

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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Young WA consumers eat more spuds

Western Potatoes' annual market research of consumers in the Perth Metropolitan area indicated that the 18-34 year old age group had a 22% increase in consumption for 1999 compared to a 24% increase in consumption for 1998.

During the last financial year Western Potatoes spent \$780,000 on promotion of potatoes in Western Australia.

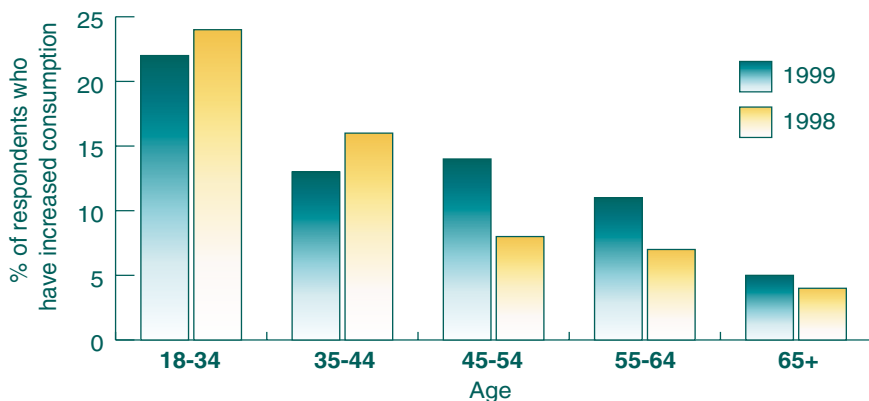
The study also identified that while fresh potatoes have a strong market position relative to rice and pasta, the market is

highly saturated, with more opportunity to increase usage among current users rather than trying to attract more potato eaters.

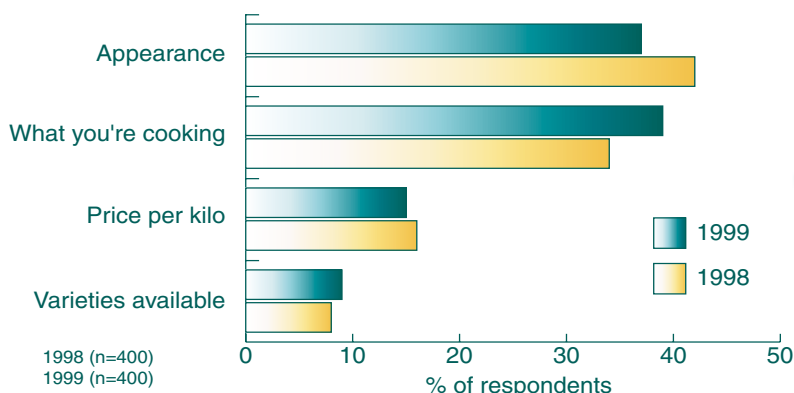
The importance of good taste, versatility and cooking options are still paramount across user and non-user segments.

The annual study was carried out by Market Equity for Western Potatoes and involved a random telephone survey of 400 households in the Perth Metropolitan area.

Increases in potato consumption



Factors influencing decision to buy potatoes



contents

IPM in the tropics	3
Seed Potato Standards	5
APIC R&D Update	6
AUSVEG Briefs	7
National	
Plant Health Program	9
Cadmium Workshop	10
Potato 2000 Conference	11
NSW Potato Industry	12-13
State Round-up	14-15

Booklets

Quality Assurance Guide for potato growers
Farm chemical storage guide
Victorian Certified Seed Potatoes
Seed Buyers Guide

New APIC chairman



Milton Rodda, the Field Manager for McCain of Ballarat, is the new chairman of the Australian Potato Industry Council and Geoff Moar, a grower from Oaklands, the new Deputy Chairman.

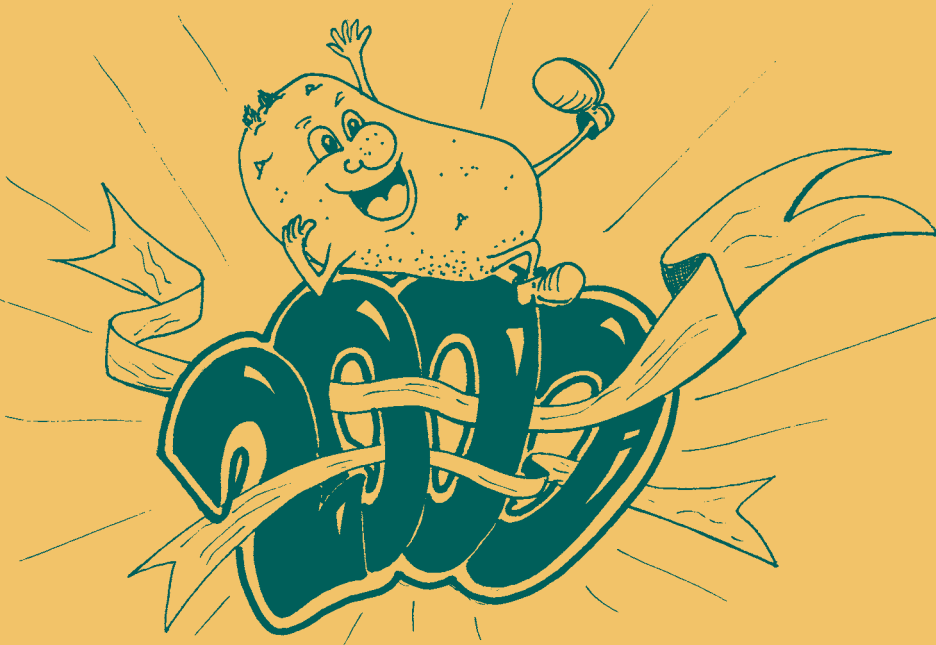
Milton and Geoff replace Ian Rickuss and Max McKenna.

Milton would like to thank Ian and Max for their effort as these positions involve a lot of work and a considerable time commitment.

"Their task over the last two years has not been an easy one with the industry going through many changes."

Editorial

Wishing you a wonderful Christmas...and a bug free New Year



Yes it's already that time again. It has sped by so fast but on reflection, much has happened within the industry.

As we saw in this year's *Potato Australia* there is a tremendous amount of R & D being done with some very positive outcomes for industry. We now have a strategic plan (see *Eyes on Potatoes* June 99) and much progress has been made in the development of national seed standards.

On a less positive note, the closure of the Manjimup factory has been a big blow for the growers concerned.

As we come to the end of the decade we see a strong move towards proprietary ownership of varieties and potatoes starting to be marketed as a product rather than a commodity.

The new century will bring many more changes, most of which we can't even anticipate yet.

Enjoy the New Year celebrations but lets hope there are no hidden bugs. If you haven't already done so, now is the time to back up all your important computer files.

Merry Christmas from the Editorial Team.

