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February 2007



Feature story **Profile: Greg Murphy**

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Correction: In the last issue the ACCC's phone number was incorrectly reported. The correct number is **1300 302 502**



Michael Badcock, Georgina Damm & Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Peter McGauran, at the launch of 'Vegetables Claim Centre of the Plate' in Melbourne.

## Australian vegetables claim the centre plate

AUSVEG today threw down the gauntlet and challenged the meat industry to share the plate at the 'Vegetables Claim Centre of the Plate' launch at the Queen Victoria Markets in Melbourne this month.

According to AUSVEG Chairman, Michael Badcock, vegetables are sick of being a side dish.

"Today, we are claiming vegetables rightful place as the centre piece of every balanced meal.

"With an increasing number of overweight and obese Australians across all age groups, it has never been more critical that vegetables take centre plate in our diets.

"The Australian vegetable industry produces just about every vegetable imaginable. The flavoursome and nutritional value of vegetables mean that lamb and other meats need to move over.

"In May, representatives from various segments of the industry will meet in Sydney at the Australian Vegetable Industry Conference to discuss initiatives that will see the industry double its value and increase consumption of Australian grown vegetables," Michael said.

AUSVEG also announced Michael Luscombe, CEO of Woolworths, as one of the key note speakers at the conference.

"Woolworths's agreement to speak at our conference is demonstration of their commitment to forging strong and mutually beneficial relations with Australian vegetable growers," Michael said.

AUSVEG were joined by the Federal Agriculture Minister, The Hon Peter McGauran MP, and celebrity chef Georgina Damm of Damm Fine Food, at the Queen Victoria Market where they prepared a fast, healthy and tasty vegetable meal.

During the event, Minister McGauran emphasised the importance of the industry to the Australian economy.

"The Australian vegetable industry is our fourth largest agricultural industry, with gross annual production worth \$2.2 billion.

"The Australian Government supports farmers across all sectors and welcomes the challenge laid down by AUSVEG to consumers to put vegetables at the forefront of their thinking when preparing meals," Minister McGauran said.



Georgina Damm and Peter McGauran cooking up a storm during the launch at Queen Victoria Market



## Chairman's message

Rainfall across many parts of the continent brought temporary relief to some growers this month. However, we must always look to the future and long term water management strategies as the realities of drought and other extreme weather appear here to stay. It is interesting to follow the Prime Minister's \$10 billion water initiative and the potential implications and advantages for potato growers.

AUSVEG held its Annual General Meeting last month in Melbourne which was well attended by all of our members. Elections were held and a number of our Board members changed.

I would like to thank all past Board members for their considerable efforts over the last few years through an especially challenging period for our industry and make special mention to the efforts of past Vice-Chairman Kent West and past Treasurer, Paul Gazzola.

Welcome to new Board members, Dimitros (Jim) Trandos, John Brent, Paul Ziebarth, Steven Page and Luis Gazzola. Paul Ziebarth is the new Vice-Chairman and John Mundy our new Treasurer.

Following the AGM an open member's forum was held. During this forum all members agreed to set up a task force to undertake a strategic review of AUSVEG. One of the outcomes will be necessary changes to the AUSVEG constitution to make sure the organisation is structured appropriately to service the needs of growers nationally.

The task force consists of all the Executive Officers from the state vegetable growing organisations, the AUSVEG CEO and Jeff McSpedden an AUSVEG Board Director to chair the group.

The first task force meeting was held on 30th January 2007. Stayed tuned for more details on this process and how you can have your say on your National organisation.

Also don't forget to enter the National Vegetable Industry Awards. I am certain there are many potato growers worthy of recognition.



**Michael Badcock**  
Chairman  
AUSVEG Ltd

## Editor's message

Having started off the New Year with a new challenge, I'm keen to capitalise on the great work Toni's undertaken over the last couple of months revamping the Potato Industry's representative magazine.

2007 is off to a flying start with the AUSVEG Annual General Meeting held on January 10 confirming the appointment of several new board members representing the Potato industry. Preparations are also well underway for the 2007 Vegetable Industry Conference and Awards to be held in May. You can find the latest news at the conference website ([www.vegieconf.com.au](http://www.vegieconf.com.au)).

Strategic plans for fresh and processed potatoes have been finalised and we'll be updating you throughout the year on the implementation of the recommendations. Simon Drum, who played a major role in establishing the strategic plan, is moving to a new role outside of HAL, but we'll have regular updates from his replacement, Lucy Keatinge.

In this issue we're reporting on several projects funded by your National Potato Levy, profiling the potato industry representatives of the newly confirmed AUSVEG Board and our Economist, Ian James, provides an insight into the recent potato spindle tuber viroid outbreak which has received wide media coverage.

Also in this issue is a report on the Soil Interpretation UTE guide which is freely available to levy-paying growers and a registration form if you haven't yet received your copy. Simply complete the form, forward it back to us and we'll ensure you receive it as soon as possible.

Our aim is to provide information relevant to the potato industry and to do that we need your feedback both on what you like in the magazine and what you'd like to know more about. Later this year, we'll be conducting a survey to gauge how you're finding the magazine, but in the meantime, please feel free to give me a call at the AUSVEG office or drop me an email ([simon.adams@ausveg.com.au](mailto:simon.adams@ausveg.com.au)).



**Simon Adams**  
Editor/Publications Officer  
AUSVEG Ltd

# vegetables claim centre plate



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# PROFILE **Greg Murphy**

**Greg Murphy is a third generation potato grower from Dunnstown in Victoria. His farm is about five km east of Ballarat, or about 80 km northwest of Melbourne, where as Duncan Handley discovers, rich red clay volcanic soils and, usually, high rainfall make the area ideal for potato growing.**

Greg's grandfather started the farm in the 1920s with just 20 acres. His three sons: Leo, Don and Ray took over the running of the farm and now three grandsons, one from each son, each run the farm together as a partnership.

The farm is now about 1000 acres and produces around 4000 tonnes of potatoes. About 60 acres are planted each year to cereal crops and 25 acres to oats for hay. The farm also runs a Standardbred horse stud with about 400 mares and eight standing stallions.

Greg and his cousins, Shane and Danny, grow mainly Russet Burbank potatoes for McCain. They also grow a small amount of crisper potatoes and, this year in response to the lower water availability, some market varieties.

Off the farm Greg is Treasurer of the Victorian Potato Growers Council and Secretary Treasurer of the McCain Growers' Group which represents McCain's growers in their dealings with the processor.

## Water

Dunnstown's average rainfall is 850 ml, but this has not been reached for ten years. The area received less than two thirds of the average in 2006, made worse by the particularly poor falls during spring: 5ml for October and 25ml for September, each month usually averaging 60ml.

"In the past few years we've been lucky," says Greg, "we've scraped by with some spring rainfall and maybe a thunderstorm, but last year these were non-existent".

Creeks and rivers in the area are no longer running, springs have stopped flowing and flows from bores have reduced or dried up. In nearby Ballarat, water reservoirs are only at 20 per cent capacity and the town has been on stage four water restrictions since November last year.

Reduced access to water means Greg's will grow about 35 per cent less potatoes this season. Greg believes the overall impact on the region's production might be even greater.

"I wouldn't be surprised if the tonnage of the area is down by 40 to 50 per cent as a result of the lack of rain and irrigation water," Greg says.

## Imports and cost squeeze

Greg says that along with lack of water, the threats of imports combined with the ongoing cost squeeze are the biggest issues the industry is facing.

"New Zealand is already importing product into Australia and is likely to import more to make up for the shortfall in production resulting from the drought. But even without the drought, New Zealand is, and will continue to be, a threat," Greg says.

