

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 7 - June 1999

ISSN 1328-6897

National Potato Growers' Field Day -

Toolangi



About 200 people took up the opportunity to see and hear about some of the latest research and developments in the potato industry at a field day at Toolangi in February.

People from each of the potato growing states attended and there was a good mix of growers, researchers, processors, packers, chemical, fertiliser and machinery companies and other people associated with the industry.

Victorian Deputy Premier, Pat McNamara, opened the day with encouraging news of an expected increase in government funding for horticulture.

Following addresses from APIC chairman Ian Rickuss and Tony Biggs (HRDC), a series of presentations were made on varieties, genetically engineered potatoes, plantlets, time of planting, retail quality, potato cyst nematode, farm hygiene, packing for export, DNA fingerprinting and benchmarking.

A keynote address was presented by Duane Preston, an extension specialist from the University of Minnesota, USA. Duane spoke about potato production in the Red River

Valley region of Minnesota and North Dakota, outlining the extreme weather conditions encountered there, the increased capacity for irrigation in recent years and the need for greater uniformity in US seed standards. He also mentioned that, from what he had seen, Victorian growers did many things well and may have some lessons for American growers.

Copies of the field day notes summarising the presentations are still available by contacting Andrew Henderson at IHD Knoxfield (phone 03 9210 9222; fax 03 9800 3521).

Above: Victorian Deputy Premier and Minister for Agriculture and Resources, Pat McNamara, tastes genetically-modified potatoes at the Toolangi field day, closely watched by Savitri Nadesan (centre) and Joanna Bialecka from IHD Knoxfield

Below: Corina Horstra (IHD Toolangi) explains the results of trials comparing potato plantlets grown at Toolangi in early November and in mid-December



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Using endosulfan - take care

Growers need to be aware of the risks of exposing cattle to spray drift on adjoining properties when using endosulfan.

In New South Wales and Queensland cattle have been affected by endosulfan residues mainly from aerial spraying of neighbouring cotton properties. Compensation claims are being sought by cattle producers.

In South Australia and other states endosulfan is sometimes used by the potato industry.

If there is a risk that cattle from adjoining properties may be exposed to endosulfan spray, please contact the owners of the cattle, preferably prior to spraying. Wherever possible cattle should not be exposed to endosulfan.

If you have cattle that have been exposed to endosulfan ensure that the 42 day withholding period from final exposure to slaughter is observed.

Aerial spraying can pose a greater risk than ground application due to the potential for spray drift.

If you need more information about this issue do not hesitate to contact your local Department of Primary Industries.

Dennis Heanes
Primary Industries and Resources SA
(08) 8226 0372

Editorial

-Thumbs up for potato publications

The editorial team have been heartened by the results of a survey just completed of the two potato industry publications, *Eyes on Potatoes* and *Potato Australia*.

The survey found overwhelming industry support for the publications with 86% of those who were surveyed considering that they are a good use of levy funds. (Both publications are funded through a mix of levy funds and advertising.)

Seventy percent of readers said that the publications were relevant to them and most

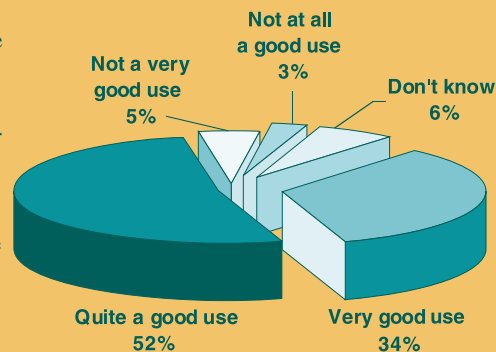
(over 80%) are happy with the format and general presentation of both publications, in particular with the easy reading style of the articles.

This doesn't mean that we have got it all right. Many made suggestions for improvements and/or critical comment, although there were no consistent trends. The editorial team is now working through these and will be trying to incorporate the suggestions and overcome the criticisms over the next few issues.

A more detailed report will be provided in this year's edition of *Potato Australia* and the full report will be available through HRDC.