Nathalie, Leigh & Helen

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EYES ON POTATOES



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A farmer's experience with IPM in the tropics

John Quadrio is a third generation potato and peanut farmer on the tablelands. John grows potatoes, grass seed and sugar cane. He likes to have a four year rotation with potatoes as that way he does not have problems with nematodes, grubs and soil diseases. John's rotation usually goes from grass into peanuts then into potatoes and then back into grass for four years.

John's interest with IPM was spurred on by his involvement with the LAPDOG discussion group (see *Potato Australia 1996, p37*) which was a project started by Department of Primary Industries and partly funded by HRDC.

I initially decided to get away from chemicals because of problems with my health. At that stage I was asked to join a discussion group with Primary Industries. I really wanted to get into Integrated Pest Management and get right away from insecticides. It is pretty hard to get away from fungicides. So my crop is now grown with virtually no insecticides at all.

We have had problems with aphids over the years. Now we let them build up and monitor them. Over the last five years we have not had to spray with any insecticides at all.

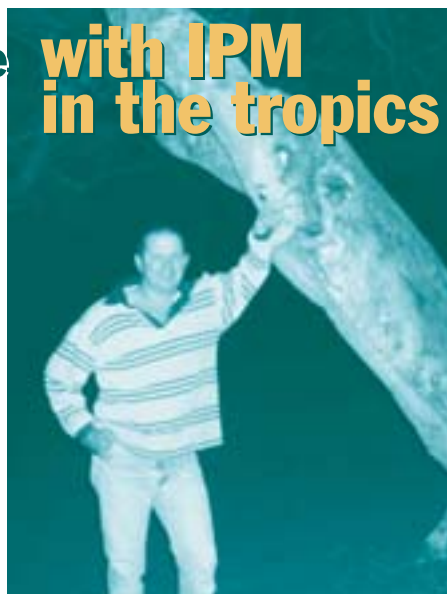
Our other big problem is potato moth and we have overcome that with the use of a tyre roller about three weeks before harvest. By sealing the cracks on top of the ground it stops the potato moth getting in and laying eggs. It is a really key factor. This time of year up here it can get up to 35°C and you would normally need to spray every three or four days. Not having to spray at all is a big plus.

I do my own monitoring and employ an agronomist who scouts the crop once or twice a week. He gives me a bit of a run down of what he thinks is happening and between us we come up with a decision of what to do.

Which bug is which

I sort out which bug is which with the help of my agronomist. We found a few beneficials up here that nobody knew what they were. They weren't in any book.

I did not know all the names of the bugs but I knew that some were good ones and some were bad ones. We found by



looking through the crop that if a particular bug was attacking aphids it was doing a good job and if it was eating a lot of the leaves it was doing a bad job.

Benefits of monitoring

Monitoring means spending a lot of time in the crop. It is amazing if you look closely what you find. I found it pretty relaxing to get in there and spend a couple of hours looking around monitoring to see what the levels were.

As farmers we do not spend enough time monitoring our crops. In the last five years I have learnt a lot about growing potatoes.

How many is too many

The hardest thing we found in getting right away from chemicals was working out a threshold level for the pests. Was 50 aphids per leaf safe or not safe? It has taken a few years to sort out what levels are safe.

Once upon a time if there were two aphids per leaf we would panic and start spraying and some people were even doubling up and spraying every two days. We have gone from that level on the tablelands to where about 90% of the growers are probably not using many insecticides at all now. It is a big change. If you said this was the way we would go five years ago to people they would have looked at you and laughed and said you were stupid.

Releasing beneficial insects

We have released *Trichogramma*, *Aphidius* wasp and *Orgilus* wasp. The *Orgilus* wasp was for potato moth. We have had big problems getting enough numbers of that particular species.

Other pests

Another problem we have is the heliothis caterpillar and that comes about by not spraying insecticides. We need to do a bit more work on that. There are some biological controls that seem to work okay.

The big secret with caterpillars is not to let the caterpillars get too big before hitting them with the first biological spray. If they get too big they are lot harder to kill. This year we only had to spray once for them and that was enough.

Challenge of not spraying

It is bit like going to the doctor. People can be too quick to go to a doctor whereas if they had let the infection go for a couple more days the body would have healed itself anyway. We are finding that with potatoes.

Before we started IPM, we would want to spray as soon as we saw something rather than letting our beneficials build up for an extra week or two and letting them do the job. We were finding that two days after we sprayed the winged aphids were back in and doing damage again.

By not spraying we had less pests in the crops because we were not wiping out all the beneficials. The amount of beneficials that build up in the first two weeks is unbelievable if you are game enough to let your crop go that far.

It is a pretty hard decision not to spray. If you have a twenty acre crop of potatoes then you are looking at about \$50,000 in the ground. If you only get a yield of 6 tonnes an acre you are not even going to cover costs. It was a big risk to take. We have learned a lot and still have a lot to learn.

Major challenges now

I am very keen to continue with the releases of beneficial insects. We are only releasing the insects that are in our area naturally. Once they have done their job they die off anyway. I like to see us push nature along a bit more.

We have been getting beneficials from Brisbane and Victoria. James Cook University in Cairns is now trying to breed beneficials and hopefully, if it works out, it will become a commercial venture for them. The money I used to spend on chemicals I would rather spend on our natural predators.

John Quadrio
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New Secretary

Brian Newman has been appointed the Secretary of APIC for the next twelve months. Brian has been acting in the position after the retirement of Max Walker in May.

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Elections

Positions in APIC were declared vacant and elections held at the November meeting.



Geoff Moar, Max McKenna and Milton Rodda

Ian Rickuss did not stand for another term and Milton Rodda, Field Manager with McCains in Ballarat, was elected unopposed as the new Chairman of APIC.

Geoff Moar, a grower from Oaklands in NSW, was elected as Vice Chairman and Max McKenna, a grower from Ulverstone in Tasmania, as Treasurer.

The new public officer is Brian Newman and the new representative on the AUSHORT R&D Committee is Milton Rodda.

National Seed Standard Project

An update was presented to the committee on the HRDC funded National

Seed Standards Project by Russell Sully (see p 5). The project is at a stage where APIC is considering its role in the administration and management of the system.

Before the proposal can be endorsed by APIC it will need to be supported by the main seed grower groups. This stage of the project is currently underway.

Potato Export Market Development Project

An update on the progress of the HRDC funded project, Potato Export Market Development, was presented to the council by Russell Sully (see p 8).

The project is now at a stage where APIC needs to be involved in determining how industry will provide the co-ordination and leadership required for export market development.

A working group has been set up to look at the issue involving Dom Della, Geoff Moar, Geoff Biggs and Russell Sully.

Milton Rodda, APIC Chairman
☎ (03) 5339 2241

Potato options for WA Simplot growers

The recently announced closure of the French fry potato processing factory at Manjimup presents the local vegetable industry with a challenge. Viable crops have not been found to replace the 700 ha of potatoes scheduled for planting between September and December this year. Despite this, strong opportunities have been identified for development which should progress to commercial scale over the next 2 – 5 years.