The combination of a high Australian dollar and the other advantages New Zealand has - larger scale production and a reduced need to irrigate - mean it poses a constant and ongoing threat to Australia.

Added to this is the potential for North America and Canada to push into New Zealand's Asian markets. This means New Zealand could be looking to sell even more product into Australia in the future. As Greg says "if it [New Zealand] is getting pushed out of somewhere, then it is going to look for somewhere else to go, and the most likely place is Australia."

The ever-present threat of imports limits the price large buyers and processors can pay for potatoes; last year the price actually fell. This combined with the increasing costs of labour, fertiliser, chemicals and fuel - diesel increased 40 per cent last year - is putting pressure on growers to become even more efficient.

But as Greg says "There is only so much you can do to increase efficiencies, at the end of the day we might be competing with dollar-a-day wage structures in other countries and we are just not in a position to pass our costs on - we have to wear it".

## Outlook

In response to these pressures many growers in Greg's area have chosen not to grow potatoes this year. And while their intention is to return to the industry, Greg expects that some are gone for good.

Greg says he has seen a trend of smaller growers leaving the industry and those growers left increasing the size of their operation to get greater economies of scale.

"But getting bigger means more risk; with the limitations we have on water, you need to think hard before making the next investment." Greg says.



*Above: Potato crop on Greg Murphy's property, Dunnstown.*

## Pests and diseases

Greg says that fortunately he rarely has a problem with insect pests and it is unusual to have to use an insecticide, but there are a number of diseases that need to be managed.

Rhizoctonia, Target Spot and Common Scab are common diseases in the area. Rhizoctonia is the most significant and Common Scab is becoming a bigger problem.

A bad infestation of Rhizoctonia can mean a yield loss of up to 25 per cent as deformed potatoes are discarded. Greg uses Monceron powder, Amistar in-furrow and Rizolex powder to manage the disease.

To manage Target Spot, Greg has a spray program that generally begins just after row closure. The program involves the chemicals Walabi, Score, Amistar and Rovral and up to 6 sprays at 14 day intervals. Greg says this might seem like a lot of applications, but if you consider the longer growing period of the Russet Burbank - 150 days - it's not that many.

Greg does not treat Common Scab because the disease relates to low water availability at tuber set and there is no real treatment, but he is concerned about the increase in the disease in his area.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9 ►

# Ute guide to promote healthy Australian soils

## Growers are to receive a timely boost to their soil management strategies with the release of a new guide providing scientific advice on how to get the most out of the various soil types.

The Soil Interpretation Ute Guide, which is supplied free to all levy-paying growers\*, allows growers to make soil-management decisions based on scientific evaluation rather than trial and error, saving growers valuable time and resources.

Primarily a pictorial reference, the guide aims to assist growers to measure and record the health of their soil and then put into place practices which will encourage sustainability, productivity and profitability.

AUSVEG's Environmental Manager Helena Whitman believes that the guide is a valuable resource, as it has been tailored to the specific needs of growers.

"Historically, there has been little information of specific relevance for growers. Many growers have a general understanding of their soil, however they are always looking for ways to enhance production and profitability for their businesses, without degrading the sustainability of their soil," Helena said.

The guide, which is designed to be carried around in the car or tractor, will cover the soil types in each vegetable growing region nationally, with pictorial references to assist growers to determine if there is a problem in their soil, and how to address the problem.

The guide will also provide information on interpreting data and soil readings so that growers can more easily understand and take the appropriate measures from soil test results.

Principal researcher Dr David McKenzie, an expert in soil management and research, has worked closely on the development of the guide, and is keen to highlight the importance of healthy soils for sustainable vegetable growing.

"By providing growers with an understanding of the soil management issues in their region and assisting them to adopt practices that improve soil health, growers will be able to make soil management decisions based on scientific evaluation instead of trial and error," David said.

"This will ultimately result in better productivity, more efficient utilisation of soil, reduced input costs and ultimately a healthier more sustainable soil profile increasing the productive life of the farm."

In conjunction with the guide, growers will also have access to an interactive CD/DVD. This resource will be ideal for time-poor growers, as well as for growers with non-English speaking backgrounds, as the CD/DVD may be translated into a number of different languages.

A Soil Interpretation and Management Course, to be offered following the launch of the Ute Guide, will also assist vegetable growers in all states to learn about their soil profile, to identify and interpret soil structure and chemistry, to restore or improve the health of the soil and to select the appropriate crop types for the soil with the least impact on the broader environment.

"The Ute Guide, in conjunction with the CD/DVD and courses will provide growers with the latest information, specifically designed for the vegetable industry, in a format that is "useable", and thereby encouraging successful adoption of Good Agricultural Practice with respect of soil and land management," Helena said.

\*refers to the national vegetable, potato and onion levies

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

### What keeps him going?

Greg admits that it can sometimes be difficult to remain optimistic when there are so many pressures and uncertainties in the potato industry. He often wonders whether he will be farming in two, three or five years' time. But there are many positives that keep him going.

"It can be disheartening sometimes, but the satisfaction of growing a good crop, dealing with other growers and the farming lifestyle is why I think I'll be growing potatoes for a while yet" says Greg.

Outside of work Greg enjoys spending time with his family. Greg and his wife, Jenny, have three children: Adam, 13, Callum, 11 and Lauren 9. He spends a lot of his spare time watching their sports and other activities that include football, tennis and karate.

### The Fourth Generation?

Greg thinks a lot about whether he will encourage his kids to takeover from him on the farm. He says it's a pretty tough lifestyle and there's better money to be made elsewhere.

"It is often a seven day-a-week job: irrigation goes from October to the end of March, and then there's harvest. I think I'd encourage them to try something else first, and if they want to come back to the farm we'd talk about it then" Greg says.

Greg did something similar; he worked away from the farm and became a mechanic, a skill that has been invaluable over the years.

Perhaps his daughter, Lauren, has already cast her vote. Recently when Jenny dropped Greg off in the paddock on a Sunday Lauren said "I don't want to marry a farmer when I grow up mum". When asked why she said "because they're never home, they're always out, they're always doing something and you never see them".

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## PSTVd highlights Pest Response Deed problems

(PSTVd) had been detected in a tomato crop in Carnarvon. Although not a signatory to the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (the Deed), AUSVEG was contacted by Plant Health Australia (PHA) because of the potential destructive impact on the potato crop if the pest was not immediately eradicated (PSTVd qualifies as a new pest because although it had existed in the past it had been eradicated).

Under the Deed, non-signatories likely to be impacted by a pest can be approached for financial contributions to assist in its eradication. In this case PHA and other signatories to the Deed were looking for a financial contribution from potato growers. In the end the Deed was not invoked and WADPI picked up the costs of the eradication program.

The incident exposed the problematic nature of the operation of the Deed and supports AUSVEG's reluctance to sign until greater clarity exists on the Deed's operation. While the costs of eradication were relatively small in this case, the potential for multiple incursions of pests across a wide range of plant products and the adverse impact on grower returns is large. This particular case raised a number of issues including where State Department of Agriculture responsibilities lay regarding the Deed.

There was also an important economic issue at stake. An economist would argue that the cost of eradication should be born by the person introducing the disease, in this case, the tomato seed importer. Unless there is a clear market signal to the importer, he/she is likely to continue to import the same seed.

If AUSVEG had been a signatory to the Deed and it had been invoked in this case, then potato growers would have had to pay the largest contribution to eradicate a pest which was introduced by a third party into Australia. While it is easy to target growers, because if the pest is not eradicated then the potential cost to growers is huge, it's a bit like asking victims of a terrorist bomb to pay for tighter security measures.

