr Stuart Wale of the Scottish Agricultural College at Aberdeen, presented the results of Scottish research over the past years. Unfortunately, the Scots had no major breakthroughs in the control of this disease over work done in Australia and New Zealand which was also presented at the workshop.

Trials on two new, but expensive chemicals in Scotland, Australia and New Zealand have given very promising results whilst New Zealand work has shown that less expensive alternatives, mancozeb and sulphur, could also provide reasonable levels of control.

The management of powdery scab requires the integration of a number of different control strategies. Resistant cultivars are recognised as the single most important control strategy. But there are a number of other factors which also influence the incidence of the disease. These include soil temperature, moisture and pH, cultivar susceptibility, the critical period of tuber susceptibility, root infection, disease on seed, the quantity and timing of irrigation, and seed and soil chemical treatments.

The impact of these factors were discussed during the workshop. Dr Wale reported that Scottish researchers have found that a cool, wet spring and summer is the greatest overriding factor influencing the outbreak of powdery scab in any one season. Scottish growers avoid planting susceptible cultivars in paddocks which have the greatest risk of scab.

The workshop identified several topics for further research.

- the development of effective seed treatments
- an evaluation of the impact of lime
- a more extensive evaluation of soil chemical treatments integrated with more tolerant cultivars
- irrigation management in different growing areas.

*Dolf de Boer,*  
*Agriculture Victoria*  
☎ (03) 9210 9222

## Serve-Ag joins forces with BFS

Serve-Ag, a Tasmanian based consultancy company, has formed a joint venture partnership with Biotechnical Field Services (BFS) in Atherton, Queensland to form the new organisation, Serve-Ag BFS. The new organisation started operations on the 1st November.

*For more information contact Keith Lewis on*  
☎ (07) 4091 3253.

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# Australian Seed Potatoes in Vietnam

A Western Australian based project to investigate the potential for Australian seed exports to South East Asia is nearing completion.

The aim was to export seed of South East Asian varieties back to Asia. The benefits to farmers in Asia would be a more secure and safer seed supply, improved yield, improved quality and increased income. The benefit to Australian farmers might be the start of a new trade in seed potatoes.

The Vietnamese sites were visited in January by Peter Batt (Curtin University) and Peter Dawson (Agriculture Western Australia) on behalf of Western Potatoes. The aim of the visit was to see how the seed was growing and to participate in training workshops on potato seed and the use of cut seed. The sites visited were in the Red River delta near Hanoi.

A visit to the Trong Quen Farmers' Co-operative was a revelation. Here the commune supports 7,000 people or 2,300 families on just 380 hectares. In terms of arable land they must derive all their food and income from just one square metre per person per day.

This site was the picture of productivity. They grow two consecutive crops of rice a year which are followed by vegetable crops. Potatoes are the most important vegetable crop but 90 days is about the maximum growing period available before the next rice crop is due for planting.

The importance of potatoes can be seen if their yield is compared with rice yields. Each rice crop yields 6 t/ha to give a total of 12 t/ha each year while the single potato crop gives 12 t/ha alone. The potatoes can be sold profitably on the fresh market and the small tubers are sold for seed at even higher margins.

The farm was meticulously cared for. There was almost no bare soil in the vegetable plantings. The outside rows of the potato crop also grew lettuces and brassicas. Vegetables were grown between the potato rows. A brilliant horticultural enterprise like this gives one confidence that these expert farmers will value high quality seed and will be prepared to pay for it.

Perhaps the most important observation made concerns cut seed. We have been led to believe that small, round seed must



Harvesting potatoes grown from true potato seed (TPS). The small seed fraction and some rejects are being collected.

A second visit is planned at harvest which will give a true indication of the performance of round and cut seed from Western Australia.

The visit was part of 'The Cooperative Development of Tropical Seed Potato Exports to South East Asia' project managed by Western Potatoes and funded by AusAID's ASEAN - Australia Economic Cooperation Program with contributions from government agencies in WA and Vietnam.

The aid program aims to promote economic cooperation between ASEAN and Australia through schemes of mutual benefit. Partners were Western Potatoes, Curtin University, Agriculture Western Australia, The International Potato Centre and the Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture. This project also involves a test shipment to the Philippines.

be provided for tropical plantings. Small seed was sent but also samples of larger seed were despatched. Most farmers who received large seed cut it and it grew very well. This was true for all sites inspected. So fresh, sound seed from Australia can be cut in the lowland tropics of Vietnam. If these farmers are prepared to accept larger seed it will be easier for Australian seed growers to supply premium seed at competitive prices.

