

Potato Business Grower Groups

Donna Lucas
RDS Partners Pty Ltd

Project Number: PT07016

PT07016

This report is published by Horticulture Australia Ltd to pass on information concerning horticultural research and development undertaken for the potato industry.

The research contained in this report was funded by Horticulture Australia Ltd with the financial support of Simplot Australia Pty Ltd - Tasmania.

All expressions of opinion are not to be regarded as expressing the opinion of Horticulture Australia Ltd or any authority of the Australian Government.

The Company and the Australian Government accept no responsibility for any of the opinions or the accuracy of the information contained in this report and readers should rely upon their own enquiries in making decisions concerning their own interests.

ISBN 0 7341 2450 3

Published and distributed by:
Horticulture Australia Ltd
Level 7
179 Elizabeth Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Telephone: (02) 8295 2300
Fax: (02) 8295 2399

© Copyright 2010



Know-how for Horticulture™

Horticulture Australia
Project Number: PT07016

Potato Business Grower
Groups:

Final Report (August 2010)

Donna Lucas

*RDS Partners Pty Ltd
(Rural Development Services)*

Any recommendations contained in this publication do not necessarily represent current Horticulture Australia policy. No person should act on the basis of the contents of this publication, whether as to matters of fact or opinion or other content, without first obtaining specific, independent professional advice in respect of the matters set out in this publication.

Horticulture Australia project number: PT07016

Project Leader:

Amabel Fulton (2007 - 2008)

Donna Lucas (2009 - 2010)
Rural Development Services
4/29 Elizabeth Street
Hobart
TASMANIA 7000

Phone: 03 6231 9033

Fax: 03 6231 1419

Email: donna.lucas@ruraldevelopmentservices.com

Web: www.ruraldevelopmentservices.com

Other key personnel:

Sue Hinton, Rural Development Services

David Fulton, Rural Development Services

Peter Hardman, Simplot Australia Pty Ltd, Ulverstone, Tasmania

Frank Mulcahy, Simplot Australia Pty Ltd, Ulverstone, Tasmania

Purpose

The purpose of this final report is to summarise the project PT07016, Potato Business Grower Groups, which ran from August 2007 to August 2010.

This project was funded via Voluntary Contributions from Simplot Australia Pty Ltd, matching funding from Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL), and in-kind contributions from Simplot Australia Pty Ltd.



Date of report

August 2010

Table of contents

Summary	2
Introduction	4
Methods and activities	6
Evaluation	9
Implications	20
Recommendations	23
Acknowledgments	24
Appendix: Training priorities (2007)	25
Appendix: Evaluation survey	26
Appendix: Summary report 'potato futures 2010'	30
Appendix: Summary report - CTF & GPS workshop	39

Summary

Purpose of the project:

Eight Simplot Potato Grower Groups were established across Tasmania in Deloraine, Legerwood, Scottsdale, West Pine, Burnie, Sassafras, Cressy and a seed growers group near Riana. Each Grower Group is supported by a Simplot Field Officer.

In late 2005, the Tasmanian potato industry was in crisis. Simplot Australia, the largest potato processor in Tasmania, lost a major contract with McDonalds, which meant a significant reduction in its market contract; and growers found that they were increasingly uncompetitive in the global market place. This sparked a national review of the vegetable industry, and the development of the Vegetable Industry Strategic Plan. In Tasmania, a Vegetable Industry Taskforce was established, and Simplot Australia undertook a major review of its future direction.

The national strategic plan identified grower business skills as a major area for improvement. Simplot wanted to support growers by establishing an independent extension service, to provide them with opportunities for accessing business skills support.

A training needs analysis identified the top training priorities. A plan was developed to deliver activities to address grower needs. Evaluation of each activity informed the ongoing needs of growers.