Nathalie Jarosz
Editor

Percentage of readers that consider that levy funds are being put to good use by subsidising potato industry publications



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

EYES ON POTATOES



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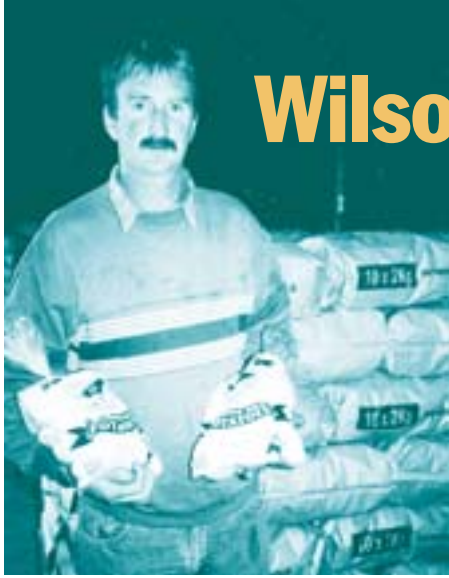
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Eyes on Potatoes is distributed free of charge to all participants of the Australian Potato Industry with assistance from the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation and the Potato Levy.



Wilson's Fresh Selection

- Supplying the premium market

Eight years ago certified seed potato growers Greg and Marlene Wilson changed direction and decided to use the attributes of Mt. Seymour in Tasmania's southern midlands to produce premium washed potatoes for the Hobart market.

Greg and Marlene's attention to detail and "quality only" philosophy sees their company, Wilson's Fresh Selection, the leading supplier in Tasmania's premium potato market.

Wilson's Fresh Selection is a boutique operation. There are only two full time employees assisting the Wilsons to daily wash and pack potatoes and their efforts are reflected in the very high quality of the packed product.

According to Greg their biggest asset is the grey sand of the midlands which gives very good tuber shape, skin finish and colour. This, along with the relatively low temperatures compared to the mainland gives excellent skin colour, particularly to their red lines.

Bintje, *Coliban* and *Red Rascal* are the main varieties washed and packed at the Mt. Seymour operation. Greg and Marlene are looking for varieties which will cook in more than one way. "Customers want a multi purpose potato. *Bintje* has been popular for a long time because of its versatility," Greg says.

Wilson's Fresh Selection has access to varieties from Crop and Food Research in New Zealand and is trialing some of their new releases. It has exclusive use in Tasmania of "*Red Rascal*" and Greg says there are other very good varieties in the pipeline.

"It is important to be working with plant breeders and retailers in order to be positioned

for future market access. Survival in the industry will depend upon these links," he says.

Expansion of the business has seen the supply chain extend to producers at Dunally on the Tasman Peninsular and Penguin in the north west.

Asked about disease pressures which may affect yield and quality, Greg said that target spot can be a problem in some years but that late blight is virtually unheard of.

"Blackleg has caused losses in some seasons but rhizoctonia is pretty well controlled with fungicide at planting. Bacterial spot was concerning us a couple of years ago but this has been overcome with modifications to the washing equipment."

Greg sees Quality Assurance programs important for market capture. "QA doesn't mean the potatoes are better but it does document procedures and provide traceability. SQF 2000 will aid market entry, particularly to untapped markets."

The Wilson's ability to provide and present a high standard of product allows them to see a future in the potato industry. Future capital investment is planned for new washing and grading equipment. This will help maintain an edge in a business where big is not necessarily best.

● Devonport

● Launceston

The area of Mount Seymour is situated in Tasmania's southern midlands, one hour's drive from Hobart. With an elevation of approximately 1500 feet above sea level, the district has long been a traditional production area for certified seed potatoes. Average annual rainfall is 23 inches and not particularly reliable. This, combined with sandy loam soils and lack of irrigation, results in a slow grown, high quality seed tuber which harvests free of soil.

● Mt Seymour

HOBART ●

Inquiry

into primary producer access to gene technology

A government inquiry was initiated on 30 March 1999 to look at the capacity of small and medium sized businesses to access the benefits of gene technology. The committee is to report on the following areas:

- the future value and importance of genetically modified varieties
- the ability for producers to compete using traditionally available varieties
- the commercialisation and marketing of agricultural and livestock production varieties

- the cost to producers of new varieties
- other impediments to the utilisation of new varieties by small producers
- assistance to small producers to develop new varieties and the protection of the rights of independent breeders, in relation to genetically modified organisms
- the appropriateness of current variety protection rights, administrative arrangements and legislation, in relation to genetically modified organisms

- opportunities to educate the community of the benefits of gene technology.