Established seed supplies used by Vietnamese farmers include true potato seed (TPS) and small seed from China. TPS will not compete with well developed, high quality varieties grown from tubers. The Chinese 'seed' is really the very small fraction from ware crops usually used for pig feed. The quality is very poor, varieties are mixed, but the price is very cheap.

*A sample of the impressively intensive cropping at the Trong Quen Farmers Cooperative. Lettuce fills the area beside the irrigation channel, the access track does not waste space and the potatoes are intercropped with brassicas.*



The green tops are used for fuel for the "tractor" or are composted to fertilise the next crop.

**Peter Dawson,**  
Agriculture Western Australia  
☎ (08) 9892 8444

**Peter Batt**  
Senior Lecturer, Curtin University  
☎ (08) 9266 7596





## More to potatoes than meets the eye

*That is, according to Woolworths.*

With new packaging and presentation at store level, consumers will be made aware of characteristics of particular varieties through an eye-catching, colour-coded system. In line with the trend of convenience, packaging sizes have been reduced, in some cases to 950g bags.

In the last decade, the advent of Plant Breeders' Rights (PBR) in Australia has led to patented varieties of fresh fruit and vegetables supplied exclusively to retailers. One of the first companies to take advantage of PBR in potatoes was Harvest Moon, when in the early nineties, it acquired ZPC agency rights to various lines of potatoes.

As holders of an exclusive license to produce and sell seed of varieties including *Symfonia*, *Royal Blue*, *Gold*

*Star* and *Latona*, Harvest Moon has developed an exclusive arrangement with Woolworths through Breeders Rights International to market a range of gourmet potato varieties.

At present, all seed is produced in Tasmania and distributed to licensed growers in WA, NSW, Victoria and SA ensuring quality and continuity of supply.

The benefits for growers of these arrangements include providing a stable and secure market for product through the supply programme.

According to Kevin Clayton-Greene of Harvest Moon, most of these varieties have a greater tolerance and resistance to scab and viruses. They are also good yielders and as yellow flesh varieties, generally handle better post-harvest.



Top: *Celeste* Middle: *Redstar*

Harvest Moon are continually evaluating and bringing in new varieties for trial in Australian growing conditions. This year, *Red Star* and *Celeste* will be added to the range.

***So potatoes just aren't potatoes.***

***For more information contact Kevin Clayton-Greene on ☎ (03) 6428 2505.***

As the second largest potato breeder in Holland, ZPC produces between 200,000-300,000 tonnes of seed and 600,000-700,000 tonnes of ware potatoes each year. An amalgamation between ZPC and another Dutch company planned for later this year will probably create the largest potato seed breeder.

*New brown paper bags allow consumers to see what they are buying through 'plastic windows'. The bags also provide consumers with advice on which cooking methods are appropriate for that variety.*





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# US magazines - in print and on line

Two popular potato magazines for growers in the USA are *Spudman* and *Potato Grower*. These magazines are not as technical as *Potato Australia* but do provide for some interesting reading.

One big advantage with both publications is that they are on the internet. Both have internet sites with the current issue available for viewing and details if you wish to subscribe. So you can sample

before you buy! This is a great concept and I would recommend anybody interested in the publications to view the sites even if they have to get a friend who is connected to the internet to help them.

## Potato Grower

Comes out 13 times a year with two issues in December. For overseas subscribers such as ourselves it costs \$US50 a year. Direct enquiries or subscription requests to :

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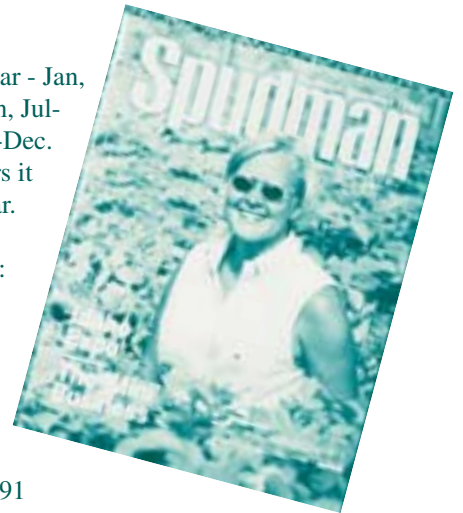
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## Project update - Potato Export Market Development

An HRDC funded project aimed at developing the export market for Australian potatoes is gearing up with the recent appointment of consultant, David McKinna, of Marketing Strategy Consultants.