Key activities:

1. 'potato futures' - annual industry review workshops
2. Business skills training (Business Success Planning workshops and training; Profit and Growth Planning workshops and training; Future planning workshops; growers were also referred to other business skills training)
3. Specialist workshops – Seed grower future directions annual workshops
4. Specialist workshops – Harvester future directions annual workshops
5. Water management planning (including preparation of Farm Water Management Plans; group discussions; farm walks; establishment of demonstration farms; establishment of demonstration site for variable rate centre pivot irrigation; field days)
6. Sharefarming and land leasing workshop
7. CTF (Controlled Traffic Farming) and GPS workshop
8. Deloraine Grower Group study tour to USA & Europe 2008 (focus of tour: Whole of crop harvest)
9. Seed Grower Group study tour to Scotland & Europe 2009 (focus of tour: seed production)
10. 'SpudNews' grower newsletter

Key outcomes:

1. Increased communication throughout the supply chain:
 - a. improved communication between Simplot and growers;
 - b. two way communication between researchers and growers;
 - c. mechanism for delivery of R&D research outcomes e.g. SARDI presentation at potato futures 2010
 - d. focus on future direction (e.g. through seed grower workshops, harvester workshops and annual 'potato futures' workshops)
2. Increased access to specialist training and other activities
3. Increased access to funding to undertake these activities
4. Improved awareness of R&D (which will lead to increased/accelerated adoption of R&D)

Recommendations:

1. Improve linkage and communication with the HAL Vegetable Industry Development Program, and also any future Potato Industry Development Program.
2. Follow up young farmer and other networks to investigate what format will encourage more farmers to attend activities and events.
3. Consider workshop format and agenda to increase participation of all members of the family farm business at events.
4. Maintain flexibility of the Groups, allowing programs and activities to focus on groups of growers who are interested in a particular activity rather than delivering activities to each regional Grower Group.
5. Investigate opportunities to address grower group needs in the area of Precision Agriculture (PA) – and tailor this information and development of PA systems to suit the different regions (e.g. different soils and climates in Northern Midlands region).
6. Investigate opportunities to research the whole farm system (not just potatoes), and deliver industry development services which integrate the whole farm system.
7. Investigate a study tour for 2011 (potential topics: tomato-potato psyllid New Zealand; precision farming U.S.A/Europe).
8. Investigate opportunities to fund international guest speakers for Potato Futures 2011.
9. Review the list of topics that growers want more information on, and develop a plan for delivering information (e.g. through SpudNews, or other activities).

Industry benefits generated:

1. Development of a trusted network for information – the grower group network provides a platform for delivery of a range of industry development services and industry information
2. Increased grower skills and knowledge
3. Improved water use efficiency
4. Industry benefits (noted above) extend to horticultural industries other than potatoes (e.g. poppies, pyrethrum, and vegetables).

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to provide historical background to the project, why it was undertaken, its significance for industry and the aims of the project.

Historical background to project

In late 2005, the Tasmanian potato industry was in crisis. Simplot Australia, the largest potato processor in Tasmania, lost a major contract with McDonalds, which meant a significant reduction in its market contract; and growers found that they were increasingly uncompetitive in the global market place. This sparked a national review of the vegetable industry, and the development of the Vegetable Industry Strategic Plan. In Tasmania a Vegetable Industry Taskforce was established, and Simplot Australia undertook a major review of its future direction.

Why was it undertaken?

The national strategic plan identified grower business skills as a major area for improvement. Simplot wanted to support growers by establishing an independent extension service, to provide them with opportunities for accessing business skills support.

In 2006, Simplot, on behalf of the Grower Groups was successful in obtaining a FarmBis Targeted Industry Initiative training project. This project developed a series of business management training workshops to address grower needs.

Initial issues identified as requiring specialist input related to agronomy and production were already being addressed through Simplot resources. However, a large number of business related issues (e.g. business planning) were also identified; and a number of other specialist agronomic issues were also identified (e.g. soil and water management) and Simplot did not have the in-house skills to address these needs.

Significance for industry

Growers have increased their business and agronomic skills and knowledge through:

- Business training
- Water management training
- Annual review workshops – including R&D outcomes
- Study tours

The Australian Processing Potato Industry Strategic Plan 2006-2011 situation analysis is still valid with global competitiveness, rising costs of production, leadership and succession continuing to impact on the industry.

The Grower Group project has resulted in improved communication throughout the Simplot potato supply chain, leaving the industry well placed to face current and new challenges in this increasingly competitive sector. The whole supply chain is

involved in the project at some level – from growers to researchers, and contractors to agronomists.