Submissions were requested by 11 June 1999. Further information about the inquiry can be obtained from the committee secretariat.

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APIC Briefs

APIC Strategic Plan

The draft Industry Strategic Plan has been accepted by APIC. A summary of the plan has been included in this edition of *Eyes on Potatoes*. The R&D Committee can now move to finalise the R&D Plan which will provide the 'blueprint' for the research organisations to base future project submissions.

National Seed Certification Project

The first stage of the project found there was a need for national standards.

The second stage is well underway with the third draft of a proposed set of national standards about to go out to industry for consideration. Comments on the draft will then be considered at a workshop to be held on 10th June involving representatives from the relevant sectors of the industry.

Proposed change of structure

A discussion paper on a new operational structure for APIC had been put forward by AUSVEG at the APIC meeting last October. The suggested change was discussed, but no decision was reached. Further discussions will be held with a view of resolving the matter at the October meeting later this year.



John Rich (right) presents Max with a small gift in appreciation of his contribution over many years to the Australian potato industry.

Max resigns as Secretary

Max Walker has tendered his resignation from the role of Secretary/Treasurer of APIC and APIC R&D Committee. Max has been involved in the potato industry for many years and was a key player in the formation of APIC.

Prior to becoming involved with APIC, Max spent almost 30 years in what is now known as, the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment in Tasmania working for the vegetable industry in extension, research and management.

In 1988 Max was elected as convenor of the steering committee to pursue the concept of a national forum to represent the Australian potato industry. The findings of this committee were then put to an open forum of potato industry representatives in Canberra in December of that year and out of this meeting the interim potato council was formed. APIC was born.

Max retired from the Department in December 1993 and took over the Secretary/Treasurer role for APIC from Tony Biggs in November 1994.

The task of Secretary is not an easy one and we greatly appreciate Max's efforts and wish him all the best for the future.

Ian Rickuss
APIC Chairman
 ☎ (07) 5465 8247

How do you spell "potato"?

English understood....

If GH stands for P as in hiccough
 If OUGH stands for O as in dough
 If PHTH stands for T as in phthisis
 If EIGH stands for A as in neighbour
 If TTE stands for T as in gazette
 If EAU stands for O as in plateau

...then the right way to spell "potato" should be....

GHOUGHPTHHEIGHTTEAU !

Variety Field Day-Mt Gambier

In April a field day highlighting French fry varieties was held at Kalangadoo near Mt Gambier in South Australia.

Fourteen varieties originating from the national breeding program were inspected and discussed in terms of their performance in this area. Technical updates were also given by Southern Choice, Technico, IAMA, SARDI and PIRSA.



Roger Kirkham (National Potato Breeder) describes the characteristics of some of the varieties to Don Ferguson (grower from Kalangadoo), Trevor Wicks (Senior Plant Pathologist from SARDI) and Daryl Ferguson



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Taking a close look at one of the varieties are Ben Dowling (Technico), Robert Peake (PIRSA Rural Solutions) and Graham Henman (SAFRIES)



Crisp varieties released in WA

Two new crisp varieties, *Dawmor* and *Hart*, were released at Manjimup in March. Suited to the export trade, these varieties demonstrate higher yields and tuber size than *Atlantic* and offer the potential to reduce seed costs.

Developed initially by Roger Kirkham of the National Potato Improvement & Evaluation Scheme, the varieties were tested on a commercial scale by Agritrade International Pty Ltd after showing a lot of potential in demonstrations run by Agriculture Western Australia (AGWEST).

New pathogen tested seed was bulked up by Agritrade International seed grower Lindsay Rodomiljac at Northcliffe and test shipments sent to processors in Malaysia where they were well received.

Phil Lalor, Manager of Agritrade International said that adoption of new, improved varieties was vital for the industry to maintain its competitiveness.

"These varieties will enhance the competitiveness of our growers through their higher yield, better tuber size and reduced seed costs," he said.