A further issue was the pathway mechanism into Australia. This was the third outbreak of this pest in Australia and in each case the pest has come through imported tomato seed out of the Netherlands. Clearly the pathway of this pest into Australia needs to be addressed or it will continue to be an ongoing problem. AUSVEG is following these issues through and will be in discussion with PHA seeking further clarity.

## AUSVEG Economist Ian James looks at the recent potato spindle tuber viroid (PSTVd) outbreak widely reported in the media and the future implications for potato growers in Australia.

Bio-security is a critical issue for potato growers and the risks increase the more that Australia embraces globalisation. The Plant Health Australia (PHA) Deed is a small part of the bio-security issue in Australia. The Deed only relates to a new pest in Australia.

Potato growers not only need clarification on the PHA Deed but also a holistic approach to bio-security without the risk of buck passing between governments and between different interest groups. AUSVEG intends to enter discussions with PHA, State and Federal governments, Bio-Security Australia and Australian Quarantine Inspection Service to work on these broader issues.

In late November 2006 the Western Australia Department of Primary Industries (WADPI) confirmed to the Chief Plant Protection Officer that an outbreak of potato spindle tuber viroid

## UPDATE National Potato Breeding Program

### Since August 2006, the National Potato Breeding Program has held numerous meetings with over 40 companies and groups to discuss the future shape of the program.

This follows Horticulture Australia proposing a new funding model for the program as a result of the Brennan Review (2004) and the Global Potato Germplasm Investigation (2005).

The Global Potato Germplasm Investigation sought to provide the Australian industry with a clear understanding of the technical approaches, scale and funding models that are being applied to potato breeding programs throughout the world, as well as major trends such as plant breeder's rights (PBR) that are driving commercial relationships internationally. With this information it was believed the industry would be in a position to consider the

performance and structure of the existing Australian program in a global context and determine how the domestic program should be altered to align and link with global programs.

The key findings of this review were:

- Successful programs need not be very large, although they should have a tight link with the end-users of the new improved cultivars, starting at an early stage of the breeding program.
- All breeding programs surveyed are now releasing PBR-protected cultivars. PBR cultivars need not be limited in their use.
- Public funding of breeding activities is decreasing and is focusing on upstream science, germplasm collection management and pre-breeding.

Tony Slater has been discussing the results of the review and the proposed investment and links with these companies. The response from the meetings has been very positive to date.

If you would like to discuss how your company can link with the National Potato Breeding Program, contact Tony on 03 9210 9222 or 0408 656 021.



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## PROFILE AUSVEG Directors

Above: L-R: Luis Gazzola, Paul Ziebarth (Vice-chairman), Geoff Moar, Des Jennings, Jeff McSpedden, Michael Badcock (Chairman), Ian Young, Steven Page, Phillip Beswick, Lisa Maguire (General Manager), David Anderson, John Mundy (Treasurer), John Roach (Chief Executive Officer)  
Absent: John Brett, Jim Trandos

AUSVEG's new Board of Directors was announced at the 2006 Annual General Meeting held on 10 January, 2007. Michael Badcock retained his position as Chairman, Paul Ziebarth was elected Vice Chairman and John Mundy was elected treasurer.

Four new directors were elected to the board, which comprises six representatives from the Vegetable Industry and six representatives from the Potato Industry.

"I would like to thank past Directors for their considerable efforts over the last few years and very much look forward to working with the new Directors to ensure the organisation meets the need of all growers across Australia," Michael Badcock said.

### Following the AUSVEG AGM, there were two new additions to the Board representing potato interests. Simon Adams gets a rundown on who the Board are and where they see the industry going.



#### Des Jennings

Des Jennings is the chairman of the Victorian Potato Council as well as a member of the Fresh Potato Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) and has served in the past as chairman of Seed Potato Victoria.

He runs a 250 HA seed potato family farm in Thorpedale which also farms beef, cattle sheepfat and lambs.

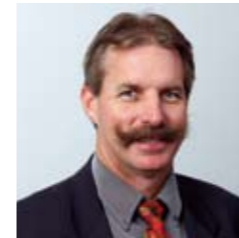
Des sees water resourcing as one of the biggest issues facing the potato industry but believes we need to ensure the industry focuses on the big picture rather than just reacting to immediate problems.

He would like to see Potato Cyst Nematode pest outbreaks handled on a national basis and has pinpointed compliance as the biggest problem growers face.

"Worksafe, product safety environment and a host of others leave a paper trail you can't climb over and no-one wants to pay for it," he said.

A veteran of the industry, Des has seen a lot of change over the years.

"It doesn't get easier, issues have changed and the industry's become more business oriented, rather than farmer to farmer. It's lost a bit of the personal touch."



#### Paul Ziebarth

Paul Ziebarth is one of two new appointees to the AUSVEG Board. Currently, Paul is the chairman of Growcom in Brisbane and runs a vertically integrated farming and marketing operation in the Lockyer Valley.

Paul, a fifth generation vegetable farmer, with a strong science and agricultural background is very keen to focus on international competitiveness and the component of price that gets back to growers.

In addition, he is keen to promote environmental sustainability from the farming and marketing perspectives.

"There are tremendous gains to be made through the adoption and integration of technology. As soon as you mention technology, people think you need to race out and spend a lot of money, when in fact there are often a lot of smaller things that can achieve the same result."



#### Phillip Beswick

Phillip Beswick runs a 400Ha cropping property, contracting, harvesting, cartage business and a fertilizer depot, with his wife Jane, located at Sisters Creek, Boat Harbour on the Northwest Coast of Tasmania.

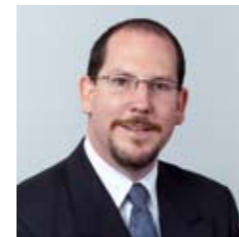
Phillip is currently on TFGA Vegetable Council and the Chairman of McCain Potatoes Committee.

Like many other growers, Phillip sees water resources and security of water allocations as a critical issue for the industry, but he is also keen to maintain quality of seed varieties available to growers as well as ensuring growers are able to get a fair share of the consumer dollar.

"They can charge high prices in the supermarket but growers never seem to get their fair share of it," he said.

In addition, Phillip would like to see improved availability of up to date chemicals such as new generation pesticides and insecticides.

"There's a lot of chemicals available in other countries that aren't available here which would help cut growers' production costs," he said. The industry needs to have a well run, organised R&D system that delivers real outcomes for growers.



#### Steven Page

Another new appointee to the AUSVEG Board is Steven Page, Managing Director of Golden Sunrise, an integrated farm enterprise controlling 5000 HA which grows, washes, packs and processes potatoes.

Steven joined Golden Sunrise in 1999 and has previously worked for Greens General Foods Limited and in the poultry industry.

A major challenge Steven sees for the industry will be maintaining farms as farms and managing the commercialisation and industrialisation of farming, something he believes the industry is already moving towards.

Steven is keen to ensure the mandatory code of conduct is adopted and further integrated to include grower to retailer and pack house to merchant transactions. As well as controlling agricultural disease which he believes will require continued research and development.

Continuing to have Australian bred potato varieties is critical. Facilities such as Toolangi are world class and must be maintained to ensure a vibrant and cohesive Australian industry.



#### Geoff Moar

Having grown potatoes in the Riverina area, NSW since the late 1960s, Geoff Moar currently supplies both processed and fresh market potatoes to markets and companies such as McCains and Kettle Chips and has seen dramatic changes in the industry.