Producers affected by the closure have some common attributes:

- High levels of potato production skills
- Ownership or access to specialised potato production equipment
- Land use (rotational) programs built around potato cropping
- Access to local infrastructure needed for potato production (seed cool stores, freight, cutting and grading lines, skilled fertiliser and chemical suppliers, etc.)

In other words – they are well suited to produce potatoes. The fast-tracking of new potato opportunities is a high priority for Agriculture Western Australia. These opportunities are for export markets, since the local (WA) market will show only marginal growth in the foreseeable future. The following are a brief description of these opportunities.

Export ware potatoes to SE Asia.

Recent analysis indicates that a superior yellow fleshed, white skinned potato will suit S.E. Asian markets such as Singapore and Malaysia. These markets are price sensitive and several studies indicate that a farm gate price of around \$230/t may be sustained in Manjimup. On the surface this may not appear to be a good reward to existing licensed ware market suppliers.

However, because some of the yellow flesh potato varieties are very high yielding, the returns may be more attractive to growers who have previously had experience with the difficult to grow French fry variety *Russet Burbank* which was sold at \$200/t. An economic analysis for *Mondial* using five years of trial and demonstration data shows *Mondial's* gross margin to be at least twice that of *Russet Burbank*.

Export seed potatoes to SE Asia

The production of potatoes in Asia is increasing to supply "Westernised" diets. The production of quality potato seed tubers within Asian countries is difficult due to rapid degeneration caused by high levels of bacterial wilt, late blight and aphid transmitted virus.

Despite the potential large size of the

market and the strong advantages of using disease free seed from WA, complex issues must be worked through to build an export seed industry. Just sending bins of seed tubers will not work. Co-operative arrangements with companies and governments of the target countries will be needed to widely demonstrate the benefits of WA seed tubers and to provide agronomy assistance to companies and growers.

Expansion of raw crisp export trade

The existing trade of raw tubers from WA to crisp processors in SE Asia could be boosted by two strategies:

- Increase the supply period through improved winter varieties or storage
- Improve the competitiveness of the local industry by the development of agronomy profiles for recently launched high yielding, high quality varieties.

None of the above work will replace the loss of the French fry industry for the 1999/2000 season, however Agriculture Western Australia is keen to involve commercial producers and exporters at the earliest stage – with the aim of generating income for as many people as possible in the shortest possible time.

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National Project

Seed Potato Standards

Last year the Australian Potato Industry Council commissioned a project aimed at establishing greater uniformity within the seed potato industry.

The first stage of the project was to investigate the need for national seed potato certification standards. The consultants found that such standards would benefit the industry by providing higher quality seed, by better specification of the product being sold, by facilitating interstate movement of early generation seed and developing our export markets by more closely meeting quarantine requirements of overseas customers, while at the same time having enhanced credibility as the National scheme.

The project has confirmed that there are real benefits to the industry if all the seed production schemes are using the same language and terminology to describe seed potatoes.

In early June a meeting of potato industry representatives from around Australia at Knoxfield Victoria agreed on the following points:

- There should be a national uniform system for describing seed potatoes
- There needs to be a mechanism for co-ordinating the schemes across Australia
- Any generation of seed should be able to be certified and sold as certified seed
- The national system should facilitate different quality seed to be differentiated independent of generation.


This National Seed Potato Standards system will simplify the trading of seed across Australia and facilitate exports.

One of the other key benefits will be the ability of growers to select from a wider range of seed quality to obtain seed which is best suited to the market potatoes are being grown for i.e. washed, crisping, brushed and French fry.

The standards have now been ratified by the steering committee and the project is proceeding to Stage 3. During this stage the National Standards Manual will be completed, which outlines how the new standards will operate, before proceeding with the final stage. Stage 4 will focus on a communication program aimed at informing all sectors of the industry how to work with the national standards.

One of the key recommendations is that the Australian Potato Industry Council (APIC) would be the Peak Body responsible for the overall implementation, funding and future development of the national standards.

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Changing of the guard in WA

The Potato Growers of Western Australia (PGWA) has been undergoing a few changes in recent times with Laurie Eldridge stepping down in October from being State President after 14 years in the job and Tom Carstairs retiring as Secretary in September after 12 years with the organisation.

Laurie will stay on the Executive of the PGWA but will now have more time to devote to his farm. His contribution has affected all potato growers in WA in a period that has seen some major changes in the industry.

The new President of the PGWA is Dom Della who has been the WA representative on AUSVEG Potato Group and the APIC R&D Committee. Dom's experience in dealing with national issues involving the potato industry provides him with a good background to take over as President.

Laurie might have been directing the action but Tom Carstairs often had to make it happen. Tom was best described as a one eyed Western Australian that had his heart totally in the job. Whether you agreed with Tom or not, you could never argue about his dedication.

In recent times Tom's energies have been focused on the National Competition Policy review with the result that the potato industry be left largely as it is in Western Australia.

Tom's replacement is Jim Turley (pictured above) who started at the end of August and is on a steep learning curve with regards to the issues important in the potato industry. Jim's background in Elders, as a shire councillor, Manager of Collier Willocks Trading Division and Manager with Metro Meats International puts him in a good position to tackle the issues he will undoubtedly face in the potato industry.

LOOKING FOR SEED?



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APIC R&D Committee Update

Projects

At the October meeting in Brisbane the committee examined 30 concept proposals from research groups from around Australia and recommended that 16 be accepted and 14 rejected. One project extension was also granted.

Research groups putting in successful concept proposals will be requested to submit a full research submission for consideration at the March meeting.

NaPIES review

The Committee considered the final report of the review for the breeding and evaluation program. It was agreed that further discussions would take place with the Victorian Department of Natural Resources & Environment to finalise the costs associated with the recommendations in the report.

Research & Development plan

The development of the R&D plan has been delayed until after the Potato Processors Association of Australia have completed their strategic planning for research and development later this year. This information will then be considered in the development of the APIC R&D plan.

Communication plan

A communication plan is currently being constructed to indicate what communication activities are being carried out through work funded by HRDC.

Leigh Walters has constructed a draft plan as part of the national technology transfer project. The plan has been circulated to a range of groups throughout industry for comment. The redrafted plan and comments will be considered at the March meeting of the Committee.

New Zealand connection

In response to a recommendation made at the trans-Tasman meeting held in early September, a group from the New Zealand's Veg Fed Potato R&D Committee (which is similar to our R&D Committee) attended the meeting.

Those attending were Ron Gall, Executive Officer, VegFed; Bharat Bhana a grower from Pukekohe and Nick Ashby, Leader Germplasm Enhancement at the Crop and Food Research at Christchurch and scientific adviser to VegFed.

The purpose of the visit was to gain a better understanding of how New Zealand and Australia can work together for the benefit of both countries and investigate possible areas of joint collaboration to avoid unnecessary duplication.

The areas being looked at to achieve greater co-operation are:



Bharat Bhana, Ron Gall, James McGeoch, Nick Ashby and John Smink. James is the Chairman of HRDC.

- Co-operation and co-ordination in existing project areas
- Identification of new project areas
- The opportunity to develop joint policy positions on issues such as genetically modified organisms
- Opportunity to look at technology as a marketable product.