Peter Dawson
Agriculture Western Australia
Ph: (08) 9892 8461



Dawmor (89-55-6)

Parents:	<i>Tarago</i> and <i>Lindsay</i>
Best growing period:	summer
Shape:	round but can be oblong in other growing periods
Yield:	high (averaging 84% better than <i>Atlantic</i>).
Dry matter:	high (20.4% compared with 18.9% for <i>Atlantic</i>)
Fry colour:	good
Internal disorders:	half the level of <i>Atlantic</i>
Tuber set:	over 11 tubers per plant (<i>Atlantic</i> sets just over 7). This means <i>Dawmor</i> can be planted at a lower density than <i>Atlantic</i> , e.g. 20 cm between plants instead of 15 cm, and so seed costs are reduced.
Cadmium:	lower than the Maximum Permitted Concentration, but higher than <i>Atlantic</i> .



Hart (90-73-11)

(named after Manjimup potato industry identity Brendan Hart)

Parents:	<i>Patrones</i> and <i>Lindsay</i>
Best growing period:	summer at Manjimup spring and autumn on the Swan Coastal Plain
Shape:	oblong (while not acceptable for domestic crisp processors, it is acceptable for the export trade)
Yield:	much higher yield than <i>Atlantic</i> from October plantings
Dry matter:	21.1% compared with 18.5% for <i>Atlantic</i> (October plantings)
Fry colour:	similar to <i>Atlantic</i>
Internal disorders:	lower levels than <i>Atlantic</i>
Tuber set:	over 10 tubers per plant (can be planted at a lower density than <i>Atlantic</i> to give savings in seed costs)

APIC R&D Committee Update 1999 - 2000 research program

At the March meeting in Devonport the Committee recommended a research program of \$1,956,000 for 1999/2000 consisting of \$1,854,000 for existing projects and \$102,000 for new projects. Due to the large number of existing projects still requiring funding the committee was not able to fund the number of new projects it would have liked. Of the eighteen new proposals submitted only five proposals could be funded.

The projects recommended by the Committee have been considered by the Board of the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation and been given final approval for funding. The successful projects will commence early in the new financial year as soon as contracts are finalised.

NaPIES Review

The National Potato Improvement and Evaluation Scheme is currently under review to determine the level of future funding by the industry. At present the industry invests about 22% in NaPIES (or \$478,000 in 1998-99) of the money available for research and development. This is a considerable investment.

HRDC requested ACIL, a consulting

company, to prepare a discussion paper regarding the issues that need to be considered in the review. This was presented to the Committee at the meeting by ACIL and they have now been requested to produce a more detailed discussion paper by mid June as background for a national workshop in August. The workshop will include representatives from different parts of the industry and will determine the extent of future involvement in the NaPIES program.

APIC R&D Plan

Immediately following the NaPIES Review Workshop in August, the R&D Committee will be reworking the R&D Plan which guides funding decisions by the Committee. This has not been able to be done sooner as it relied on the completion of the Strategic Plan which was finalised at the APIC meeting in May.

Lawrie Shaw calls it a day

Lawrie has handed in his resignation to the R&D Committee so he could focus his attentions more on his farm business. His contribution, particularly on seed issues, has been very much appreciated by the committee. We thank him for his contribution and wish him all the best for the future.



Max McKenna, Nathalie Jarosz and Lawrie Shaw having a lunchtime chat during the APIC R&D Committee meeting in Tasmania

Committee visits local facilities

While in Tasmania the APIC R&D Committee visited the Simplot factory at Ulverstone, Serve-Ag Research and attended a Serve-Ag seminar which included such topics as Geographical Information Systems which is a very powerful mapping technique to aid decision making. The visits were to gain a better understanding of the local industry and how industry money was being spent.

The next APIC R&D meeting to consider funding proposals will be held at Gatton in Queensland in early October.

Dr Jack Meagher
Chairman

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Promotional Levy

Senator Troeth has not yet made a decision on the Fresh Potato Marketing Levy. Geoff Moar (Chairman - AUSVEG) and Brian Newman (Executive Director - AUSVEG) will be meeting with the Senator to discuss the issue further.