Currently a member of the Horticultural Committee of NSW Farmers, Geoff's very keen to improve the percentage of the retail dollar that is delivered to the producer.

"When I first started growing potatoes, the percentage was much larger than it was today and everybody seems to be able to justify a larger share leaving the grower with much less at the end," he said.

Geoff is also greatly concerned with the government's attitude to water and associated water property rights, fearing growers may find themselves having difficulty retaining water rights they have already secured.



#### David Anderson

David Anderson was elected to the AUSVEG Ltd Board in November 2005 and is a fourth generation potato and vegetable grower, on a property in Baldivis, WA with his family selling fresh and processed potatoes for domestic consumption.

Currently, David is the Chairman of vegetablesWA and on the State Executive of the WA Potato Growers Association.

A key focus for David is to make the industry more sustainable, through water security, ensuring the right to farm and easing the bureaucratic burden for growers, such as streamlining the introduction of environmental management systems for production and safe quality food standards.

David is also seeking to improve growers' share of the retail dollar and also promote a healthy, safe, quality health food message to the general public of Australia. He believes more can be done to present a healthy focus on vegetables at a time when obesity and diabetes are becoming more of a national focus.





## Australian Vegetable Industry Conference 2007

# Potatoes 'claim centre plate'

**Vegetables will claim centre plate at the Australian Vegetable Industry Conference 2007 from 29 May to 1 June at the Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbour. Partially funded under the Vegetable, Potato and Onion levies, preparation is well underway for the first ever industry-wide conference, bringing together general vegetables, fresh and processed potatoes, onions, organics and hydroponics to further unite the industry.**

Following a strong response from sponsors at last year's conference, this year's suite of sponsorship packages have been further developed to ensure industry partners can professionally demonstrate their support for the industry and its importance to their business. All sponsors are given the opportunity to take part in the trade exhibition, a showcase of innovation and industry services and products that has proven to be a valuable resource for conference delegates.

The conference will be an outlet for industry leaders to extend innovation, research and development initiatives to growers, service providers, supply chain partners and other industry stakeholders. It is the only opportunity for individuals and companies to come together on a national level to network, share ideas and gain a better understanding of all facets of the industry.

The conference organising committee represents all sectors of the vegetable industry and has played an integral part in shaping the direction of the conference. The organising committee includes the following industry representatives:

- Jeff McSpedden, AUSVEG Board, Chairman of organising committee
- John Mundy, AUSVEG Board, Vegetables
- Des Jennings, AUSVEG Board, Fresh Potatoes, IAC member
- Iain Kirkwood, TIAR, Processed Potatoes Research & Development Program Leader

- Joanne Thomas-Ward, Executive Officer, Onions Australia
- Lisa Maguire, Director Communications, AUSVEG
- John Roach, CEO, AUSVEG
- Alison Anderson, Industry Development Officer, NSW
- Luke Jewell, Members Executive, NSW Farmers Association
- Graeme Smith, Australian Hydroponics and Greenhouse Association
- Andre Leu, Organic Federation of Australia

The conference will be the finale to a consumer awareness campaign titled "Vegetables Claim Centre Plate". The theme seeks to reclaim the place vegetables should have on the dinner plate of all Australians. The campaign will include a variety of consumer activities, highlighting the importance of vegetables in the Australian diet.

A registration brochure will be mailed soon, to enable growers to register early to take part in the 'Vegetables Claim Centre Plate' Australian Vegetable Industry Conference 2007.

For more information contact AUSVEG on (03) 9544 8098, or visit the conference website [www.vegieconf.com.au](http://www.vegieconf.com.au).

### The bottom line:

- Vegetables Industry conference to this year include fresh and processed potatoes
- Current national issues to be discussed in R&D and company forums
- Conference will serve as finale to nationwide consumer awareness campaign



## Conference Program includes:

### Tuesday 29 May 2007

- Trade exhibition set up
- Early registration
- Welcome cocktail reception

### Wednesday 30 May 2007

- Official conference opening
- Trade exhibition
- Key speakers
- Panel sessions
- Vegetable industry supply chain presentations
- Exhibitor and trade exhibition drinks

### Thursday 31 May 2007

- Trade exhibition
- Key speakers
- Showcase of research and development, innovation and extension across the vegetable, potato, onion, greenhouse and organic industries
- Australian Vegetable Industry Awards and Gala dinner

### Friday 1 June 2007

- Optional field tours





# Blueprint delivered for the battle against blight

**As Late Blight affects potato crops overseas, recently completed research has investigated how prepared Australian growers are to combat this pest and Graham Gosper discovers there may be a few gaps.**

NEW research has delivered the first pest-specific national response plan to help the potato industry combat one of its most serious ongoing exotic disease threats.

The plan is the result of a research project which assessed the threat to the industry from exotic new strains of *Phytophthora infestans* - the pathogen that causes late blight in potatoes - and identified some serious gaps in Australia's ability to deal with an incursion.

Australia is among a few countries which remain free of the new strains which have devastated crops as they spread around the world over the past 30 years.

Jacky Edwards, a Pathologist with the Department of Primary Industries Victoria in the Melbourne suburb of Knoxfield, led the project, which was commissioned because of serious industry concerns following the detection of the new strains in potato crops in Papua New Guinea in 2003.

The Knoxfield facility has a well-established reputation for plant pathology and biosecurity research, especially in horticultural crops and Jacky was able to assemble an expert team for the study from among her colleagues.

Using internationally recognised assessment techniques the team found the risk of the new strains entering Australia was low, mainly because of excellent border control and import restrictions however, it also found that if an incursion did occur the risk of the destructive new strains spreading within Australia was high.

Jacky said the study team identified serious gaps in Australia's ability to deal with an incursion in two areas - diagnostic capability and survey procedures.

"There is an immediate need to update and standardise national diagnostic protocols suitable for incursion purposes," she said.

"Diagnostic capability is inadequate with only one Australian laboratory able to distinguish *P. infestans* strains. The protocols used also involve several steps and have a turn-around time of at least two weeks - too long in the event of a suspected incursion."

Jacky said the team found a need for a surveillance program involving areas where late blight caused by old strains are known to occur which would provide the opportunity to develop robust diagnostic protocols and train diagnosticians in their use.

"It would also increase the likelihood of early detection of new strains," she said.

Chemical control options were also examined and national and state quarantine measures reviewed.

Jacky and her team believe further research will need to be undertaken to address the gaps in Australia's defences against the new strains. Jacky says diagnostic capability and survey procedure studies could be undertaken as a single project.

The team drafted lists of blight experts in Australia and overseas, survey procedures, quarantine zones and movement controls for use in an incursion situation.

Jacky said the project was a team effort and the results have put the industry in a much stronger position to deal with the late blight threat.

The national response plan and the risk assessment documents would together become part of the new National Potato Industry Biosecurity Plan.

"Immediate action to close the gaps the study identified in Australia's defences against the new strains is essential to effective management of any future incursions," she said.

The concerns that led to the Knoxfield project have been somewhat overshadowed in recent seasons as industry attention has moved on to issues arising from the drought and international competition.

Jacky has cautioned it would be a mistake for the industry to become complacent about late blight, citing the example of a grower she recently met remarking that the last late blight he had seen was eight years ago, before the drought began.

"All growers should be aware that there are two mating types of *P. infestans* known as A1 and A2," she said.

"In Australia, we only have old strains of A1, but the presence of A2 may result in the development of tough survival spores (oospores), and therefore, long-term survival in soil," she said.

"The offspring from the mating of A1 and A2 strains are more adaptable, potentially capable of tolerating drier conditions than the old strain we already have in Australia."