A small working party has been proposed to further this issue involving Jonathan Eccles, Program Manager, HRDC; Brian Newman, Secretary, R&D Committee; a grower representative and a processor representative. The latter two will be chosen through AUSVEG and Potato Processors Association.

Queensland perspective

Eric Coleman gave a very good overview to the Committee of changes in the Queensland Horticultural Institute and the implications for research. He also provided an update on Quality Assurance and marketing research.

Dr Jack Meagher
Chairman
APIC R&D Committee
☎ (03) 9836 1934

Mac Lette recognised for industry contribution

Mac Lette of Scottsdale has been awarded the 1999 Simplot Australia Award for Services to the Tasmanian Potato Industry.

Mac received the award at the Simplot Potatoes 99 conference in July. In presenting the award, Phil O'Keefe (Simplot) and John Rich, (Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association) said that Mac had been involved in potato growing all his life from his childhood on the farm and through almost four decades at the Scottsdale processing factory.



Mac Lette (centre) with Greg Williamson (Simplot Executive General Manager - Operations) and John Rich (Executive Officer, Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association)

"Mac has a depth of knowledge about potato growing that is the envy of many involved in the industry" Phil said.

"His great contribution to the industry is that he has been able and willing to pass this knowledge on in a simple and accurate way to so many - new growers, new company staff and even to the countless work experience students."

Mac started work at the then Kraft Foods plant at Scottsdale in 1965. Since then,

Mac has witnessed several ownership changes through Wattie Pict, General Jones, Edgell-Birdseye and now Simplot.

Mac has also witnessed vast changes in production technology. For instance when Mac first started at the factory, all potatoes were delivered in bags - 105 per truckload!

Mac has worked with potatoes all over Tasmania and has been involved in developing many new potato growing areas, particularly Cressy and the Derwent Valley.

"Mac is still showing enthusiasm, imagination and dedication to his position and responsibilities. He still has the Scottsdale factory at heart," Phil said.

Fresh Potato Marketing Levy

Geoff Moar and Brian Newman met with Senator Troeth in September to discuss how to progress the introduction of the Fresh Potato Marketing Levy.

The outcome from the meeting and the following discussions was that the Senator required the growers to be surveyed again to ascertain the level of support for the levy. The Senator accepted that a proposal be put to the growers aimed at introducing a levy of \$2.50 per tonne, increasing to \$5.00 per tonne over a three year period given certain milestones are reached.

This proposal has been put to state grower associations to ascertain the level of support. The closing date for comments on the proposal has been extended from 12 November to 10 December.

The AUSVEG executive will then consider the outcome of the survey and a decision on the future of the levy made.

AUSVEG elections

Geoff Moar and Max McKenna have been re-elected unopposed as Chairman and vice-Chairman of AUSVEG Potato Group. Delegates to the AUSVEG Board are Geoff Moar, Max McKenna and Neil Perry with Dom Della as a proxy if one of the delegates cannot attend. Representatives on APIC are Max McKenna and Geoff Moar with Dom Della and Neil Perry as proxies.

Proposed merger between AHC and HRDC

AUSVEG has supported the proposal in principle but has requested a cost benefit analysis to justify the merger. AUSVEG wants to ensure that if money is spent on a merger there will be real benefits coming back to industry.

Australian Plant Health Council

Government is establishing the Australian Plant Health Council (see article page 9) in March next year and seeking partners in the new organisation. It is proposed that the council be set up under a company structure with the Commonwealth Government, State Government and plant industries (those who wish to participate) as equal partners.

The AUSVEG Potato Group agreed to seek membership to the Australian Plant Health Council.

Peak industry forum

A proposal has been put forward to form a company and seek membership from industry groups to form a Peak Industry Forum.

The AUSVEG Potato Group did not support the proposal. The Potato Group favoured a twice yearly forum between leaders of the horticultural industries and the relevant ministers. The participants funding their own participation.

Brian Newman
Executive Director AUSVEG
☎ 03 5790 5247

Ring rot scare

Most growers will be aware of the recent quarantine restrictions which were applied to farmers on the North West Coast of Tasmania because of suspected bacterial ring rot in potatoes shipped to Western Australia.

The good news was that the tests showed this to be false and Tasmania **does not have** bacterial ring rot. As far as we know this disease is not found in Australia and we would hope to maintain this situation into the future.

This has brought home to us the continual need to protect our valuable rural industries from the threat of disease and pest problems. Our reputation for the production of clean, high quality and pest free potatoes must be maintained.

The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) plays an important role in keeping Australia free from many of the pests and diseases found in other parts of the world. Just one unwanted pest could devastate our rural industries and environment.

When a suspected problem has been identified, such as the recent bacterial ring rot in potatoes, AQIS assumes the worst in the first instance. The quarantine barriers are put in place and tests are conducted to identify/confirm the pest or disease. The outcome of testing determines the next phase, either lifting the quarantine barriers or implementing a control and eradication program.

However, we can't just leave it all up to quarantine. All farmers need to take responsibility for what comes onto and leaves their properties. It has been stated that: **"Farm Hygiene is to Farms as Quarantine is to Australia."**

All farmers are encouraged to give more attention to farm hygiene. The benefits can include, expansion of domestic and export markets, maintaining our relatively disease and pest free status, saving time and money and most important, securing the future.

You can take action now. Ensure that all machinery and equipment coming on to your farm is cleaned before arrival and cleaned prior to departure. Make certain that plant debris, weeds, soil and unhealthy plants or animals are not brought on to your farm or leave it.

Become Farm Hygiene Conscious and Help Protect Your Future.

Lloyd Langham
Chairman TFGA Vegetable Council
☎ (03) 6437 6245

Did you know?

A two row harvester has been known to carry at least 400 kg of soil out of a paddock.



Out & About

Certified seed grower, Dot Chapman from Thorpdale, tries out a Hako power sweeper. An extensive range of Hako sweepers and vacuum cleaners were demonstrated at John & Anthony Paterson's shed during a coach tour as part of ViCSPA's fifth AGM held in the south Gippsland town of Meeniyah. The meeting was attended by seed growing members and representatives from the Potato Crisping Research Group, Agriculture Victoria, Accredited Laboratories, Wrightson's Seeds and Elders.

Export market development project

A project being conducted with HRDC funding support to develop potato export markets, has again confirmed the large opportunities for development of both export and domestic markets through greater collaboration between all sectors of the industry.

In particular, it recommended establishment of a voluntary "*Uniform Product Description and Labelling System*" which would require a QA system to support it. Such a package would provide a trading, language and product integrity mechanism covering all potato markets.

This would allow product description based around variety, growing area, fitness for purpose/use (e.g. mashing, baking, roasting etc.) and ensures that the product consistently performs up to expectation. This would need to be supported by a code of practice to ensure that all steps were taken along the production marketing chain to meet consumer satisfaction.

This type of system would then underpin highly targeted marketing and promotion based on branded products that consistently perform. Once it is in place for the domestic market it will give the Australian industry a major competitive advantage on export markets.