Hort 2000

A proposal has been put forward by a Working Group of Hort 2000 to form a horticultural peak industry forum for Australia. A workshop has been held and an implementation group has been given the responsibility of developing a business plan by January 2000. This would then be considered by all horticultural peak industry bodies to determine whether there is support for the proposal.

AUSVEG supports the formation of a peak industry forum provided that it can have a positive contribution to influencing government policy.

Horticultural Industry Alliance Steering Committee

The Horticultural Industry Alliance Steering Committee has been formed to consider a merger of the Australian Horticultural Corporation (AHC) and the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation (HRDC). A discussion (green) paper has been produced and regional meetings have been held throughout Australia to gain industry input. Once the submission period has concluded a white paper will be produced for industry and government consideration.

At present AUSVEG cannot see a compelling reason for change.

Developing a national PCN strategy

It was reported that a proposal was put forward at the last APIC R&D Committee meeting to develop a national strategy for Potato Cyst Nematode. Due to the late receipt of the proposal there was a lack of time for prior discussion so a decision was deferred until the October meeting. In the meantime the R&D Committee requested Agriculture Victoria to work with Leigh Walters who is developing a national Code of Practice for diseases.

Thanks to Max Walker

AUSVEG would like to thank Max for his very significant personal and professional contribution to the potato industry over a long period of time. As indicated in the APIC report Max has decided to call it a day.

Brian Newman
Executive Director
AUSVEG

☎ (03) 5790 5247

Will WA keep its regulated marketing system?

Last year we reported that Western Australia had been forced to review its potato marketing system to ensure it complied with the National Competition Policy guidelines.

The review was tabled in the Western Australian Parliament in January. The report recommended the retention of both the regulated supply management system and the setting of wholesale prices by Western Potatoes based on grading standards.

These findings have been welcomed by the industry in Western Australia and the report has the endorsement of the Minister for Primary Industry, Monty House. However the review process is not yet completed and the following four steps are required to be taken.

1. Comments on the report are made by the National Competition Policy (NCP) Unit of State Treasury.
2. The report and State Treasury comments then go to the State Cabinet Government Management Standing Committee.
3. If endorsed by the state cabinet committee, the report then goes to full cabinet for approval.
4. The recommendations of State Cabinet then go to the Federal Government where the National Competition Council will make their own recommendations to Federal Treasury on the payment of National Competition grants back to Western Australia.

This process should be complete by the end of the year.

Out & About



A linear move irrigator at Max McKenna's property at West Gawler in NW Tasmania. This was one of two irrigation systems featured at an irrigation field day held by Simplot in March. The purpose of the day was to make growers aware of some of the irrigation alternatives now available in Tasmania.

Harvesting on the property of G. Dimond and Sons, Mollonghip, Victoria. The paddock is worked by Ross & Glenda Dimond and Barry & Vivienne Dimond.



Colin Stewart, of Bonde Pastoral, and Gary O'Connor of Serve-Ag, look at crop growth at Brian and Jan Bonde's property at North Motton in Tasmania. A 70 acre centre pivot irrigator was installed in this paddock last winter. Brian and Gary monitor soil moisture weekly.

Electronic information services in the potato industry

As part of the process of gaining input into this project from growers and others in the industry, focus group sessions have been held in Virginia (SA), Warragul (Vic), Berrigan (NSW), Crookwell (NSW) and Devonport (Tas). Discussions were also held with people from the processing and service sectors along the way. The information gathered in this process will be used in the workshop to be held in Melbourne in June.

A big thank you to all those who participated. A report on the outcomes of the project will be included in *Potato Australia*.

Nathalie Jarosz Project Leader

Save time! Save money!

What can new electronic information services offer?

New electronic information services are changing the way we do business. The internet, email and e-commerce are some of the better known technologies that are currently having a big impact on world commerce. How these technologies may impact on the Australian Potato industry and how we may benefit and take advantage of them are the main topics of the workshop. The workshop will culminate in the development of a draft strategy to facilitate the introduction of Electronic Information Services into the Australian Potato Industry.

National EIS workshop

23-24 June 1999

Airport Motel and Convention Centre
Melbourne

Cost: \$50 (if only attending Day 1)

\$230 (both days including accom.)