Jacky believes industry should also remember that late blight is among the most destructive of potato diseases, estimated to cause losses of around 15 per cent of worldwide production annually.

Experts estimate potato production losses in Australia would exceed 100,000 tonnes a year and industry dependence on pesticides would rise sharply if the new strains became established in this country.

## The bottom line

- A new national response plan has been formulated to combat Late Blight
- New strains entering Australia are considered a low risk
- Diagnostic capability and survey procedures still need improvement



**Above:** Late blight 'meltdown' symptoms (cv Sequoia) caused by a new strain of *Phytophthora infestans*, Papua New Guinea. Credit: R. F. de Boer



# Introducing Lucy Keatinge

**Lucy Keatinge has commenced as Horticulture Australia's new Industry Services Manager for the Vegetables portfolio, replacing Simon Drum who is taking up a strategic planning role as a consultant.**

Lucy's role will involve determining and managing ongoing budgets, liaising with major stake holders and determining projects that will fit with the national strategic plan, Veg Vision 2020, and the recently completed Potato Industry Strategic plan.

Lucy will be Horticulture Australia's first point of contact for vegetable industry bodies.

"If any of the peak industry bodies, AUSVEG or the Potato Industry have a problem, they'll come to me in the first instance and then that gets fed back into our professional services group whose response I will coordinate," she said.

Lucy comes to Horticulture Australia from the onfarm R&D

department at Meat and Livestock Australia where she held several roles, the most recent being the Strategic Planning Business Coordinator. She has also held roles with Root Projects Australia, a construction project management company and a niche biotechnology organisation in the United States.

Unlike Simon, Lucy will be based in HAL's Sydney office, but she has been keen to make contact with people and organisations she'll be dealing with ahead of the upcoming Industry Advisory Committees meetings.

"The development of trust relationships is really important as you can bring whatever issues you need to the table," she said.



## Fresh Potato Industry invests in market development

### Understanding consumer perceptions and better cohesion throughout the supply chain are two major goals of a new market development project to commence this month.

Market development is critical to the long term sustainability and profitability of the fresh potato industry as fresh potato consumption in Australia has been in decline and the export market is small.

Through extensive research and consultation, the fresh potato industry identified knowledge on all aspects of potatoes such as health, nutrition, handling, use and packaging was limited.

It was also found that there was a lack of cohesion and collaboration throughout the supply chain, ultimately limiting the progression of the industry.

"The market development project will create an enabling framework and environment for the industry to resolve these issues which will lead to a marketing capability," project leader Lisa Maguire from AUSVEG said.

"The project will gather a broad range of information on potatoes, create networks within the supply chain and develop long term working relationships," Lisa said.

The fresh potato industry has also undergone a significant strategic planning process last year in line with the whole of vegetable industry strategic plan, VegVision 2020, which was developed through the Australian Government's Industry Partnership Program.

This market development project fits directly within the fresh potato strategic plan which identified that the beneficial attributes of potatoes and consumer perceptions require identification and communication.

"A significant output of this project will be a market development plan that has clear recommendations on the future marketing investments the industry should make," Lisa said.

#### The bottom line

- The fresh potato industry requires in-depth knowledge on all aspects of potatoes to pursue marketing strategies
- A lack of collaboration and cohesion throughout the supply chain is a limiting factor in the industry
- A market development plan will ultimately lead to a marketing capability for the fresh potato industry

For more information visit <http://www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers/login.cfm> and search under PTO6022 or 'market development'. Service Provider: AUSVEG Ltd



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# Specialty potatoes a hit in Melbourne



Image supplied by Prahran Market

**Michael Mow is affectionately known as “Mr Potato Head” by the customers who frequent his gourmet potato stall at Melbourne’s Prahran Market. Toni Davies visited his stall to see the fantastic range of gourmet spuds and chat with him about his passion, potatoes.**

A family business with a long tradition in selling vegetables has inspired Michael to devote over thirty years to selling specialty spuds.

Michael took the reigns from his father who retired after sixty years in the business.

Michael’s grandfather worked on the stall making Michael the third generation of Mows to work at the market, but unlike previous generations, Michael has shifted the business focus to gourmet varieties.

“It wasn’t a business decision, it was just that I was selling washed and brushed potatoes and getting the occasional gourmet variety in depending on what was in season,” he said

“It soon became clear that my customers wanted potatoes that were full of flavour, with good texture that suited their specific needs, so I began sourcing more of the niche gourmet varieties,” he said.

The focus of Michael’s sales changed to the point of not stocking washed or brushed potatoes due to lack of demand.

“I’m finding the younger buyers like to use varieties such as Sapphires, Royal Blue, Kipflers and Pink Eyes (Southern Gold) and they are willing to try potatoes with colourful skins and flesh, with my older clientele preferring the white skin and white flesh varieties,” Michael said.

With sales averaging about one and a half tonnes per week, Michael is kept busy sourcing seasonal varieties from small growers.

His potatoes come primarily from Tasmania, the Gippsland area, around Mirboo and through companies such as Dobson’s Potatoes in Alexandria, Victoria who specialise in varieties in that the supermarkets have never heard of.

Over the years, Michael has featured on food shows, in magazine and newspaper articles which has heightened his profile and brought growers with new varieties to his doorstep, a practice he is keen to encourage.

Michael has become an expert in potato preparation and cooking, knowledge he happily shares with his customers, even giving them written recipes.

His stall is a one stop potato shop with boxes of spuds everywhere, shelves of books on farming, different potato varieties, and recipes all being watched over intensely from another shelf by an army of Mr Potato Heads which he has collected over the years.

Although Michael sells up to forty different kinds of potatoes he still has a few favourites.

“Dutch Creams from Tassie make the best mash of the lot, just a pinch of salt is all you need; Pink Eyes also known as Southern Gold have a lovely nutty flavour with creamy yellow, waxy flesh and are great for salads, boiling, steaming or baking,” he said.

“The Nicola are also versatile, good for boiling, baking, steaming or mashing with their buttery, slightly sweet flavour,” he said.

There is an excitement in Michael’s tone when he chats about his other favourites, The Toolangi Delight and the Bison, and his latest recipe idea, a potato salad using lots of the colourful varieties available, undoubtedly soon to be a hit on his customers’ plates.

**You can find Michael at: M.J. Mow, Gourmet Potatoes, Stall 106, Prahran Market, 163 Commercial Road, Prahran. VIC 3181.**



## Final siren for award nominations

**With the nomination period for the AUSVEG Australian Vegetable Industry Awards coming to a close on February 23, the time is now for potato growers to get nominations in.**

The awards are about recognising our industry’s champions and AUSVEG is urging the wider vegetable communities to nominate their contenders.

AUSVEG Chairman, Michael Badcock said that the awards rely on industry participation to ensure that the best candidates are recognised.

“The awards belong to the Australian Vegetable Industry and it’s up to us to ensure that the best candidates are nominated,” Michael said.