David's first task is to look at the services Australian exporters need to provide to be competitive on the international market and to determine how these services could be provided through greater collaboration between Australian exporters.

Project Manager, Russell Sully, said that one of the problems Australia faces is that most exporters are small companies and cannot afford a full time person in the market place to provide the necessary level of market intelligence and promotional activities. However by companies working more closely together, this may be able to be achieved.

The second part of the consultancy is to provide a kick start in the provision of the identified services.

# Pot-Tainers

## - a non-refrigerated export system for potatoes



In the same way that fantainers were developed to ship onions from Australia without the need for expensive cooling systems, Pot-Tainers are being developed to assist the development of an export market for potatoes, particularly to Asia.

The aim is to develop a system whereby normal air (not cooled in any way) is used to keep the produce in peak condition throughout the shipping voyage, without the need for refrigeration.

A team of people including Alister Sharp and Barbara Stephens from Food Science Australia and Stephen Morris of Stephen Morris Horticultural Consulting is doing this work with funding from HRDC.

Because potatoes store best at high humidity (90-95% Relative Humidity), compared to onions which store best at low humidity, they need a differently designed container than the fantainer.

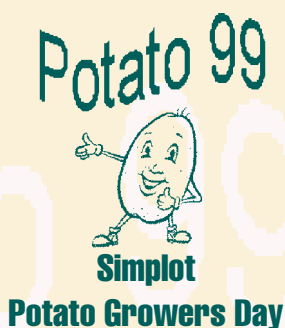
The team came up with a system whereby the air is initially circulated through the container. Most of that air is then continually recirculated to maintain humidity, with just enough fresh air introduced to take away any gases produced by the potatoes.

This system is currently being trialed, initially in a simulated shipment where the temperature and humidity were varied as if on a real voyage and diseased tubers placed at various locations throughout the

container. Importantly the disease did not spread during the simulation and weight loss was very low. Plans are now being made for live shipments comparing the Pot-Tainers with conventional containers.

For Pot-Tainers to work properly it is essential that the potatoes be disease free prior to export, properly cured and preferably treated with a fungicide. It is also necessary that the container be properly stowed so as to create uniform airflow as well as the ideal airflow pathways throughout the produce.

*For further information contact Alistair Sharp  
Food Science Australia (CSIRO)  
☎ (02) 9490 8333*



In 1999, Simplot Australia is once again holding grower information days Potato 99, in Tasmania and Western Australia.

The Tasmanian Potato 99 will be held at the Ulverstone Civic Centre on July 15th, with the Manjimup day being held the following week.

This year, the focus of the days is soil preparation, seed handling and planting the crop. There will be a number of speakers on these topics, with a seed specialist from the USA being the special guest speaker.

In Ulverstone, Potato 99 will be followed by a dinner where the Award for Services to the Tasmanian Potato Industry will be presented.

*So if you require more information on these days,  
or wish to nominate someone in the Tasmanian potato industry,  
then please contact Tracey Taylor at Simplot Australia, Ulverstone,  
on ☎ (03) 6425 1633.*



*When it comes to communicating with consumers next time you talk to someone ask them how much vitamin C is present in a potato.*

*Potatoes actually contain more vitamin C than tomatoes and are recognised as an important dietary source of vitamin C!*



## Internet links to the world

A new version of the Potato Internet Starter Pak which provides internet links to over 400 potato sites around the world is now available.

The Starter Pak has links to sites with information on growing potatoes, diseases, pests, marketing, exporting, machinery, government services, chemical information and much much more. The new version also provides links to some of the major agricultural libraries in Australia and overseas.

The aim of the Starter Pak is to make it easy and quick for people to get to the potato information on the internet.

If you want a copy of the new version please send an email to Leigh Walters ([lwalters@saff.com.au](mailto:lwalters@saff.com.au)) and include in the subject box - **Request for Starter Pak**. In the area where you usually write your message type - **Request**.

*Leigh Walters*  
☎ (08) 8272 5555

## New National Co-ordinator for Elders

René de Jong has taken a new position with Elders Ltd as National Potato Coordinator after 13 years with Agriculture Victoria.