To register and for more details contact:

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*EIS was featured in the
March Eyes on Potatoes*

New publications from Victoria

Some DNRE Victoria/CQ-Potato publications now available:

Potato Export Guidelines

Andrew Henderson, Peter Carr, Bruce Fry and Kan Moorthy

Covers the export process, regulations, handling potatoes for export and where to get further information. *104 pages. Cost \$20.*

Benchmarking the seed and French fry potato industries – summary reports 1997/98

Kaye Aitken, Peter Carr and Bruce Fry

Studies on last season's financial performance in each industry sector. *39 pages. Cost \$10 each.*

Potato handling: minimising mechanical damage to potato tubers

Graeme Thomson and Andrew Henderson

Information about types of damage, environmental factors, hazards in handling and how to check for damage. *44 pages. Cost \$10.*

*These publications, and a full list of others available, can be obtained from
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(phone 03 9210 9222 fax 03 9800 3521).*



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We think we have **problems!**

If growers had any doubts about the value of moving towards national standards for certified seed it is likely they would have been dispelled if they had attended a grower meeting near Creswick, Victoria in February.

During a talk given by Duane Preston from Minnesota in the USA he raised the issue of seed certification systems in North America which is timely given our current project on establishing national standards for certified seed in Australia.

The difficulties we face in moving towards national standards seem to pale into insignificance compared to the challenges faced in North America.

In the USA, like Australia, many of the states have developed their own systems of certification resulting in differences in standards. One simple example is the naming of generations that have been grown from laboratory tested stock.

Agency	Year in the Field							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Alaska	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	G7	G8
California	N	G1	G2	G3	F	C	-	-
Colorado	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	-	-
Idaho	N	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	-
Minnesota	N	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	C	-
New York	Uihlein Farm		G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6
Oregon	N	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	-	-
Washington	N	G1	G2	G3	G4	-	-	-
Wisconsin	E1	E2	G1	G2	G3	G4	C	-
Canada	PE	E1	E2	E3	E4	F	C	-

Extract from table prepared by the Potato Association of America Dec 1997
C=certified, F=foundation, E=elite, G=generation, N=nuclear, PE=pre-elite

So if you were a looking at seed that had been out in the field for five years it would be called Generation 5 in Alaska, Foundation in California, Generation 4 in Idaho, Generation 3 in New York and Elite 4 in Canada. You would want to have your wits about you if you were buying seed from another state!

To add to the challenge, Duane indicated that Minnesota had two different certification schemes.

There is a limited generation certified seed scheme where seed potatoes must originate from pathogen tested *in vitro* plantlets and maybe replanted for certification for a limited number of years.

There is also a conventional certified seed scheme because a lot of farmers did not want to give up a particular line of potatoes.

Duane also indicated that seed is sometimes certified in two states, especially when growers are on the borders.

So the thought of having one set of standards for all of Australia is sounding better all the time!

Duane Preston is a Professor and Area Extension Agent for Potatoes for the North Dakota State University Extension Service and the University of Minnesota Extension Service. He was brought to Australia by the Victorian Government through the CQ-Potato Project to participate in the National Potato Grower's Field Day at Toolangi and a series of field days and talks in Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia. Duane's visit was co-hosted by Tony Myers (Victorian Potato Crisping Research Group) and Tony Pitt (Victorian Certified Seed Potato Committee).



Paddock walk at A.J. Toohey's property at Mollonghip 20 km north-east of Ballarat, Victoria

(left to right) Gerard Toohey, Unknown (Somebody moved at the wrong time!), Greg Toohey, Jim Toohey, Robert Toohey, Frank Toohey, Duane Preston, Laurie Dean, Kan Moorthy, Charlie Dean



Duane Preston addressing attendees at a Simplot field day in Tasmania

Potatoes 2000

Australian Potato Research, Development and Technology Transfer Conference

Linking research to practice

31 July to 2 August 2000 • Stamford Grand Hotel, Glenelg • Adelaide, South Australia

Put these dates in your diary

For more information about the conference contact :

Potatoes 2000 - Conference Secretariat
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Adelaide SA 5000
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A registration form will be in the December edition of *Eyes on Potatoes*. If you wish to submit a paper and have not received a Call for Papers contact the Conference Secretariat.
The conference is supported by HRDC and the Potato Levy.