The project has also identified opportunities for the sectors of the industry to work together towards the development of production cluster of 15,000t or more capacity in each production region, gathering market intelligence, freight negotiation, market access, establishment of export protocols, support of trade missions and shows.

The next step will be aimed at establishing a mechanism to achieve greater co-ordination over the export market development activities and for development of the Product Pathways system.

Establishing an Australian Potato Export Council type organisation is what appears to be required to develop the export markets more effectively.

How this could work and be funded will be explored in collaboration with APIC, the Australian Horticultural Corporation and the wider potato industry over the next few months.

*Russell Sully and Ralph Cadman
Agriculture Victoria,*

☎ (03) 9210 9222

✉ russel.sully@nre.vic.gov.au



Kindred potato grower Kevin Goodwin, Simplot Agricultural Manager Peter Hardman and keynote speaker Dr Phil Nolte take a break during a business session at Potato 99 held in Ulverstone in July.

Potatoes are the Versatile Vegetable

That can be baked, mashed, chipped and diced, fried, boiled, braised and sliced, stuffed, stewed, casseroled or canned, and even used as a 'filler for jam'.

There are potato sweets, breads and flakes, flour, powders and potato cakes. Hash Browns are now a take-away line And potatoes make an exceptional wine.

Our schools are using them every day, Science, study and potato play Potato baskets are common place NASA now grows potatoes in Space.

D. Montgomery '99

Changes to Advertising Manger role

The Editorial Team would very much like to thank our previous advertising Managers, Peter and Sue Banks, for their efforts in support of our potato industry publications over the last three years. Peter and Sue have decided to move onto other activities and we wish them well in the future.

We now welcome Target Media on board. All future advertising enquiries should be directed to Target Media using the contact details on page 2.

Editor

World Potato Congress 2000

Netherlands 4, 5, 6 September 2000

Crookwell Potato Association Inc and Traveland Wagga Wagga have been appointed the Official Australian representatives.

For further information on the Congress, registration details and bookings, contact

**Crookwell Potato Association Inc.
PO Box 64**

CROOKWELL NSW 2583

Tel: 02 4832 1800

Fax: 02 4832 1830

E-mail:

seed.potato.shop@interact.net.au

For travel options and costs, contact

**Jeremy Reithmuller
Traveland**

Wagga Wagga

162 Bayliss Street

WAGGA WAGGA NSW 2650

Tel: 02 6921 5144

Fax: 02 6921 4712

National Plant Health Program moves closer to establishment

Pest and disease incursions over recent years such as fire blight, grape vine virus and papaya white fly have led to a proposal to set up a national body to focus on national plant health issues.

Last December a workshop of industry and government leaders recommended that a government/industry company be formed which will enable industry to have a say in contingency planning for incursion management, right down to the development of a compensation scheme for growers affected by pest or disease incursions.

The company will be non profit, and limited by guarantee under Corporations Law, having members rather than shareholders.

A further workshop in August worked

through issues such as representation and membership arrangements, voting rights, funding, role of the company and its relationship with existing groups in the plant health field. One of the outcomes was that the company be called Plant Health Australia Ltd (PHAL), in recognition of the industry government partnership and a wish that the company be seen as clearly separate from government.

Currently a company proposal is being developed including a draft constitution, business plan and memberships forms which will form the basis of industry consultation.

Jan Davis

☎ (02) 4577 6285

✉ info@jawin.com.au



Who's digging at the moment

A new poster showing Australia's major potato production areas and their harvesting times is now available from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Victoria.

The growing districts are identified on a map of Australia and the harvest times shown in an easy-to-read, colour-coded table.

The poster was developed by NRE's Peter Carr, together with representatives of the other potato-growing states.

It can be obtained by contacting Peter Carr at DNRE Ballarat

☎ (03) 5333 6749

or

Andrew Henderson at IHD Knoxfield

☎ (03) 9210 9222

Western Potatoes is online

After months of development, Western Potatoes has launched its new web site at <http://www.westernpotatoes.com.au>.

Designed by web developers Method+Madness, the site utilises the latest technology available online and offers an equal balance of interactivity and information.

The aim of the site is to provide relevant and timely information in a way that is modern, fun and easy to use. The site has been tailored to four specific audiences, including kids, youth, adults and industry. Different 'guides' take users through each area of the site.

The kids site is hosted by 'Bud the Spud', who teaches children everything about potatoes from growing through to easy ways of cooking them. There is also a virtual tour and fully interactive online game designed to amuse and educate users.

The youth site, aimed at the elusive teenage/young adult audience, is guided



by 'Clint & the Gang' from the Corporation's successful youth advertising campaign. This area features recipes, nutritional information, potato varieties, industry news and competitions.

'Con the Fruiterer' is the final site guide for both the adult and industry sites. The adult site features a variety of information including recipes, answers to frequently asked questions, competitions and useful downloads.

The industry area provides growers and other industry members with practical information on topics such as potato diseases, handling, market research, Pool news, research and development and quality assurance. A bulletin board facility gives users the opportunity to share information online.

Wrightson expands potato activities

Wrightson Seeds (Australia) Ltd, a subsidiary of the public listed New Zealand agribusiness company, Wrightson Ltd, will be purchasing Sunrise Seed Potatoes of Devonport in Tasmania.

According to Michael Worthington of Wrightson Seeds, Sunrise has a minituber production technology that has been successfully licensed in South Africa and the U.K.

"This will dovetail very nicely with Wrightson's own rapid multiplication technology operating in South Australia. The two technologies will be key components of Wrightson's entry into seed potato production in Australia," Michael said recently.

Michael may be contacted on

☎ (03) 9931 6644

✉ MichaelWorthington@Wrightson.co.nz

Cadmium Coordination Workshop

A workshop was held in Adelaide in August to:

- review results of HRDC and other projects investigating cadmium accumulation in vegetables and potatoes
- review national and international developments regarding metal residues in horticultural produce
- assess if further activities are necessary within HRDC with regard to contaminants in horticultural soils and crops
- focus extension and information activities into high priority areas.

A total of 25 people attended with representatives from growers, industry, academia and state/federal government departments.

The issue of cadmium contamination of vegetable produce was reviewed and priorities for further action agreed upon. These were:

1. That existing information on cadmium uptake for vegetable crops other than potatoes be compiled and assessed to find out what risk they pose to consumers and industry, relative to one another and to potatoes. This would be a desktop study, co-ordinated by Mike McLaughlin, but with help from others in agencies and in industry. It may identify gaps in knowledge or particular crop by environment combinations which warrant further study. Existing information may also be suitable for compiling in extension leaflets for industry distribution.
2. That protocols for field sampling of potato crops for tuber cadmium determination as part of grower QA requirements be co-ordinated by Mike McLaughlin with the help of Australasian Soil and Plant Analysis Council (ASPAC) and distributed to QA consultants/auditors.
3. That existing information bulletins about cadmium also be distributed to QA providers, along with a list of laboratories capable of reliable cadmium analyses (Mike McLaughlin, with Eric Coleman and ASPAC).
4. That Australian and international data on the long-term fate of cadmium, with a focus on the fate of cadmium added in recycled materials, be collated and assessed to indicate needs for local demonstration and extension (Mike McLaughlin to co-ordinate with help from industry and agency contacts).

