

**Canadian Study Tour -  
Certified Seed  
Production -Training  
of Certification  
officers and Industry  
Trends, June 2007**

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Victorian Certified Seed  
Potato Authority Inc

Project Number: PT06040

## **PT06040**

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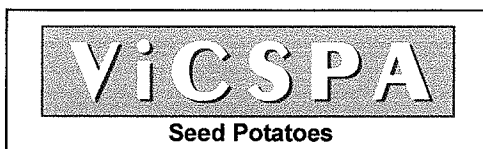
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TRAINING OF CERTIFICATION  
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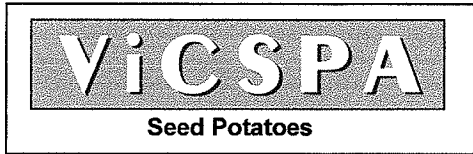
**Final Report**

**Report Compiled by Russell Bell, ViCSPA**

AUGUST 2007



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**CANADIAN STUDY TOUR - CERTIFIED SEED PRODUCTION - TRAINING  
OF CERTIFICATION OFFICERS AND INDUSTRY TRENDS**

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- ⊕ ViCSPA Certified seed potato growers via the district Associations in Gippsland, Ballarat, Portland and the Otways
- ⊕ Warragul Potato Conference Committee

Report date: Thursday, 6 September, 2007

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## **MEDIA SUMMARY**

All Australian certification schemes are being challenged to maintain a well trained staff to successfully conduct their work.

The future of ViCSPA and other state certification programs is at risk unless they can quickly, efficiently and effectively train new staff on a regular basis as well as maintain/improve the ongoing skill/knowledge levels of existing staff.

To basis of the project proposal was to attend a world renowned seed scheme training program. The Canadian Potato Certification scheme is one of the largest certified seed schemes in the world.

The Seed Potato Inspectors' Course was held at Ridgetown College, which is part of the University of Guelph. It is an annual course that was initially designed to train Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) staff. They now have people attending from USA, export market country representatives, young growers and occasionally from Australia.

Russell Bell is the area manager for Australia's largest certified seed producing area in Gippsland, Victoria. Russell has achieved a certificate IV in Assessment & Workplace Training and will be the lead tutor in future training workshops for Australian Certification Officers. The study tour provided a unique opportunity to further his knowledge and skills for the benefit of the greater industry. The opportunities provided by this study tour have been recognised by the ViCSPA growers. The Victorian seed industry through their district industry associations and ViCSPA agreed to financially support a voluntary contribution for this project. Significant assistance was provided by the Warragul National Potato Conference committee.

ViCSPA is a not for profit incorporated agency that supplies a range of services to the Australian Potato Industry and in particular the production of certified seed potatoes. All potatoes that are marketed in Australia are "touched" by ViCSPA's services at some stage during their multiplication.

## **EXPECTED OUTCOMES (& HOW THEY WERE ACHIEVED)**

### *1. Improving the knowledge of training methods for Certification Officers.*

In order to improve our knowledge of training methods for Certification Officers, and understand the training methods used by the Canadians in the delivery of information at the course would be required.

The delivery of information was similar to the ViCSPA Certification Officers Training Workshop (HAL Project, PTO6030 Certified Seed Potato – Certification Officers Training Workshop). However the Canadians have a more formal mode of delivery, including lectures in an auditorium and the information delivery is measured in the form of a formal exam at the end of the course.

There were forty or more participants in the training course, and the ratio of participants to trainers was about 8:1. ViCSPA training workshops have a ratio of 4:1 (participants to trainers), and thus ViCSPA can assess the participant's progress as they move through the course. The ViCSPA exam is open book, which means the participant quickly learns to reference from the National Standard, which is the minimum requirement for certification in Australia, as well as the ViCSPA Rules Annexure. An exam requiring demonstrated knowledge of both information sources is required to pass the course. By adopting this type of testing ViCSPA can be confident that the participants are knowledgeable enough about the basic standards for Certification that they can adapt to rule changes that may occur, without laborious retraining.