Elders are interested in becoming a major player in Plant Breeders Rights (PBR) potato variety development in the fresh (ware) market. The PBR varieties have been bred by Caithness Potato Breeders Ltd (U.K.) for which Elders are the head licensees in Australia.

René will co-ordinate the introduction of potato varieties including importation, variety testing, seed production and market placement. A large part of the effort will be devoted to making sure the potatoes are adequately field tested before being sold in volume. Elders are also developing a quality management system (agronomy package) to assist growers in maximising yields and quality.

*René is based at Elders, Ballarat (Vic) and can be contacted on*  
☎ 018 507391

## Government Inquiry looks into Retail Sector

A Joint Parliamentary Inquiry on the Retail Sector is to look at the degree of industry concentration within the retailing sector in Australia. The terms of the inquiry were to be finalised with the commencement of the Senate in mid-February.

Senator Murray gave notice in December of proposed amendments which would include an examination of the social and community impact of retail concentration, particularly on rural and regional communities and the impact of retail industry concentration on suppliers and primary producers.

This issue is of concern to many people as the three major supermarket chains are reported to control nearly 80% of the retail grocery market in Australia.

Information on the inquiry can be found at the Federal Governments internet site at:  
[www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/retail\\_ctte/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/retail_ctte/index.htm)



## New insecticide for whitefringed weevil and mole crickets

Rhône Poulenc have announced that a permit has been granted by the National Registration Authority for the use of a new chemical, Regent™, against whitefringed weevil and mole crickets.

*This permit is only valid in certain areas so growers with a problem with these pests are advised to contact Rhône Poulenc on 1800 811 146 to ensure product availability in their area.*

# Hey, what's an onion doing in a potato publication?



It just happens that it is really a self caricature of our illustrious cartoonist, John Fennell, who started his working life as an onion breeder in the UK and then in New Zealand. After a move to Tasmania, John came to his senses and realised that spuds are the only way to go. John is now the Manager of Wrightson Research, Australia and has been driving the introduction of the Potex seed multiplication technology down under.

John's description of how he got into cartoons goes like this.

*'As part of extension initiatives I came to realise that cartoons offered a lot of potential. Sometimes photos weren't available or were not clear enough, and certainly cartoons made people take a second look. Professor Bleasdale at the National Vegetable Research Station in the UK was the first to identify my lunacy and asked me to produce some comic strip cartoons for him to illustrate a conference presentation he was going to make. The next was a cartoon used in a handout at the Chelsea Flower Show to clarify the subject of pollination incompatibility in brassica species. Wow!!*

*This then blew out uncontrollably and my life has since been bugged by 'Hey John, can you do a quick cartoon for me?' The editor of Potato Australia and Eyes on Potatoes is the worst offender!!!'*

## Trish replaces Michael at SAFF

Michael Cain has resigned from his role as Executive Officer for Horticulture with the South Australian Farmers Federation to take up a position with the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority in Brisbane.

Michael has been an active supporter of the potato industry in South Australia and at the national level through AUSVEG. He played an important role in establishing and supporting the Australian Technology Transfer Project. We wish Michael all the best in his new job.

Trish Semple will now take up the reigns at SAFF and we look forward to her involvement in the industry.



## Frank Mulcahy joins Simplot

In December Frank Mulcahy joined Simplot as a field officer at its Ulverstone factory and is responsible for Southern Tasmania and the area west of Burnie. Raw product intake to the factory for French fry processing from these districts is around 29,000 tonnes and seed production is about 4,500 tonnes.

Previously Frank was the Seed Production Officer with the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment.

Frank can be contacted on ☎ 0417 101 340 or email: [frank.mulcahy@simplot.com.au](mailto:frank.mulcahy@simplot.com.au)

# Potato exports increase by 7%

The following has been compiled from information supplied by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and provides a summary of our export trade in potatoes in 1998 and how this compares with 1997.

## Value of potato and potato products exported from Australia

1997	1998	Change
\$24,137,505	\$25,943,514	+7%

## Value of potato and potato exports by state

	1997	1998	Change
New South Wales	5,364,636	4,297,879	-20%
Queensland	1,508,448	907,786	-40%
South Australia	1,118,451	946,687	-15%
Tasmania	2,995,988	3,223,756	+8%
Victoria	8,164,155	9,394,081	+15%
Western Australia	3,946,825	4,765,899	+21%
Re-exports*	1,039,002	2,407,426	+132%

\* Re-exports are goods that are imported and then exported again in either the same condition or after undergoing some minor operations which leave them essentially unchanged (eg. blending, packaging, bottling, cleaning, sorting, husking and shelling).