Project aims

Simplot established the Grower Groups to:

- inform the development of a coordinated strategy to identify the needs of growers and other members of the supply chain; and
- address these needs through workshops, groups and one-on-one services, using a range of funding sources, and where appropriate national and Tasmanian specialists.

The purpose of the groups was to create a mechanism for growers and Simplot to work collaboratively to build producer capacity to manage their farm businesses in an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable manner over the long term.

Methods and activities

The purpose of this section is to describe the method used and report on project activities.

The project included the following major components:

- Project management
 - regular project management phone links and face to face meetings
 - project design and planning
 - leveraging of funding from other sources e.g. FarmBis, TasSkills, National Landcare Programme, Caring for Our Country, HAL (e.g. study tours)
 - project management responsibility was taken by the provider and Simplot. Linkages with DPIPWE and TFGA were maintained through activities such as potato futures, other workshops, and SpudNews.
- Group training activities
 - workshops, seminars, farm walks, field days
 - national and Tasmanian specialists to deliver training and seminars
 - facilitation of member participation in other training activities and industry programs
 - annual specialist workshops (seed growers and harvesters)
 - water management planning projects
 - field services team professional development
- Annual industry review workshops (potato futures)
- Grower Group study tours
- Spud News grower newsletter

Needs analysis:

The first task was to identify Grower Group training needs. Each field officer facilitated their regional group to explore training needs and rank these in terms of importance. The results from this initial training needs analysis are presented in Appendix A. Growers gave preference to production issues over business issues; however there was strong support for business training, especially in the areas of farm planning, future planning and business planning.

The top business training needs were:

- Farm planning (74%)
- Future planning (61%)
- Cooperatives and buying groups (61%)
- Land tenure and economies of scale (57%)
- Computer skills

The top productivity training needs were:

- Irrigation (91%)
- Soil conservation (87%)

Identifying funding options:

Following the needs analysis, funding options were identified for each of the priority training needs. The funding options identified included:

- Cradle Coast NRM and NRM North

- Horticulture Australia
- AusIndustry (Building Entrepreneurship in Small Business)
- National Landcare Programme
- FarmBis
- Tas Skills

Identifying training options:

Training options were identified for each of the top training needs (Table 1).

Table 1: Initial training options identified

Training need	Training options identified
Farm planning	Property Management Planning, funded through the regional NRM bodies (NRM North and Cradle Coast NRM)
Future planning	Cropping for Profit, Growing your Business, Business Success plan
Cooperatives and buying groups	Options for change
Land tenure and economies of scale	Options for change, Share-farming and leasing
Computer skills	Adult Education
Irrigation	Wise Watering
Soil conservation	Healthy Soils, Healthy Profits, Property Management Planning

Further evaluation of grower needs:

Further needs were identified through project management meetings, and through evaluation of projects and activities.

Further to the initial training options identified in Table 1, other key activities included: one study tour focussing on whole of crop harvest, one study tour focussing on seed production (funded through HAL) and two water management projects (funded through NLP and Caring for our Country).

Simplot have undertaken preliminary research on precision farming systems for potatoes. Future Grower Group activities will be strongly linked to this and other Simplot R&D.

Project outputs:

Project outputs included:

- ‘potato futures’ 2007, 2008 and 2009 – three industry workshops per year (one workshop in each of Tasmania’s main potato growing regions)
- SpudNews grower newsletter to communicate activities, learnings and project outcomes
- “Business Success Planning” workshop series – including group workshops, and one-on-one support for development of business plans
- “Profit and Growth Planning” workshops
- “Same eyes – new glasses – better future” – two workshops (Ulverstone and Longford), a future options workshop
- “On track with potatoes” – a workshop on controlled traffic farming and GPS equipment
- “Land leasing and share-farming” workshop

- Simplot Field Services professional development training
- Review of Simplot Field Services strategic plan
- Annual Seed Grower Future Directions workshops
- Annual Harvester Future Directions workshops
- “Sustainable Water Management on Tasmanian vegetable farms” – project funded through NHT; including establishment of eight demonstration farms, development of eight Farm Water Management Plans for demonstration farms, several group meetings, field walks, presentations and one-on-one support.
- “Adoption of Sustainable water management on Tasmanian vegetable farms” – project funded through Caring for Our Country. Review of the eight demonstration farm Water Management Plans, development of a further 19 Farm Water Management Plans; establishment of a demonstration site for variable rate centre pivot irrigation; field walks, open field day.
- Deloraine Grower Group study tour to USA and Europe in July 2008 (HAL project PT08019) – focus of tour: Whole of Crop Harvest
- Seed Grower Group study tour to Europe in September 2009 (HAL project PT T09033) – focus of tour: Seed Potato production
- Strategic plan for Simplot Ulverstone Field Services

Evaluation and participant feedback from each activity was reviewed by the project team, to inform the design of future activities.