ROUND-UP

State

Western Australia

French fry

Last issue I said that the early indications were for good yields with high dry matter. This has been borne out with Simplot reporting specific gravity averaging 1.078 compared with 1.075 last season.

The fairly dry autumn has also been beneficial. The potato production areas were missed by the rains associated with the cyclone and storms that hit Exmouth and Moora, allowing the harvest of the Scott River region to proceed uninterrupted.

Fresh market

The main Manjimup/Pemberton crop has been harvested. Deliveries started early and the improved timeliness of harvest helped quality. Consequently sales improved on last season. This resulted in little surplus production. The combination of better quality and increased sales means that grower returns for Pool 5 should be better than last season. Western Potatoes wouldn't give an estimate of prices but my guess is better than \$430 per tonne.

The National Competition Policy review has been completed and found in favour of retaining statutory marketing in WA. Details can be found in a separate article.

Western Potatoes is going ahead with its QA program. A number of ware growers, seed growers, transporters and packers have already gained SQF 2000 accreditation.

Crisp

Growers in WA are showing more interest in the opportunities for exporting crisp potatoes to Asia. Agritrade International, which exports crisp potatoes, held a release for two varieties, *Dawmor* and *Hart* developed by the national breeding program.

Brett Pemberton, formerly of Simplot in Manjimup, has joined The Smith's Snackfood Company as Agronomy Manager.

Peter Dawson

*Development Officer, Horticulture
Agriculture Western Australia*

Queensland

The autumn crops of Lockyer and Fassifern valleys were planted in near perfect conditions. Day temperatures were warm to hot, with mild to cool night temperatures. Crops to the end of April looked very good, although westerly winds may reduce the expected yields, particularly if this becomes a more general weather pattern.

The southern Downs has commenced harvesting the autumn crop and are very happy with the yields.

The Killarney region has also had a very good season, local growers stating it has probably been the best for the last 8 - 10 years. Again days have been warm and nights cool. The last week of April saw a frost in the Killarney region, with a soil temperature of minus 4°C. This will have some effect on the later crops, causing some reduction in size and yield.

Atherton Tablelands has had a very wet start to the year receiving 713mm and 534mm of rain in February and March. While rainfall has not been as high during April, conditions have remained wet. This caused major problems to those growers planting "once-off certified" summer crops, with some crops being a total loss. The remaining summer crops were planted approximately four weeks later than planned. Wet weather has also slightly delayed the early plantings of the main season crops. Conditions have improved and are now favourable for the main crops.

The crisping industry has had a very good season, with crops being on schedule (except northern Queensland which has had a slight delay), producing excellent yields and having above average specific gravities.

Michael Hughes

*Extension Agronomist
Department of Primary Industries*

New South Wales

Planting of the late ware crop began in early January in the coastal, Tableland and Riverina districts. Sowing was completed by early March, although planting was delayed in the Dorrigo district due to wet weather.

Apart from a few breakdown losses in the Riverina crops following the hot summer weather, most districts achieved excellent plant establishment. Autumn crop areas remained similar to last year.

Autumn seasonal conditions have been favourable with the mild, wet weather across the state providing most crops with an average to fair yield potential. However, fungal disease pressure in the coastal areas and early frosts in the Tablelands are expected to reduce yields in some districts.

Weather permitting, digging is expected to commence in early May in the Maitland district and by early June in the Riverina, with crop yields of 30 to 35 tonnes per hectare forecast.

Digging of the main ware crop started in March in the Tablelands. Although wet weather had delayed planting in the central Tablelands, the growing season was favourable with frequent summer storms in both the northern and southern districts. Fresh market prices over the summer/autumn period have ranged from \$180 to \$200/tonne (bulk, dirty, on-farm) in late January to \$350 to \$380/tonne by early April.

Certified seed harvesting has commenced in the Guyra and Crookwell districts with most varieties already being placed with buyers. A shortfall in *Atlantic* and *Coliban* seed is becoming evident. The 1999 recommended minimum price for Crookwell certified seed is \$450/tonne. The Crookwell Potato Association Inc. have opened an office/resource centre in Crookwell, which will be staffed by a permanent secretary.