The workshop unanimously reaffirmed that Mike McLaughlin should continue his role as technical spokesperson on cadmium for the potato industry and that this role should now extend to include the vegetable industry. The workshop also called on both the potato and vegetable industries to confirm their existing or new industry spokespersons on cadmium (currently Laurie Greenup for the fresh produce industry and Wayne Cornish for the processing industries).

The workshop was funded by HRDC and the Vegetable and Potato levies.

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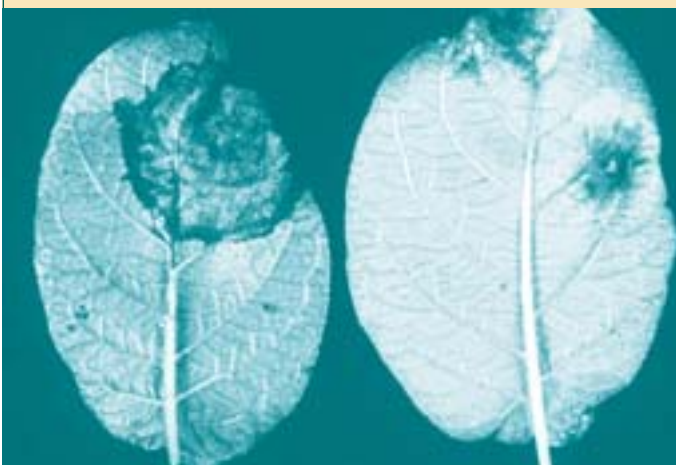
Call for Stockist (03) 9497 2822

The hunt for the potato late blight fungus continues

Last season, a team of potato pathologists began a project to identify (fingerprint) strains of the fungus that cause late blight (also known as Irish blight) in Australian potato crops (see *Eyes on Potatoes* Volume 5, December 1998).

New strains have emerged on the American continent and in Europe over the last decade and are having a devastating effect on crop production and on farm incomes. The purpose of the project is to ensure that we don't have the new strains and to recommend steps to make sure it stays that way.

The team (Dolf de Boer, Hoong Pung and André Drenth) collected samples from outbreaks in Victoria and Tasmania last season and would like to collect more this season. The fungus has proved to be very difficult to isolate from potato tissue and they would like as many samples as possible. If you suspect that you have late blight in your potato crop please contact one of the team members.



What to look for

The disease typically occurs during the summer after row closure and during still, cloudy, humid weather conditions. It usually develops before target spot takes hold in a crop. Traditionally, the disease is found in the central highlands of Victoria and on the north coast of Tasmania.

It is first seen as small pale to dark green, irregularly shaped spots on leaves. Under warm, still conditions these spots grow within hours to large brown to purplish 'moist' lesions (not like the dry, papery target spot lesions) which eventually spread to the stem killing the entire leaflet and eventually the plant.

A pale halo is often present around the edges of the lesions. Under humid conditions (especially dews), a white cottony growth appears at the edges of the lesions on the underside of the leaf. The disease first appears as 'islands' of affected plants in a crop.

Dolf de Boer, VIC

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André Drenth, QLD

☎ 07 3365 4772

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Hoong Pung, TAS

☎ 03 6427 0800

✉ hpung@serve-ag.com.au

Invitation to Potatoes 2000 Conference “Linking Research to Practice”

July 31st - August 2nd 2000 - Adelaide

Find out about the latest in technology, meet people involved in the potato industry within Australia and overseas and discuss issues critical to the future of the industry.

What's in the program

The conference will consist of talks by Australian and overseas speakers, workshops where you can address your issues and a trade and technology exhibition.

Talks

Farmers and research specialists will give talks on many topics covering the following areas:

- future direction of research and development
- plant improvement
- effective pest and disease management
- best practices in crop nutrition
- precision farming
- potato quality, promotion and marketing
- future challenges in marketing

Workshops

Panels of experts will lead workshops covering critical topics such as

- breeding and commercialisation of varieties
- genetically modified potatoes
- management of seed and soil borne diseases

Cost

Approx \$330 including most meals and GST

Bus tour

An optional bus tour is available on August 3rd. This will visit wash-packers, variety trials and the Waite Research Complex.

To obtain a registration package fill in the form below and send to:

**Potatoes 2000 Conference Secretariat,
PO Box 6129, Halifax Street, Adelaide SA 5000**



Key note speakers



Dr Walt Stevenson is Professor of Plant Pathology at the University of Wisconsin - Madison, USA. His extension/research program includes early and late blight and seed piece decay.



Dr Stuart Wale is the Head of Crop Services at SAC (Scottish Agricultural College) based in Aberdeen Scotland. The SAC potato team carries out R&D consultancy and training in all aspects of potatoes throughout Great Britain.



Dr Pierre Nortje is the Assistant General Manager - Technical Services for Potatoes South Africa, the commercial arm of the South African potato industry. He is responsible for commercialisation of potato varieties, breeding and user oriented research.



Dr Nick Ashby is currently Team Leader and Business Development Manager for Germplasm Enhancement in the New Zealand Institute for Crop & Food Research. Besides his role in managing the breeding, evaluation and commercialisation of varieties he has also recently been involved in cross Tasman negotiations to develop closer potato R&D links between Australia and New Zealand.

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The potato industry in New South Wales

Overview

The potato industry is the largest vegetable industry in New South Wales. In 1996-97 the State's 198 growers produced 136,173 tonnes of potatoes, worth \$49.4 million, on 5,959 hectares. Eighty three percent of the New South Wales crop is sold fresh, 15 percent is processed and 2 percent is used for seed. New South Wales grows 10 percent of the Australian potato crop (see Table 1).

Table 1. New South Wales potato production in 1996-97.

	Production (tonnes)	Area (hectares)	Yield (t/ha)	Value (\$Million)
NSW	136,173	5,959	22.9	49.4
Australia	1,286,130	41,083	31.3	448.5

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Over the last decade the New South Wales potato industry has undergone considerable change. While the area planted to potatoes decreased by 4 percent, total potato production expanded by 12 percent. Although New South Wales yields remain below the national average, average State yields increased by 17 percent during this period. Due to the emergence of large vertically integrated grower-packer-marketing enterprises and the consolidation of suppliers in the crisping sector grower numbers dropped by a third, (see Table 2).

Table 2. Changes in the New South Wales potato industry 1987-97.

Year	Production (tonnes)	Area (hectares)	Yield (t/ha)	Growers
1987	121,573	6,225	19.5	307
1997	136,173	5,959	22.9	198
Change	+12%	-4%	+17%	-35%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Regions

With the State's wide range of suitable climate and soil types, potato production occurs in most parts of New South Wales (see Table 3).