## A piece of potato history

The following was reported in the Tasmanian newspaper  
*The Examiner* on April 26, 1995.

### 100 years ago-

Among the cargo of the Pateena, which left for Melbourne yesterday was 7 tonnes of potatoes shipped by Messrs Hinman and Wright for transhipment to the steamer Australasia for Cape Town (South Africa). A shipment of five tonnes of potatoes is also being sent by the same steamer to Cape Town from West Devonport and it is to be hoped that both consignments will turn out well, so that an export trade in produce with South Africa may be opened up.

*The Examiner, Friday April 26, 1895.*

## Evaluation of potato publications

We are currently undertaking an evaluation of both *Eyes on Potatoes* and *Potato Australia* to see how well we are meeting your information needs. We are also seeking your guidance in how to make these publications better.

The evaluation is being done by an independent market research company, McGregor Marketing. Telephone surveys are being conducted with around 350 industry participants across all of the potato growing areas and industry sectors.

A summary of the results will appear in the next *Eyes on Potatoes*.

Nathalie Jarosz  
Editor  
☎ (03) 6421 7637



# ROUND-UP

## State

### South Australia

Seasonal conditions have been generally hot, dry and windy during late spring and summer.

These conditions have produced emergence problems in some early sown South East crops, resulting in replanting being necessary in specific cases. In the Murraylands these conditions have resulted in some sprouting which may be as a result of increased soil temperatures breaking dormancy. In the Riverland, a few of the crops planted in late December had restricted tuber set and in some cases, deformed tuber set in early January.

Yield and quality predictions are that both will be average with some crops finishing a little early as a result of the weather conditions.

The tough weather conditions have meant that irrigation management and crop monitoring has been a constant task. Growers are now appreciating the significance and the critical nature of these technologies in determining final yields and profitability and as a consequence, more commercial advisory services are becoming available.

Wrightson Seeds Pty Ltd will be producing mini tubers and plantlets in certified poly houses at Waikerie for this coming planting season. This is a new commercial development that has commenced in the last twelve months.

*Robert Peake  
Senior Consultant Potatoes  
PIRSA Rural Solutions*

### Victoria

Most districts had good planting conditions this season, although some planting has been later than normal. In the Otways, planting started late and South Gippsland planting was not completed until mid-January.

Dry periods have been experienced at various times around the districts and some very hot days resulted in leaf damage to some crops. However, there were instances of good rainfall breaking up the hot periods and growers generally have been able to maintain good soil moisture. Irrigation started early around Portland, whilst Thorpdale had a cool, wet spell mid-season, resulting in fewer completed irrigations.

Along the Murray River, harvesting began in mid-November and continued through the hot, dry conditions of December.

Loopers have been an unusually prominent pest this season, with flights of moths still entering crops in December and producing large numbers of caterpillars. Spraying has been necessary in many crops.

Aphids and thrips have also been monitored in some districts and the hot weather also carries the threat of potato moth late in the season. Late blight, target spot, army worms and grasshoppers have been other pests and diseases of note.

*Andrew Henderson  
Technology Transfer, Potatoes  
Agriculture Victoria*

### Tasmania

The summer of 1998/99 has so far been generally good to the Tasmanian potato growers. An unusual weather pattern since the turn of the year has resulted in less than normal windy days and generally humid conditions. Crop canopies have remained upright and the lack of wind damage sees crops in good health. Late blight conditions have been prevalent but good preventative fungicide programs have been effective in stopping an outbreak.

The two processing companies, Simplot and McCain, have just commenced harvesting in the early areas. The crop assessments at this stage are good and growers will be expecting both good quality and yields this year.

Seed potato crops are of good health with very few showing foliage problems. Expected certified seed harvest will be as last year, in the vicinity of 24,000 tonnes.

Growers have welcomed the announcement by Simplot to provide some additional potato storage. This has come about from a cooperative arrangement with Field Fresh, Tasmania's largest onion exporter. Field Fresh have recently commissioned a purpose built storage system capable of taking onions during the season and then able to accept potatoes when not required for onions. This will assist growers to harvest the crop prior to the onset of winter.

Simplot are calling for nominations for their Award for Services to the Tasmanian Potato Industry. Anyone wishing to make a nomination should call the Simplot office at Ulverstone.