Evaluation

The purpose of this section is to evaluate the extent to which the project outcomes were met, and how well industry development needs have been met.

The target audience for the Grower Group project was primarily processing potato growers and other members of the supply chain: seed producers, contractors, service providers, Simplot field services.

Outcome one: Increase the crop profitability, and overall business performance of Potato Grower Group members

Through attending workshops, growers have increased awareness of technology available, increased awareness of current R&D, and increased access to information and networks.

We can infer that this has resulted in a positive impact on crop profitability and overall business performance. It is difficult to quantify the impact on profitability, especially in the current economic and climatic environment, for example growers are finding that a range of production costs, many of which they have little influence on, are increasing.

A demonstration site was established with a variable rate centre pivot irrigator. At this site there have been improvements in crop yield and quality. The grower estimated that the cost of the technology was recovered in year one. Other growers are now investing in this technology, and there was considerable interest in this topic at potato futures 2010.

Outcome two: To have all potato growers participate at some level, in the Potato Grower Business Groups project

More than 100 growers have participated in the grower groups at some level, in particular 'potato futures' annual industry review workshops. This represents more than 50% of Simplot growers.

All growers have received the SpudNews newsletter, which communicates project outcomes, and promotes workshop and training opportunities.

Outcome three: Develop a shared five-year strategic plan for the future of the Tasmanian potato industry

The *situation analysis* component of the Australian Processing Potato Industry Strategic Plan 2006-2011 remains valid and identifies that global competitiveness, rising costs of production, leadership and succession planning continuing to impact on the industry.

A strategic plan for the Tasmanian Vegetable Industry, which includes potatoes, was developed for 2007-2012. The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association is currently reviewing this strategic plan. The work that has taken place throughout this contract has positioned Simplot, the growers groups and the provider to contribute through this review, in setting the industry strategic direction.

A strategic plan was also developed for Simplot potatoes in 2007 (NB Simplot accounts for 80% of Tasmanian processing potato production). This plan was reviewed in July 2010.

There are a number of strategic planning processes taking place at an industry level (e.g. TFGA). The intelligence gathered through the evaluation survey, confirms that growers hold grave concerns about the future viability of the industry and their businesses.

Other outcomes: Improved communication throughout the Simplot supply chain

There has been improved communication between growers and Simplot, which has increased confidence about Simplot amongst growers. This is evidenced through feedback from Simplot field services team, and feedback at workshops.

However, growers are currently finding that they are once again increasingly uncompetitive in the global marketplace. The improved relationship between Simplot and growers means that the industry well placed to face current and new challenges in this increasingly competitive sector. This was evidenced, for example, in the lower levels of conflict and difficulty reported and observed in the latest round of price negotiations (August 2010).

2010 survey of growers

Growers were invited to participate in an online survey (see Appendix for a copy of the survey).

The grower database included a limited number of email contacts. This highlighted that Simplot generally did not use email for communication with growers. Only three growers completed the survey online. A further 25 growers completed a telephone survey.

Survey Q.4 – “Rate how each of these Grower Group activities have met your needs (only answer for those activities you have participated in)”

Q.4a – “what do you do differently as a result of these activities?”

By far the most popular activity was study tours (Table 2). Harvester workshops were very well received. Growers were also quite satisfied with potato futures events.

Water management project was one the least popular in terms of how well it met their needs. However, when growers were asked what they do differently as a result of the above activities, water management was the area mentioned most often (mentioned by eight growers) (Table 3).

Business planning was also ranked lower than other activities in terms of how well it met their needs.

Twelve growers mentioned that they implement bits and pieces, make minor changes or are testing more things. Six mentioned that they learn by talking to other growers, hearing and seeing what others are doing.