Riverina

Nearly two thirds of New South Wales production is located in the Riverina. The region has a dry, warm, temperate climate similar to the Riverland districts in South Australia. The area grows three crops a year, producing 86,174 tonnes of potatoes for the fresh, crisping and French fry markets. Crops are sown in July/August, October/November and February/March for digging between mid-November to October. Production occurs on large-scale irrigated farms on the sandy soils. Berrigan, Oaklands, Coleambally, Narrandera and Hillston are the main production centres in the Riverina.

Tablelands

The Tablelands districts, found along the Great Dividing Range, have a cool, temperate climate similar to the Ballarat area in Victoria. These districts grow one to two crops a year, depending on elevation, and produce 25,758 tonnes of

Table 3. District potato production in New South Wales 1996-97.

Statistical Division	Production (tonnes)	Area (hectares)	Yield (t/ha)	Value (\$Million)
Sydney	5,767	253	23	2.1
Hunter	3,119	188	17	1.1
Illawarra	5,524	204	27	2.0
Richmond Tweed	1,779	59	30	0.6
Mid-North Coast	13,575	536	25	4.9
Northern	10,055	394	26	3.6
North Western	2,745	122	23	1.0
Central West	5,628	197	29	2.0
South Eastern	1,806	112	16	0.6
Murrumbidgee	37,212	1,768	21	13.5
Murray	48,962	2,127	23	17.7

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

potatoes for the fresh, crisping and seed markets. Sowing goes from August to December for a December to September harvest. Production is on mixed dryland farms on red or grey clay soils, which can require supplementary irrigation in dry seasons. Batlow, Crookwell, Robertson, Orange, Comboyne, Dorrigo and Guyra are the main potato towns in the Tablelands.

Coast

The Coastal districts are situated between the Great Dividing Range and the sea. These districts have temperate or humid sub-tropical climates and are similar to east Gippsland in Victoria and the northern coastal areas of Tasmania. The area grows two crops a year, producing 24,240 tonnes of potatoes for the fresh and crisping markets. Planting occurs in June/July and January/February for October to December and May to July harvests. Production takes place on market gardens, irrigated cropping and mixed dryland farms on red or grey clay, silty loam or sandy soils. Windsor, Maitland, Kempsey, Bellingen and Grafton are the main potato centres in the Coastal region.

Market Sectors

Fresh

The main white-skinned fresh market variety grown in New South Wales is *Coliban*, with *Sebago* still an important minor white-skin variety in some districts. Red-skinned varieties include *Desiree*, *Red Pontiac*, *Red La Soda* and *Bison*. Small areas of speciality varieties such as *Pink Fir Apple* and *Jersey Royal* are also planted.

The widespread location of the State's potato districts enables fresh potatoes to be dug all year round. Large quantities are also sent to the interstate markets in Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne and Adelaide. While the Sydney Markets are the main fresh produce distribution centre for eastern Australia, New South Wales growers only supply 18 percent of this market, with South Australian (42%), Victorian (24%) and Queensland (15%) growers providing the balance of receivals.

Processing

Potatoes are grown for crisping, French fry and canning in New South Wales.

Crisping is the largest processing sector, using 10 percent of the State's potato production. Atlantic is the major crisping variety. Potatoes are processed at the Snack Brands Australia and the

C & M Snack Foods factories in Sydney. The Smiths Snackfood Company plants in Adelaide and Brisbane and the Kettle Cooked Chip Company facility at Shepparton are also supplied with crisping potatoes.

The main French fry variety grown in New South Wales is *Shepody*, which provides early deliveries to the McCain Foods factories at Ballarat in Victoria and Penola in South Australia. Potatoes are canned at Cowra by Cowra Export Packers. A number of small Sydney processors also supply the fresh chippie market and catering trade with prepared products.

Seed

Certified seed is produced at Crookwell, Orange and Guyra. These Tableland districts are isolated by Government Quarantine Regulations from the main commercial potato areas and are free of soil borne diseases such as bacterial wilt and potato cyst nematode. High elevations and a cold climate minimise the risk of infection from aphid transmitted virus diseases.

The New South Wales Seed Potato Certification Scheme is supervised by the New South Wales Seed Potato Advisory Council. The seed scheme is limited to five generations, with every generation inspected by Regulatory Officers from NSW Agriculture. The main potato varieties grown for seed are *Coliban*, *Sebago*, *Desiree*, *Pontiac*, *Atlantic* and *Kennebec*.

The seed is sold to local, Queensland and South Australian growers, as well as exported to Asia.

The seed industry is also producing Technitubers® and potato minitubers. These products improve disease control by reducing the number of field generations required to produce certified seed, lower seed costs and allow a more rapid introduction of new varieties.

Future

Fresh market growers face the long-term risk of declining fresh potato consumption, unless promotion can reverse this trend. However with a third of Australia's population at its doorstep and a central position in relation to the Adelaide, Melbourne, Canberra and Brisbane markets, New South Wales growers will probably survive whatever future directions the fresh market takes.

A long growing season, large average farm size and plentiful supplies of land and irrigation water give New South Wales the potential to develop an internationally competitive French fry industry.

The new seed technologies from companies such as Technico will provide opportunities to lower seed costs and increase yields.

Stephen Wade
District Horticulturist (Finley)
NSW Agriculture
☎ (03) 5883 1644
✉ stephen.wade@agric.nsw.gov.au



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www.agtourtour.com.au/potato_sa

ROUND-UP

State

Western Australia

Mostly bad tidings from the West with the closure of Simplot plus losses in the fresh market sector caused by flooding. Accelerated growth of the export industry may occur, however, as a consequence of the Simplot closure. This export production may see the crop recover to recent levels over the next two to five years.

French fry

Simplot Australia closed the factory at Manjimup at the end of August. The factory had been operating for 10 years and processed 35,000 tonnes last season. This was nearly a third of all potato production in WA. The small factory was operating below capacity and Simplot said that production costs were 25% above international benchmarks. About 35 growers have been affected. Many had geared up production with substantial capital investment only to find they now have very limited immediate alternatives.

Fresh market

The fresh potato supply was interrupted following heavy rains at Busselton during winter. This combined with poor germination of some late summer planted crops resulted in a shortage of potatoes during spring.

Fresh potatoes for export

The industry is testing the market for export table potatoes. The excess capacity for production since the Simplot closure means there are growers willing to try this market. Prices offered to growers are around \$230 per tonne. If a high yielding variety such as *Mondial* is grown then the returns to growers may be better than they received for processing.

Crisps for exports

There continues to be growth in the export crisp trade. The industry in WA is showing more interest in export opportunities for crisp potatoes to Asia since the Simplot closure. Last season about 8,000 tonnes were exported and most of these were crisp potatoes.

Peter Dawson
*Development Officer, Horticulture
Agriculture Western Australia*

Tasmania

An overview of the results of the 1999 processing potato harvest is that the season was generally good. Wet conditions during February created some rot problems but subsequently, digging conditions were mainly quite favourable.

Potatoes being taken from storage for processing during November are reported to be delivering good quality product. On average, the yields were slightly down last season.