*John Rich  
Executive Officer  
Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers  
Association*

## Western Australia

### French fry

Early crops for the French fry industry are showing lots of promise. *Shepody* has produced a good number of tubers and although size is just moderate the specific gravity has been outstanding.

Indications for the *Russet Burbank* main crop are that yields will be good as will specific gravity. The *Russet* crops are growing longer than expected due to improved fertiliser programs. A comparison of the new and old programs at the Manjimup Horticultural Research Centre shows the difference quite starkly. The *Russets* under the old program died at 115 days while the new program supports a crop which is still green and is expected to grow out to 140 days.

### Fresh market

The winter here was mild with overcast skies. This resulted in crops maturing late which made supply tighter than usual until mid January. The tight supply had benefits for the industry in that most crops were dug very fresh and tubers had better appearance and quality than usual. This has helped to maintain sales.

The improvement was most noticeable at Manjimup where *Delaware* had better skin quality, looking whiter than usual. The Manjimup crop is now 70% *Nadine* and growers have improved the sample with less oversize tubers. Some *Snow Gem* was grown but delicate skin and susceptibility to bruising has been reported.

### Crisp

The crisp industry reports business as usual. Murphy's Crisps has been sold to Dollar Sweets but it will still operate independently and compete with The Smith's Snackfood Company and Snack Brands of Australia. Crisp exports to Asia are also steady.

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

## New South Wales

The late ware crop harvest in the Riverina district was completed by the end of October with modest prices of less than \$200 per tonne (dirty) being received late in the season following a dry, mild winter and good supplies of potatoes from the southern States.

Fresh prices then lifted to \$500 per tonne over November and remained firm until early December due to wet digging weather and poor yielding crops in some early districts. There was also a shortage of crisping potatoes with processors paying up to \$50 per tonne over contract prices for early harvest potatoes.

In the Hunter Valley some early ware crops had been ploughed in following the floods in August and many others were adversely affected by the cool, wet spring weather. However harvesting in the Bellingen district on the north coast finished three weeks ahead of schedule with the good early prices.

In the Tablelands seasonal conditions were also cooler than normal, with delayed plantings of the main crops in the Central Tablelands around Orange and slow early crop growth, particularly in paddocks with a southerly aspect, in the Northern Tablelands around Dorrigo and Ebor.

Digging of the early ware crop in the Riverina district started in early December and continued until early February. Crop yields averaged 35 tonnes per hectare, while farm gate prices dropped from \$240 per tonne in early December to less than \$200 per tonne by February.

Planting of the late ware crop started in February in the coastal, Tableland and Riverina districts. Crop areas are expected to be similar to last year.

There has been a further exodus of small growers from the New South Wales potato industry, with only two seed growers left in the Central Tablelands and just a handful of small growers remaining in the Riverina.

**Stephen Wade**  
District Horticulturist  
NSW Agriculture

## Queensland

Yields of spring harvested crops in the Atherton, South Eastern Queensland and Lockyer and Fassifern Valleys were lower than average due to early senescence of crops. In the Lockyer Valley, this caused a dramatic price lift to \$600/tonne at the tail end of the season as stocks of ware and crisping lines became limited.

Furthermore, losses of crisping crops in the Central to northern region of Queensland put added pressure on the ware market as considerable quantities of fresh market *Sebago* were sourced for crisping purposes.

Good rain was received in the December/January period and although subsoil moisture is good, substantial flows in the Lockyer Creek and tributaries have still not been recorded.

Harvesting on the eastern Darling Downs has progressed well with high yields being realised. Growing conditions have been particularly favourable with mild to hot day temperatures but cool night temperatures (13°C). The SGs of crisping crops in this region were generally up 3 or more points. Despite this, a high demand for crisping lines continues. The inability to harvest NSW crops due to rain has resulted in *Sebago* continuing to be sourced for crisping purposes.

The Lockyer and Fassifern Valley winter crops commenced planting in February and it is expected that areas will be down slightly. Conditions at planting were mild.

The growers in Eric Coleman's QA project team have again conducted a marketing trial. Potatoes graded to a customer specification received a premium price. Furthermore, the supplying of a consistent quality product again showed an increased consumer demand resulting in substantially greater sales.

**Stephen Harper**  
Research Horticulturist - Heavy  
Vegetables  
Department of Primary Industries

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