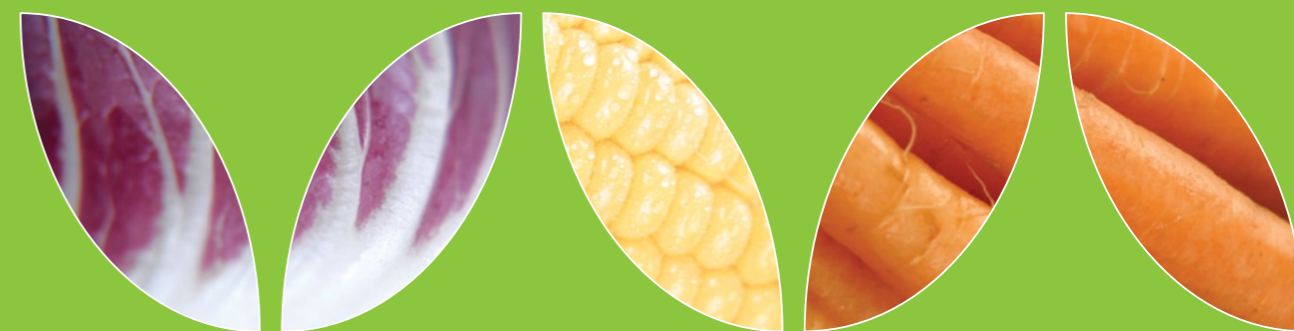
The awards will be presented on the gala dinner of the 2007 Australian Vegetable Industry Conference in Sydney, May 31, 2007.

Nominations are currently open for the following awards:

- NAB Growers of the Year
- Young Grower of the Year
- Researcher of the Year
- Innovative Marketing Award
- AUSVEG Chairmen’s Awards

Following the nominations closing finalists will be short listed for each category by an award specific judging panel based upon the quality of the nominations submitted. The finalists will then be notified and interviewed by the relevant judging panels to determine the winners.

**For more information on the awards nomination process please call AUSVEG on 03 9544 8098 or visit [www.ausveg.com.au](http://www.ausveg.com.au)**



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**NOMINATIONS ARE NOW OPEN FOR:**

- NAB Grower of the Year Award
- Young Grower of the Year Award
- Researcher of the Year Award
- Innovative Marketing Award
- AUSVEG Chairman’s Award

**Nominations close Friday, 23 February 2007 for more information visit [www.ausveg.com.au](http://www.ausveg.com.au)**

**ViCSPA's a familiar name to Victorian, Tasmanian and New South Wales potato growers, but many may not be aware exactly what the group does and as David Jarwood discovers, it's more than just certification.**



*The ViCSPA team left to right: Bruce Fry (Colac), Daniel Grayling (Ballarat), Keith Blackmore (Manager), Pauline McPherson (Office Manager), Andrew Hayton (South Australia) and Russell Bell (Gippsland)*

## ViCSPA - The potato industry's watch dog

**Australia's potato industry is in good hands thanks to the diligent work of ViCSPA and its manager Keith Blackmore.**

Keith has a real passion for the humble spud and has worked for 37 years to preserve and enhance Australia's fine reputation for producing quality potatoes.

ViCSPA is the body responsible for the seed potato certification scheme. It is a not-for-profit organisation near Healesville providing a range of certification services for the Australian potato industry. Its aim is to increase the profitability of the industry through the production of high quality certified seed potatoes.

Services include the care of the public variety collection, accreditation of the processes and facilities that produce minituber and micro tubers for the Certified seed schemes in Australia and field and tuber inspections for its 100 member growers. Each year approximately 2000 hectares of crop is certified.

ViCSPA, which is located at the Potato Research Station at Toolangi, near Healesville, provides a range of professional certification and quality assurance services in Victoria, NSW, South Australia and Tasmania and operates the Seed Potato Certification Scheme.

Keith, who has been with ViCSPA since its inception in 1994, said that over the past 10 years ViCSPA had been responsible for the seed scheme in Victoria and more recently in South Australia.

"During this period the Australian potato industry successfully developed National Standards for certified seed production," he said. "This was a major step forward for the industry with all certified seed schemes using the same National Standard as the basis of their scheme rules."

Two of the recent projects that ViCSPA has been working on are:

- Refreshment and maintenance of the certified seed public variety in vitro collection; and,
- Virus monitoring of ViCSPA growers' seed plots.

Keith says the "Maintenance and Refreshment of the Certified Seed Public Variety Potato In-vitro Collection" project is an essential on-going project benefiting the whole Australian potato industry.

The project aims to "refresh" the whole in-vitro collection every eight to ten years and ensure the best types and vigorous seed of each public variety are available to industry via the certified seed schemes in Victoria, South Australia, NSW, Tasmania and Western Australia.

Keith said commercial potato growers needed vigorous true to type seed tubers to have the best chance of achieving high yields of quality potatoes.

"To ensure ongoing access to high yielding lines of public varieties, the national variety collection is maintained by ViCSPA on behalf of the Australian potato industry," he said.

"This collection represents many years of selection & improvement by skilled seed growers to many of the traditional public varieties."

Keith said the virus monitoring project had shown good results to counter diseases that, while not affecting humans, could have a significant effect on the yield and quality of potato crops and processed potato products.

"These viruses are spread to potato plants via the mother seed tuber, insects (mostly aphids & thrips) and/or mechanically by contact. Infected seed tubers when planted give rise to infected plants," he said.

"As the seed stocks are multiplied in the field over a period of up to five years they are potentially exposed to reinfection with the plant viruses - Potato leaf roll virus (PLRV), Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus (TSWV), Potato Virus Y (PVY), Potato Virus X (PVX) and Potato Virus S (PVS).

"Each year the crops are inspected in the field and must meet the specified National Standard before further multiplication or sale as certified seed potatoes."

Keith said the survey had shown the health of ViCSPA's seed plots was generally very good. No PVX was found and low levels of PLRV, TSWV and PVY were present.

"However there is a need to improve management practices to ensure minimal levels of PVS in some grower's crops," he said.

"ViCSPA will also use the survey results to develop future policies for virus monitoring of growers stocks."

ViCSPA puts a high importance on training and runs training for staff from all schemes using the National Standard and more

importantly the ability to apply the standards in "the field".

The bi-annual training workshops provide the essential knowledge and skills required by Certification Officers and assist in the uniform implementation of the National Standards for Certified seed potatoes as well as focusing on developing variety identification skills and disease identification skills.

Keith said seed potato certification schemes were the foundation of a strong domestic Australian potato industry.

"These schemes also offer significant potential for increased export growth for certified seed potatoes and fresh potatoes," he said.

A major focus for the future, according to Keith, needs to be on hygiene issues, as diseases and pests such as Bacterial wilt and PCN were readily moved between farms in soil, on machinery and dirty potato bins and poor quality seed.

Keith's passion for potatoes is understandable as he has been working with the vegetable since 1969, when he started with the Department of Agriculture in Victoria.

While he is keen to ensure Australia's spuds are the best they can be, he also believes Australian consumers need to improve their knowledge about the versatile vegetable.

"Generally I believe that many buy on appearances, rather than for specific uses," he said.

"The industry needs to ensure that all varieties that are sold are sold for a particular purpose."

And this is where the industry can improve its marketing and education. But that, he says, is out of his field and best left to the marketing gurus.

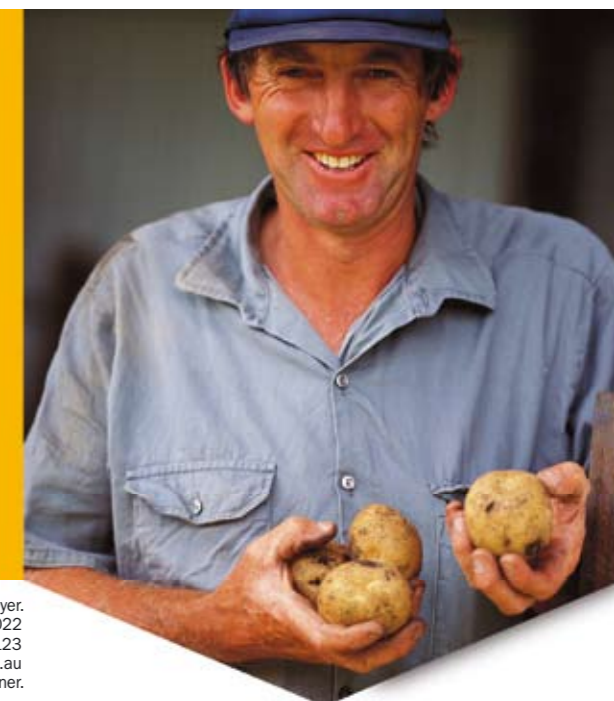
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## CEO's message

The meat industry was publicly challenged by the vegetable industry this month. Consumers have been reminded that vegetables "belong at the centre of meals and are tired of being a side dish".