Table 2: Rating of how well Grower Group activities met grower needs

Rate how each of these Grower Group activities have met your needs (only answer for those activities you have participated in)				
	High	Medium	Low	Response Count
Potato Futures 2007 - 2010	30.4% (7)	69.6% (16)	0.0% (0)	23
Water Management (water planning; field walks; group discussions; field day)	27.3% (6)	59.1% (13)	13.6% (3)	22
Annual seed grower workshop	33.3% (1)	66.7% (2)	0.0% (0)	3
Annual harvester workshop	50.0% (5)	40.0% (4)	10.0% (1)	10
Business planning workshops	36.4% (4)	45.5% (5)	18.2% (2)	11
'On Track with Potatoes'- CTF & GPS workshop 2010	25.0% (1)	75.0% (3)	0.0% (0)	4
'Land Leasing and Share Farming' workshop 2010	100.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1
Study Tours (Deloraine Group 2008; Seed Group 2009)	88.9% (8)	11.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	9

Table 3: What do you do differently as a result of these Grower Group activities

What do you do differently as a result of these activities?	
	Number of mentions
Minor changes; bits and pieces; testing more things	12
Water management (including using less water at end of season, irrigation scheduling, and water budgeting)	8
General information, awareness, networking, learning from other growers	6
Soil management	2
Nutrition	2
All others (potato calculator, upgraded spray equipment, cropping work, impressed by study tour, don't cut seed now, size of Tas industry - all one mention each)	7 (one mention each)
Nothing or "nothing major"	9

Survey Q.5 – “Do you have any other comments regarding the Grower Group activities in Q4?:

Five growers mentioned that the Grower Groups or activities were good, they came away with more information, or wanted to keep developing the groups. Four growers mentioned that they found it difficult to find time to attend activities, and two of these suggested evenings were better. Two growers mentioned the value of informal discussions, and discussions in the field. Two growers mentioned that events were improved this year compared to the previous years.

Table 4: Other comments regarding the Grower Group activities

The meetings are a big plus
 Good getting growers together from the same area
 More than half the information comes from informal discussions

Generally, I find it easier to attend evening sessions rather than daytime particularly when harvesting products other than potatoes

I get most out of information about new technology
 The field day at Michael Coote's was excellent (other earlier field days didn't change much)

Small groups close to home is better
 Organise events for the end of the day (after 4 pm)

Final report

They are a good thing

They are a good idea - timing an issue

They take up valuable working time.
Time would decrease productivity.

They cover most stuff that is important to us.
Good in field and discussion.

More disease and pest information.

They are disjointed and not planned.
They are reactive, should be proactive
Not hitting the right target.

Keep them going & developing.

Study Tour would be useful.
Good to see the latest and greatest overseas.
This can reinforce what you are doing.
See issues others are confronted with.

Not into the GG that much.
Need different set up with more localised workshops.
A lot of what is talked about is not relevant - every set up is different.

More activities would be good.

We organised a lot of stuff ourselves.
Simplot didn't fund in the first instance.

I come away with more knowledge.

Activities were good quality this year.
Earlier years a bit shallow.

Need to change the format.
Need more variety
Get a guest speaker - eg European farmer
Need new growers (always the same people)

More information on research results.

Survey Q.6a – “What topics or types of information would you like to see MORE of in the SpudNews?”

Table 5: Topics that growers would like to see more of in the SpudNews

How product sales are trending and why

Nutrition

New ways of growing. Overseas advances

Need to know what Simplot are thinking - keep us informed

Final report

Maintain as is

Warnings - potential pests & soil borne pathogens

High yields information

New varieties information - make it available to general growers

Feed back on how Simplot is going. More on water

It's OK

Successful farming practices

More of same

Survey Q.5b - “What topics or information would you like to see LESS of in the SpudNews”

Growers were asked what topics they would like to see less of in ‘SpudNews’ - there were no responses apart from one who said “all information is good information”.

Survey Q.5c - “Do you have any other comments regarding the SpudNews?”

Table 6: Other comments regarding the SpudNews

I read it and my wife reads it

Generally a good newsletter - brief and to the point

Generally informative - well put together

It's an interesting publication

I don't read it

More on important issues

It's good - keep communicating

Reasonably good

Some more variety would be good

Pretty good all round

It is informative. Continue making it.