The CFIA trainers passed on a number of skills in disease identification, and more importantly, how to teach these skills to other people, which will be extremely beneficial for the participants at the next certification officer course run by ViCSPA. Overall it is a well run course which I thoroughly recommend. It gave me a new perspective on how to train and how to learn. This course would be beneficial to future senior inspectors. It is not suitable for someone with minimal inspection skills.

After completing the CFIA course, and seeing the different methods of training and comparison with what ViCSPA currently provides its course participants, I believe ViCSPA will be able to adapt some of the skills and training methods learnt from CFIA. Future courses will be then able to confidently deliver a more comprehensive package to the National certification officers who take part in the next Certification Officer training workshop.

### *2. Taking part in the Canadian Food Inspection Agency Seed Potato Certification Inspectors Course.*

I took part in the Canadian Food Inspection Agency Seed Potato Certification Inspectors Course, and completed the theory and field examinations. I had to learn 13 of 15 varieties presented to me in the field and a whole new system of Certification. The course was a challenging. There was a lot to learn in a short time. Such was the calibre and dedication of the course trainers that they were prepared to take interested participants out to the fields at the end of the day and spend extra time pointing out the small variations in the plants that made identification possible, and made learning about the new varieties a lot clearer for those of us who were unfamiliar with the varieties.

### 3. *Comparison of training Methods.*

ViCSPA conducts certification officer training at the Victorian Department of Primary Industries research station at Toolangi. Participants need to travel twenty minutes to and from Healesville, the closest town to Toolangi with accommodation. Being personally familiar with the varieties grown in the ViCSPA trials means that extra time with each variety is not necessary for confident identification, however, some of the participants who are not so familiar with the varieties may benefit from more time with the varieties before the exam in order to become familiar with their identifying components. Thus the trials should be made more accessible to all participants, perhaps planted closer to Healesville.

The trials which contained diseased plants were extremely interesting. I feel it would be beneficial to the ViCSPA course to locate to a growing area closer to the accommodation. A few diseased plants could be planted in order to actually see diseased plants growing in a healthy crop. Pictures in books can only show so much and a major part of a certification officer's job is disease identification in grower's paddocks.

## RESULTS OF DISCUSSIONS

### 1. *Disease problems.*

During the training course it became apparent to me that the Canadians and Americans face more pressure from disease than Australian growers. As a result they require more chemical input than Australian growers which makes the crop inspections more hazardous to the CFIA staff. This means a larger contingent of staff is required to do inspections when the crops are deemed 'safe' for entry. CFIA staff are also made aware of the health dangers of completing field inspections when agricultural chemicals have recently been applied. The CFIA places a high emphasis on safe work practices. An entire lecture is presented on this topic by an OH & S specialist from the CFIA.

### 2. *Hygiene.*

Because of problems with Bacterial Ring Rot (*Corynebacterium Sepedonicum*) the CFIA officers have excellent hygiene protocols in place to prevent the spread of this important disease. Despite not having Bacterial Ring Rot in Australia, it was good to note that ViCSPA has hygiene protocols that are at a similar level as the CFIA, ViCSPA has protocols that are superior to that of the CFIA when dealing with Potato Cyst Nematode (PCN).

## IMPLICATIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN HORTICULTURE

The implications for Australian horticulture after attending this course include the following;

- With better trained inspectors on the ground, certified seed should be of a better quality with fewer defects and less chance of carrying disease.
- When ViCSPA offers a training course its instructors now have a broader knowledge base and a more confident approach due to the knowledge that ViCSPA is offering a world's best practice.
- Inspectors are now more informed of the symptoms of diseases that are not currently endemic to Australia.
- Inspectors will be able to access information in the USA and Canada through new contacts made by ViCSPA.



## COMMUNICATIONS /EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Presentations have been made at the Victorian district associations that contributed voluntary funding in order for Russell Bell to complete the CFIA training course. Other organizations have been made aware that Russell is available to speak to them as well.