Common scab remains the single most important disease problem to be overcome for this industry.

Tasmanian potato growers have welcomed moves to develop export markets by the processors, Simplot and McCain. Increased tonnages will be grown this season. It is estimated that Tasmania will plant around 8,500 hectares of potatoes for the year 2000 harvest. This covers all sectors, process, fresh and seed production and is possibly an all time record number of hectares of potatoes ever planted in Tasmania.

The plantings for the coming season are progressing. The good weather during the winter months means that plantings are ahead of schedule. Crops of *Shepody*, *Kennebec* and *Russet Burbank* which have emerged to date are looking very good. Some slowing of planting occurred around the end of October/early November because of unusually cold conditions. This is quite a contrast against the remarkably warm winter with timely rains.

John Rich
*Executive Officer
Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers
Association*

South Australia

Production of washed potatoes continues to expand in the Mallee and Riverland. Some of the main packing sheds have increased their capacity or are in the planning stages of doing so.

Winter rainfall in South Australia has been below average. This has allowed for early paddock preparation in the south east, but lower than acceptable soil moisture levels has meant early irrigation prior to planting. Once the soil moisture levels have been raised the mild spring conditions have ensured good soil preparation conditions. Most crops are being planted on schedule to be completed by the end of November.

There have been some concerns about what long-term effects another dry winter and a long irrigation season will have on the ground water levels in the south east.

The Southern Hills area has had a dry winter but their water source is Lake Alexandrina and their season is progressing on schedule. This area enjoys a mild climate and is relatively frost-free.

Severe and isolated frosts for seven days during August in the Northern Adelaide Plains caused total crop failure to some crops.

Mondello Farms of Virginia won three awards from the Premiers Food and Fibre Awards, which were announced recently. The awards were for Overall Industry Achievement, Leadership through Innovation and Industry Achievement for the Horticultural Sector. Mondello Farms operates one of the most sophisticated, computerised potato grading and weighing system for washed potatoes in Australia.

Robert Peake
*Senior Consultant Potatoes
PIRSA Rural Solutions*

New South Wales

Digging of the late Riverina crop finished at the end of October. Crop yields averaged 20 tonnes per hectare, while farm gate prices for bulk, brushed ware potatoes dropped from \$300 per tonne in June to \$230 per tonne by October. Due to the slow harvest, prices fluctuated around \$210 per tonne in early September as some growers rushed to dig their remaining crops before tuber quality deteriorated from sprouting.

Despite only average production by the New South Wales growers during the winter months, the ware market remained oversupplied due to a reduction in demand from the supermarkets. By cutting the sizes of consumer packs by a quarter (from 5 to 4 and 2.5 to 2 kilograms) and still charging the old prices (around \$2,500 a tonne) for the new bag sizes, the supermarkets could increase their profit margins by up to 20 percent while buying less potatoes.

Sowing of the early crops in the Riverina finished on time following the dry conditions over August in southern New South Wales. Crop areas for the fresh, crisping and French fry crops are similar to last year. Because of the warmer than usual temperatures, most crops had fully emerged up to two weeks earlier than usual. With the wet weather since October crop growth has been excellent, pest and disease problems have been minimal and good yields are forecast when the harvest starts in December.

Planting of the early and main crops on the Coast and Tablelands was delayed in many areas by the very wet conditions over the last six months. Sowing started in June at Maitland and Dorrigo, in October at Guyra and Canowindra and in November at Blayney, Robertson and Crookwell. Fresh, crisping and seed areas in the Coastal and Tablelands districts are similar to last year.

Crop growth has been excellent in the early crops, while pest, disease and irrigation problems have been slight. Digging of the early crops started in Bellingen in November and in Dorrigo in December with good yields and excellent quality expected in both districts.

Stephen Wade
District Horticulturist
NSW Agriculture

Victoria

The general lack of rain is the dominant issue facing growers in the early part of the new growing season. Some growers have had to change their paddock selections or lease land to ensure adequate water. Nevertheless, some plantings in the earlier districts were delayed slightly by welcome but untimely falls of rain. The (small) compensation for the dry weather is that ground preparation can generally proceed on or ahead of schedule.

Common scab is a potential problem this season if the dry conditions continue and seed piece breakdown is more likely if the soil is very warm at planting.

Potato exports from Victoria continue to strengthen, with some forward contracts being sought by exporters. However, Sri Lanka, one of the bigger importers in recent years, has recently been sourcing many of its potatoes from India, and seems to be importing less from Victoria at present.

The total production of certified seed last year was a record 36,050 tonnes from 2286 hectares. A record 81 varieties were submitted for inspection and crop rejections were low. The 30 registered Quality Assurance growers produced nearly half of the total certified production. Production estimates for the 1999 season are in the order of 38,900 tonnes.

Whilst certified seed production is at record levels, the make up of the industry has changed. Over the last 5 years the number of growers has decreased by 14%, but the area grown per grower has increased by 16%. The production per grower has increased by 17% over the same period. Gippsland seed growers on average grow 34.4 hectares each while the state average is 21.2 hectares.

Agriculture Victoria is gearing up for the next round of financial benchmarking in the seed and French fry sectors of the industry. The French fry industry will also be surveyed in South Australia, with assistance of PIRSA. This activity continues to provide useful ongoing information for the growers involved.

Andrew Henderson
Technology Transfer, Potatoes
Agriculture Victoria

Queensland

Crops in Northern Queensland were exceptionally good in the early season with high yields of good quality tubers. Later season crops have been lighter in yield and tuber size smaller. The price on table lines has also been buoyant as *Sebago* has been sourced to supplement crisping supplies.

A considerable amount of late crop has been planted this year and it is anticipated that harvest will continue up to Christmas. Moth damage will pose a real problem as numbers increase dramatically with the increasing summer temperatures.

The Bundaberg district has also had an extremely good growing season and good to very high yields have been recorded. The growing season was marked with good rainfall and mild growing conditions. It is anticipated that harvesting will continue until mid-November. Rain during mid-October delayed some harvesting and the threat of more storm rain may present further harvest difficulties.

The Lockyer Valley spring crop has been grown under near perfect conditions. Warm to hot day temperatures with cool nights have prevailed throughout the winter and into early November. This has resulted in some very good quality crops with many recording extended growing seasons of up to 18 weeks.

Storm events in early October had threatened to delay harvest but the continuation of subsequent fine conditions has meant that harvest has continued uninterrupted until the end of October. Subsequently the price on most lines dropped towards the end of October.

Planting on the eastern Darling Downs commenced in August under near ideal conditions. Days have been warm and nights cool with ample rain recorded. It is anticipated that yield in this crop may eclipse that of last year, which was the best season for the last 10 years. There are concerns over threats of heavy rain particularly monsoonal influences. The current Southern Oscillation Index would indicate above average rainfall in the new year as south eastern Queensland enters a la nina phase.

Planting on the plateau districts of Killarney has commenced early this year due to the very mild winter.

Stephen Harper
Horticulturist – Heavy Vegetables
Department of Primary Industries



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