I do read it

I always look at it

Put out more often

Survey Q.7 – “For each of the following topics, rate the importance of a grower having knowledge and skills in this area”

Growers were asked to rate the importance of a list of 22 topics, in terms of importance of a grower having knowledge and skills in this area (note that lower values indicate higher importance) (Figure 1).

The most important topics were:

- Irrigation
- Planting and seed
- Pests and diseases
- Productivity
- Soil conservation

Interestingly, these were the same topics which growers said in 2007 were the top training priorities. Note that the 2007 training needs analysis identified “training priorities” and Q7 in 2010 asked growers about importance of skills; NB Q7a does ask which topics they want more information or training provided.

The next most important topics were:

- Business management
- Financial management (e.g. budgeting, gross margins)
- Harvesting
- Future planning
- Energy

In 2007, energy was ranked at the bottom of the training priorities. This probably highlights the increasing publicity around this topic.

The least important topics were:

- Carbon trading
- Co-operatives
- Controlled traffic farming (CTF)
- Buying groups

Carbon trading was the least important topic of all, because growers were unsure what was happening in this area. However, when asked what topics they would like more information or training or field days provided, carbon trading was identified by a number of growers as a priority (Table 7).

Other topics mentioned by growers that they would like more information, training or field days are listed in Table 7. The group of topics mentioned the most was: pests and diseases/ IPM/tomato-potato psyllid/biosecurity. Followed by carbon trading/emission trading schemes and then by precision farming/GPS/mapping.