A report featuring highlights from the training course will be prepared for Potatoes Australia, which has an audience of around 4000 potato growing businesses around Australia.

## ITINERARY

- Saturday 2 June 2007** - Travel to Seattle
- Sunday 3 June 2007** - Visited Pike St markets in Seattle. Finding local growers and agents.
- Monday 4 June 2007** - Local calls to Agriculture Dept. Discussions with inspector in Bellingham County were most of Washington States seed potatoes are grown. Ringing contacts in Idaho and making contact with Idaho potato commissioner Keith Esplin etc.
- Tuesday 5 June 2007** - Drove from Seattle to Portland in Oregon travelling through farmland.
- Wednesday 6 June 2007** -Drove from Portland Oregon to Kennewick in Washington State.
- Thursday 7 June 2007** - Washington State Potato Commission offices. Picked up brochures and other useful information to take back to Australia. Followed the Columbia River back to Oregon, then on to Baker City.
- Friday 8 June 2007** - Travelled from Baker City in Oregon through Idaho to Idaho Falls,
- Saturday 9 June 2007** - Farm tour of Rainbow Farms. Toured the Idaho potato museum. Drove to Boise following the Snake River
- Sunday 10 June 2007** - Travelled to Toronto
- Monday 11 June 2007** - Travel to Ridgetown College Ontario. Registration and welcome.
- Tuesday 12 June.2007** - CFIA course starts.
- Saturday 16 June 2007** - Final day of course and field exam. B B Q dinner and certificates awarded.
- Tuesday 19 June. 2007** - Visited the farming areas around Hamilton, Bramford, Kitchener and Guelph area and overnight south of Toronto.
- Friday 22 June 2007** - Drove to Charlottetown on Prince Edward Island.
- Saturday 23 June 2007** - Drove around the east end of Prince Edward Island. Dropped into some growers sheds and checked out the local markets.
- Sunday 24 June 2007** - Drove around the west side of Prince Edward Island and visited the Prince Edward Island Potato Museum (magnificent museum). Drove on to Fredericton in New Brunswick.
- Monday 25 June 2007** -Met up with Aaron Perry who took me to the Potato Development Centre, Agricultural Certification Services and the Potato Research Centre.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

After successfully completing the CFIA Seed Potato Inspectors' course, I can make the following recommendations for the improvement of the ViCSPA training course;

- A field trial involving diseased plants to improve potato certification officers' knowledge of disease identification in crops.
- Both disease and variety identification trials to be held at a more accessible location for the participants of the course.
- The Australian industry must be trained further in exotic disease identification. It is essential that exotic diseases are identified quickly should they turn up in Australian crops.
- The growers and industry need to be made aware of the potential for extremely detrimental effects on the industry should exotic diseases find their way to Australia.
- The repercussions of not conducting good hygiene strategies for each farming business need to be made clear to growers.
- More communication between biosecurity officials and growers is needed so that both parties understand the repercussions of outbreaks and how they can be controlled.
- A closer relationship between state biosecurity, horticulture departments, industry representatives and growers to ensure a good working relationship exists should their be an exotic disease outbreak in Australia.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project relied on the assistance of the following people/associations;

- ViCSPA funded the time spent on this trip
- District seed grower associations at Gippsland, Ballarat, Portland and the Otways
- The Warragul National Potato Conference
- The ViCSPA Board of Management
- Keith Blackmore
- Laura Bowles

## CONTACTS LIST

Whilst doing the course and travelling through Canada some of the people I contacted and am now networking with are:

- Jo Buss CFIA, Potato Specialist.
- Terry Petrow, Seed Potato Specialist.
- Craig Houghton, CFIA, Ontario Area OSH Advisor.
- Glenn Pharoah, CFIA, Multi-Program Supervisor.
- Dr Umadatt Singh CFIA, Charlottetown Lab – Research Scientist.