The Federal Agriculture Minister, The Hon Peter McGauran MP, and celebrity cook Georgina Damm of Damm Fine Foods along with AUSVEG Chairman Mike Badcock launched the vegetable industry campaign 'Vegetables Claim Centre Plate' at the Queen Victoria Market to media and shoppers.

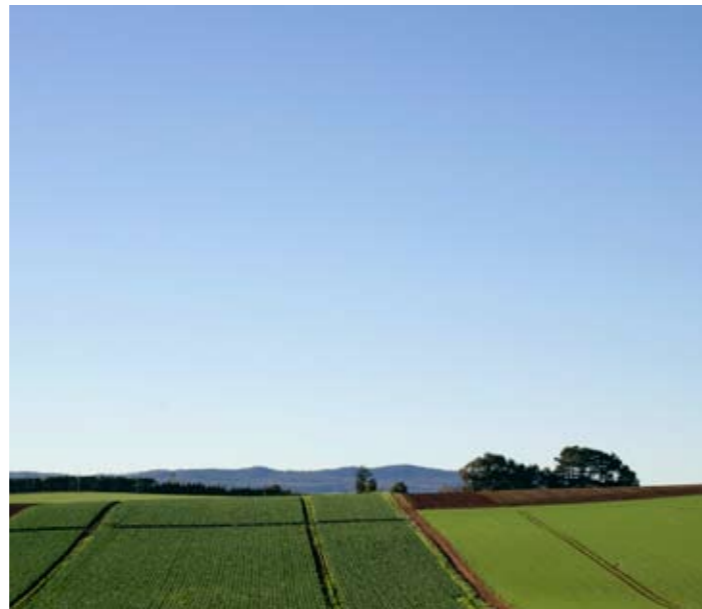
This event is the beginning of a wide range of activities aimed at keeping the vegetable industry at front of mind, (or the 'centre of the plate'). The campaign leads up to our industry conference in Sydney from 29 May to 1 June.

More specifically in the area of marketing, AUSVEG is pleased to announce the commencement of a market development project, funded through the National Potato Levy on behalf of the fresh potato industry. This key industry project aims to develop the research knowledge and infrastructure to implement long term marketing strategies to reposition the fresh potato in the Australian diet.

The first meeting of the National PCN Working Group took place earlier this month. A wide range of issues were debated and it was agreed to develop a set of national protocols and management plans to address the problem. Work will begin immediately with the PCN working group evaluating these reports in mid-March, which will then be taken to both industry and government for their consideration. A highlight of the day was the goodwill shown by all to progress the issue. The meeting involved delegates from all federal and state government regulators, Plant Health Australia and AUSVEG Potato Directors.

In other news the Australian Consumer and Competition Council (ACCC) and Department of Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) held an industry forum for the Horticulture Code of Conduct on Monday February 5, 2007 in Melbourne. Extensive debate centered on who is or isn't covered by the Code as well as 'keeping it simple' for industry. Further meetings are being arranged around Australia and will take place shortly. The official start date of the code is May 14, 2007.

Submissions for the Prime Minister and Cabinet's Security Sensitive Chemical consultation paper close March 1, 2007.



Industry members of the working group for all industries involved are working to arrive at a one joint position. If we can achieve this outcome, all industries in Australia speaking as one would be carry a great deal of weight for our industry. This joint position will then form the basis of our submission with our industry specific detail added. We hope to release a draft to growers mid-February for comment. It has been fortunate that AUSVEG was appointed to this working group on an issue that has potentially large impacts for the industry if not handled sensibly.

I recently met with the Allan Smith, President of Processing Potato Association of Australia (PPAA) to look at ways we can work more closely together.

I would also like to welcome Simon Adams, the Editor for Potatoes Australia and new Industry Services Manager for HAL, Lucy Keatinge who looks after the vegetable, potato and onion industries. Lucy must have left Meat and Livestock Australia just to stay in the "centre of the plate".



**John Roach**  
Chief Executive Officer  
AUSVEG Ltd

irrigation technology, machinery, packaging and computer software.

The Expo will be held at the Gordon Institute of TAFE, on Dairy Road, Werribee and will run from 8:00am - 5:00pm on Thursday and 8:00am - 3:30pm on Friday. See you there!

## AUSVEG hosts display at National Vegetable Expo

AUSVEG will be hosting a stall at the National Vegetable Expo 2007, to be held on May 3 and 4, 2007.

Held every two years, the National Vegetable Expo offers growers an opportunity to view exhibitions and innovations of seed, fertilizer,



## Processing chief says R&D has the answers

**The recently appointed President of the Potato Processing Association of Australia (PPAA), Mr Allan Smith, is a firm believer in the potato industry's resilience. Graham Gosper finds out why.**



FEW things about the processing potato industry in Australia impress Allan Smith more than its ability to bounce back in the face of a major challenge. That is something he has witnessed again and again as the industry has responded to issues ranging from rationalisation to maintaining supply through extreme drought.

Allan is the President of the Potato Processing Association of Australia (PPAA).

He first became directly involved with the industry in 1999 as a field manager for Arnott's. In 2004 he was appointed the company's representative on the PPAA and the crisping potato representative of the PPAA on the processed potato IAC. He was elected PPAA president in October 2006.

The PPAA is made up of representatives of Australia's four major potato processors - McCain Foods, Simplot Australia, The Smiths Snackfood Company and Arnott's. Allan, 38, is now the national agronomy manager for Arnott's Snackfoods and is based in Brisbane.

Allan said the biggest test of the industry's resilience in recent years has come from cost pressures resulting from increased competition from overseas. Such pressures were showing no

signs of easing and had become one of the biggest issues facing growers and processors.

With that in mind the PPAA is focussing on working for the success of Australia's \$14.6 million Processing Potatoes R&D (PPR&D) program.

"With the price of our products limited by a competitive global market the industry must find innovative solutions to build more efficiency into what is already considered to be a very efficient system," Allan said.

"R&D offers that opportunity through better management of waste and disease on farm. It also offers hopes for the development of better varieties," he said

The five-year PPR&D program, which began in 2004, is a collaboration between the Australian Government, Victorian DPI, HAL, an impressive line-up of research groups and the Canadian Government.

It is addressing the major disease threats to the industry which experts estimate spends \$50 million annually on disease control.

Allan indicated the PPAA has recognised the importance of R&D to the industry through membership and support of HAL.

"This is one of the only industries I know of where processors match the contribution for R&D from grower levies with a similar contribution," he said.

Allan pointed out that since the PPR&D program began, significant foundation work had been achieved to carry out the necessary programs and it would not be long before that work would begin producing major results for the industry.

Allan said the PPAA is continuing to work for the success of the R&D program as a peak industry representative of the processing potato industry.

"It is also working to advance concepts and issues that grow the industry and improve its sustainability," he said.

Allan believes the time has also come for the industry to address planning for the next stage of the PPR&D program. He said this could probably best be done as part of the recently finalised processed potato strategic plan.