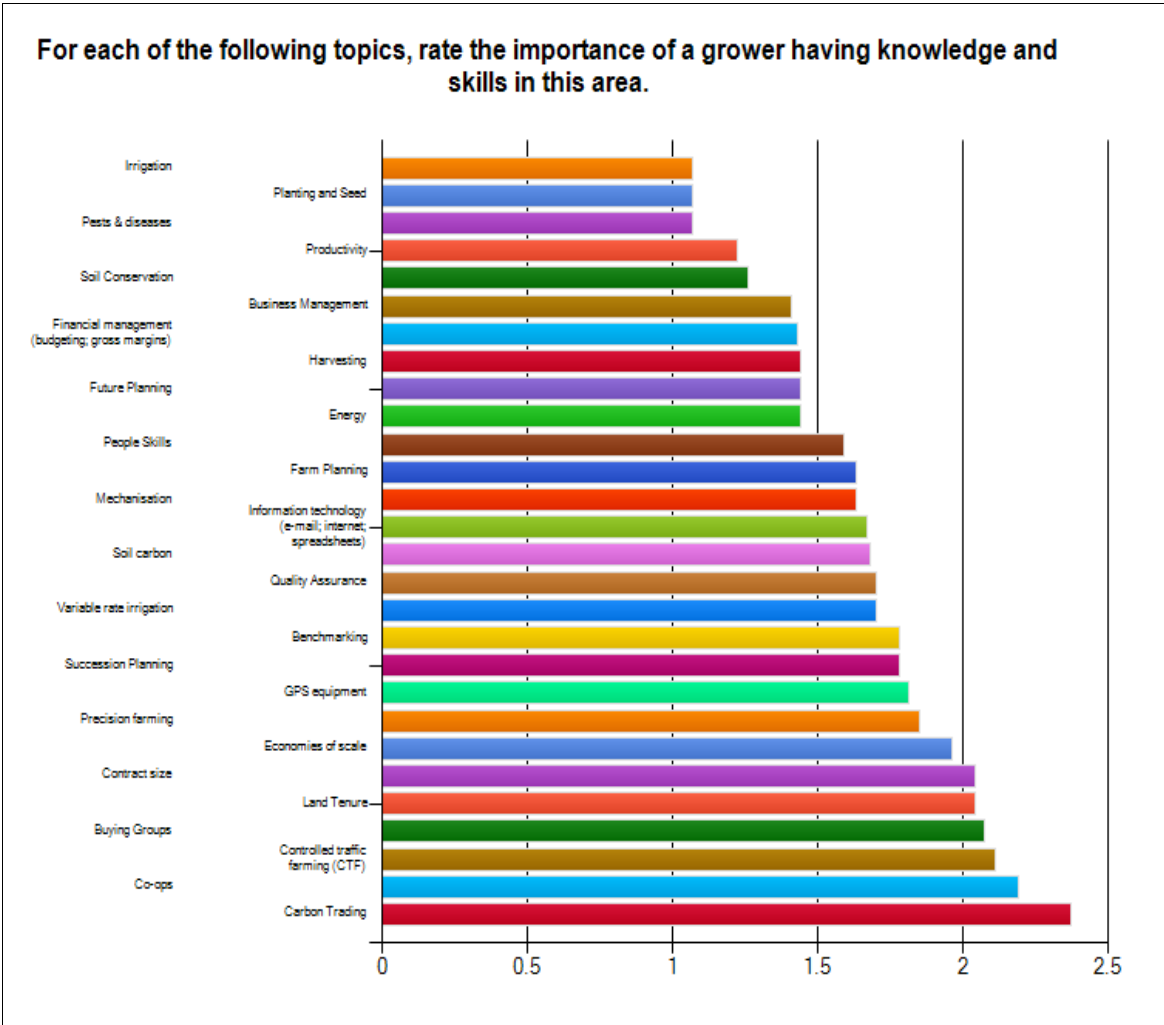


Figure 1: Rating of importance of grower skills and knowledge on listed topics

Growers were asked which topics (from those listed in Q.7, and also any other topics) they would like more information, training or field days provided.

Table 7: Which topics would you like more information, training or field days provided?

What topics would you like more information, training or field days provided?

	Number of mentions
Pests and diseases; IPM; tomato-potato psyllid; biosecurity	9
Carbon trading; emission trading schemes	5
Precision farming; GPS and mapping	4
New varieties	3
Marketing	2
Study tour; mechanisation; variable rate irrigation; people skills; internet; business management; nutrients	1 mention each

Survey Q.10 – “Thinking about the previous three questions (Q7-Q9), can you identify any gaps or industry needs?”

Thinking about the previous three questions (Q7-Q9), can you identify any gaps or industry needs?

	Number of mentions
Supply chain, industry planning, industry certainty, industry communication, industry structure	10
Imports, competitiveness, pricing	5
Lobbying, government policy, government assistance	3
Marketing, product innovation	7
Biosecurity	2
Harvesting	2
Others	1 mention each

Table 8: Other gaps and industry needs, as identified by growers

Survey Q.11 – “Are there any other comments relevant to the Grower Groups?”

Any other comments relevant to the Simplot Potato Grower Groups?	
	Number of mentions
Groups are good; going well etc	14
Have good field officer	3
Study tours (one suggested a future tour to NZ; one mentioned how valuable previous study tour was)	2
Get good information from other growers	1
The number of Simplot growers has decreased from 400 to 200	1
Information needs to be tailored for local situation	1
Groups are a waste of time	1

Table 9: Other comments relevant to the Simplot Grower Groups

Implications

Key learning's and/or implications for Australian horticulture, based on the method, activities and evaluation of the project:

1. Growers generally have a preference for production related activities compared to business related activities.

Business planning workshops and activities were ranked lower than most other activities in terms of how well the activities met grower needs. The focus of two (and to a certain extent the third) of these projects was on development of farm business plans. The project team has identified, that increasing follow-up mentoring after the workshops will assist growers to fully implement their plans.

2. Growers gain knowledge and skills from each other.

One grower commented “*more than half the information comes from informal discussions*”. Not surprisingly, group activities provided a mechanism for discussion, and sharing of ideas and information.

3. Growers are very busy, and sometimes find it difficult to find time to attend activities.

Several growers mentioned that evenings are a better time for attending activities. Nevertheless, the feedback also identified that too many activities with a similar focus can reduce effectiveness of outcomes (including activities offered by other groups and other service providers). This can be improved by engaging with other service providers to value-add to services being provided.