Stephen Wade

*District Horticulturist
NSW Agriculture*

Victoria

Dry weather has been the dominating influence on this year's growing season. Yields have generally been down as a result – tuber numbers have been reasonable, but warm conditions (particularly in February) have restricted bulking up. However, harvesting has generally been going to schedule and prices have been good.

Common scab was found in a number of crops this season, possibly due to the dry conditions. It was mainly detected outside the irrigation areas, in new areas or new paddocks and in conditions of high soil organic matter. In the Central Highlands, sporadic outbreaks of late blight were found in a small number of crops in sheltered conditions. These were kept in check by the dry, windy conditions.

A total of 81 varieties were submitted for inspection in the Victorian Certified Seed Potato Scheme this season. The total area submitted for inspection was up by 110 ha on the previous season, with increases in some of the more widely-grown varieties accounting for much of this.

In recent months, there has been an increasing demand for potato exports from Victoria. More exporters are looking to include potatoes in their businesses, as either seed, fresh or fresh for processing.

The Victorian Potato Growers' Council, with the assistance of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, is now producing a newsletter for distribution to every potato grower in Victoria. The newsletter is edited by Tony Pitt.

Following its promotion at the Toolangi field day in February, a Farm\$mart program for Ballarat potato growers will be conducted later this year. Farm\$mart is about controlled planning of the farm business and has been jointly developed by DNRE and the Victorian Farmers' Federation.

In March, Kan Moorthy left Agriculture Victoria (DNRE) to return to Smith's Snackfoods, where he is now managing their storage facility at Tynong. Kaye Aitken, who led the project on financial benchmarking of the Victorian potato industry, has also departed, to continue her family tradition of growing cherries.

Andrew Henderson
Technology Transfer, Potatoes
Agriculture Victoria

Tasmania

Harvest is well under way of what is probably Tasmania's biggest ever potato crop. Expected to yield 380,000 tonnes, the farm gate value of the crop will be around \$80 million.

March and April have been dry allowing uninterrupted harvest of processing crops with both Simplot and McCain filling their stores before the end of May.

Unseasonal late summer rains caused some tuber loss in poorer drained soils but this has been minimised by drier autumn conditions which has allowed early harvest. Processing crops generally are showing lower solids as a result of the season. In some cases the early varieties, *Kennebec* and *Shepody* have failed to meet processor specifications.

Price negotiations for the forthcoming year are about to commence between Simplot and the grower representatives. This process is often drawn out and may not conclude until later in the year.

Harvesting of seed crops is well under way and quality is excellent. Like last year, most seed will be harvested dry and stored free of soil. The seed industry is eagerly awaiting the outcome of discussions that will aid the formulation of common national standards for the certification of seed potatoes.

The fresh market sector is yet to capitalise on the national trend in price improvement but this is expected to occur when colder conditions prevail. The expected surplus of processing potatoes may depress fresh market prices. But it is early days yet and a wet winter could turn surplus into shortage.

Like mainland producers of table varieties, Tasmanian growers and packers are still in search of potatoes with better skin finish and colour.

Frank Mulcahy
Field Officer
Simplot Australia Field Service

South Australia

Seasonal conditions have been dry and mild with the occasional severe frost.

Most of the processing crops have been harvested with yields average to slightly below average. The hot dry conditions earlier in the season, as well as the effects of target spot late in the season were the most significant contributors.

Tomato spotted wilt virus damage was recorded in the South East and the Northern Adelaide Plains. Growers will need to re-assess their Integrated Pest Management strategies before next season, as the problem appears to be becoming more severe.

Several severe frosts in the Murraylands region devastated some fresh crops close to maturity.

A very successful potato variety field day was conducted near Kalangadoo in the South East.

Robert Peake
Senior Consultant Potatoes
PIRSA Rural Solutions

More spuds Not duds



Introducing the best news in years for potato growers – the new pink fungicide from Bayer – MONCEREN 250 FS. It provides highly effective control of seed borne *Rhizoctonia solani* (stem canker and black scurf) in potatoes every time. So MONCEREN increases your proportion of clean, marketable-size tubers. MONCEREN is a convenient, easy to use flowable



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