## New crisping potato variety to offer Atlantic alternative

### Growers may soon have a new potato variety option available to them as Katie Fisher discovers.

The most common crisping potato, Atlantic, could soon be facing tough competition after recent trial results identified a new variety with superior characteristics.

Results from trials harvested last year and in January found the new variety, when compared to the Atlantic potato: was higher in solids; had less bruising; was more uniform in size; more resistant to cold sweetening and, from a grower's perspective, was the only variety that could be successfully grown for winter production.

The evaluation trials, managed by Smith's Snackfood Company's Agronomy Manager, Kan Moorthy are based in Queensland at Bundaberg & Gatton as well as Robinvale and Thorpdale in Victoria.

While Kan, due to confidentiality reasons, can not divulge the potato varieties he said "in all key performance areas the company's proprietary variety was performing well in the trials and showing promising results indicating it should exceed the Atlantic".

"In all the trials to date, the variety has a marketable yield similar to Atlantic but has better figures for solids and bruising," he said.

"The uniformity of tubers are very even compared to Atlantic which gives an advantage for processing in conversion and also growers are getting the full bonus for size."

"The variety matures a week later than Atlantic, but can be used for the main season's crop," he said.

He added that the: "Frying results produced a light coloured chip with white flesh."

Kan said he was continually importing crisping varieties, predominantly from the company's breeding program in the United States and also looking at varieties from the Australian public breeding programs.

He said one of the trials' greatest challenges was the changing seasons.

"Every year no matter where we are growing we have different environmental conditions to contend with compared to the previous year," he said.

Kan said it would be about five years before the company's proprietary variety, if it passed all the quality tests, was released for commercial use.

"The next phases are long and costly and involve bulk growing, testing at our processing plant and stringent qualification trials," he said.

#### The bottom line:

- A new, improved crisping potato variety has been identified
- The variety is similar in yield to the Atlantic and can be grown in winter
- Extensive testing will be undertaken to confirm the result



Above: Participating growers harvesting potatoes for trailing.



## From roguing to research: a profile of Dr Iain Kirkwood

A summer roguing job in the potato fields of Scotland set Dr Iain Kirkwood on a path that would take him to the other side of the world. Now Senior Research Fellow at the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research (TIAR), Iain is set to continue his fight against disease in potatoes.

While studying for his Bachelor Degree in Science at Scotland's oldest University, St Andrews, Iain spent his holidays as a roguer removing diseased and off-type potatoes from Scottish seed crops. He has been in the potato industry ever since.

Building on his first degree Iain completed a Masters in Plant Breeding at Cambridge University and a PhD in Microbial Ecology at Cranfield University.

In 1996 Iain moved to Australia to accept a position as an agronomist. Initially based in NSW, he soon moved to China to work as the company's plant pathologist. From China he managed local potato crops as well as potato crops in India and Thailand; each location having significant disease issues, bacterial wilt being the most common.

Returning from Asia in 2000, Iain joined the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries and Water to manage their Potato Services Team. The Team has three main areas of interest: seed potato certification, mini tuber production and general industry development.

Iain still manages the Potato Services Team, but he does so now as a Senior Research Fellow at the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research, which takes about fifty per cent of his time. The remainder is spent managing the Processing Potato Research and Development (PPR&D) project.

The PPR&D project is a national and multinational research and development project. The focus of the project is reducing the impact of diseases in potatoes. Iain says this project is funded and managed differently than many others.

"Previously research was a whole series of small projects, but the PPR&D is one large project that takes a long-term view, dealing with the most important issues facing the potato industry - it's far more strategic." Iain said.

The PPR&D project uses Australian and international research providers to carry out its work. Iain says there are plans to increase the use of international providers in the coming months.

"Expertise in potato research is spread across the world. We need to tap into this expertise to get the best research results and to encourage young researchers into the industry." Iain said.

In to the future Iain says the effective use of water in potato production has to be one of the greatest challenges the industry faces. This closely followed by the increasing potato production in Asia, particularly China, from whom low cost imports are a constant threat.

"The best way to address these challenges is through communication," says Iain, "the researchers know how to improve efficiency and increase production, we just need to get the knowledge into the field"

While not working with potatoes Iain enjoys bushwalking in the Tasmanian wilderness and entertaining his children Archie, 3, and Poppy, 8 months, with his wife Lisa.



# What is Black dot?

**Black dot is a fungus of potatoes that causes skin blemishes and possible yield loss. It is caused by the soilborne fungus *Colletotrichum coccodes*. Black dot develops from infected seed or soil and can show up on stems and stolons 6-8 weeks after planting.**

The Black dot fungus infects potatoes through the foliage particularly after leaves are damaged during sandstorms.

The Black dot fungus is most active in warmer climates, usually around 25°C with most instances reported in South Australia.

### What can growers do?

There's no one magic treatment for Black dot. A number of different management strategies are recommended to reduce the impact of the disease.

While these strategies will help, further research needs to be undertaken in areas such as optimising dose, timing of fungicides and/or biological products, evaluating potato cultivars for resistants, and determining threshold levels in the soil to enable growers to make decisions on where to plant different seed lines. Robin Harding from South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) has indicated additional research is currently being undertaken.

### Tuber seed treatments

Seed lots are often heavily infected with Black dot. Tuber seed should be examined for Black dot and, if found, treated with the fungicide Maxim. Seed tubers should be free of soil before treatment and fungicides applied so that they are spread evenly over the tuber surface.

### Soil preparation

The Black dot fungus survives in soil for more than 8 years. Soil fumigation with either Metham or Telone kills the fungus in the soil but the treatments are expensive and unreliable. Only disease free tubers or fungicide-treated seed tubers should be planted in fumigated or non infested soil. Moleboard ploughing to a depth of 30 cm has also reduced Black dot overseas.

### Weed control

The Black dot fungus survives on weeds such as fat hen (*Chenopodium allium*), black night shade (*Solanum nigrum*), skeleton weed (*Chondrilla juncea*), and heliotrope (*Heliotropium europium*).

These weeds should be controlled in the year after harvest and at least 12 months before planting.

### Cultivar selection

Most common potato cultivars are susceptible to Black dot with Coliban being a highly susceptible variety. Early or thin-skinned cultivars are generally more susceptible.

### Planting

The Black dot fungus is most active at around 25°C so planting or harvesting at times when soil temperatures are less than 25°C will reduce the level of disease development.

An in-furrow application of Amistar at planting can reduce the level of disease. Amistar can be sprayed onto the soil in front and behind the seed tuber to create an envelope of treated soil.

### Growing

Black dot develops from infected seed or soil and can show up on stems and stolons 6-8 weeks after planting. The Black dot fungus infects potatoes through the foliage particularly after leaves are damaged during sandstorms. The effect of fungicides on the control of this stage of the disease has not been tested.

### Harvest

Tubers should be harvested as soon as possible after maturity to avoid long storage periods in the soil. When stem infections are present, withholding irrigation or reducing the frequency of irrigation before harvest reduces the level of tuber infection.

Removal of haulms or applying Amistar one week after desiccation reduced Black dot infection in some experiments.

### Crop rotation

Crop rotation with non-host crops has the potential to reduce soil levels of Black dot, but may be of limited value particularly if infected tuber seed is planted.

Biofumigant (green manure) crops such as Indian mustard may be useful in reducing soil levels of Black dot.



Above: Evidence of Black dot on tubers

### Information sourced from:

Control of Black dot in potatoes  
2000 – 2004. HAL project PT01001.

BLACK DOT: RESEARCH RESULTS

R. Harding, and T. Wicks

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