4. Study tours are extremely valuable.

Study tours were, by far, the most effective and popular activity in terms of meeting grower needs. There were also several who suggested bringing guest speakers from overseas to give presentations. The survey was undertaken after the tomato-potato psyllid workshops which included presentations from New Zealand. Tasmanian growers enjoyed hearing from the New Zealand growers, and this highlighted the benefits of bringing international speakers to Tasmania. In addition to an effective way of taking in new information and research, study tours build relationships and learning cultures within grower groups which extend and maintain the focus on taking up new technologies and improving business management.

5. SpudNews newsletter is a useful method for communicating information.

Growers indicated that they valued SpudNews, and were happy with the type of information provided. This newsletter is mailed out to growers and industry service providers.

6. Field officers play a key role in grower communications and relationships; and also a key role in facilitating and maintaining the usefulness of Grower Groups for growers.

How might industry benefit from these insights?

Most potato growers also grow other vegetable crops (carrots, beans, brassicas); and many also grow other crops such as poppies and pyrethrum. The Simplot Grower Group network provides an effective, established conduit for industry information e.g. through SpudNews or presentations at ‘potato futures’, the annual industry review workshops – not only for the potato industry but for also other vegetables.

How can the planning of future initiatives or events use the feedback and evaluation received on this project?

1. Business planning activities:
 - a. Design and funding for future business planning workshops should include follow up mentoring.
 - b. Where appropriate, consider incorporation of business topics into other production related topics in the design of workshops.
 - c. Further analysis of exactly what type of business training growers need, is warranted (to ensure activities are targeted and meet grower needs) as needs are continually changing with the market environment and as new technologies come into the system.
 - d. Consider incorporation of business topics into other activities rather than delivery of specialist training workshops (e.g. a short session on gross margins at Discussion Group meetings).
2. Ensure enough time and opportunity for informal discussion at all activities. Ensure group leaders and coordinators are skilled at facilitating discussion.
3. Consider timing some events during the evening.
4. Ensure coordination and communication amongst industry service providers to ensure that activities do not overlap.
5. Investigate what activities and events are currently planned through the Vegetable Industry Development Program, and coordinate with and value-add to these events.
6. Coordinate further Grower Group study tours. Growers find these useful in terms of meeting their needs, providing insight into overseas production (and how that compares to Tasmania).
7. Identify potential guest speakers from New Zealand and overseas to invite to Tasmanian events (e.g. speakers for ‘potato futures 2011’; host study tour groups from overseas; coordinate a conference for Tasmanian industry).
8. Continue SpudNews as a means of communication. Continue mail out, and consider investigations into emailing the newsletter. It is expected that very few growers would prefer email initially, but this may change over time.
9. Increase field officer involvement in project planning and management. Provide training and support for field officers, e.g. facilitation skills.

Tasmanian potato industry - challenges and opportunities, strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • soil, climate, and growing environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • availability of irrigation water • small scale farms
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new technologies e.g. precision farming • irrigation development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pest and disease incursions - e.g. tomato-potato psyllid / zebra chip disease • cheap imports • increasing farm input costs

Recommendations

1. Improve linkage and communication with the HAL Vegetable Industry Development Program, and also any future Potato Industry Development Program.
2. Follow up young farmer and other networks to investigate what format will encourage more farmers to attend activities and events.
3. Consider workshop format and agenda to increase participation of all members of the family farm business at events.
4. Maintain flexibility of the Groups, allowing programs and activities to focus on groups of growers who are interested in a particular activity rather than delivering activities to each regional Grower Group.
5. Investigate opportunities to address grower group needs in the area of Precision Agriculture (PA) – and tailor this information and development of PA systems to suit the different regions (e.g. different soils and climates in Northern Midlands region).
6. Investigate opportunities to research the whole farm system (not just potatoes), and deliver industry development services which integrate the whole farm system.
7. Investigate a study tour for 2011 (potential topics: tomato-potato psyllid New Zealand; precision farming U.S.A/Europe).
8. Investigate opportunities to fund international guest speakers for Potato Futures 2011.
9. Review the list of topics that growers want more information on, and develop a plan for delivering information (e.g. through SpudNews, or other activities).

Acknowledgments

The author of this report would like to acknowledge the assistance of the following

Organisations and individuals and thank them for their contribution to this project:

- Horticulture Australia Limited
- Peter Hardman, Agricultural Manager, Simplot Australia Pty Ltd, Ulverstone
- Sue Hinton, Rural Development Services
- David Fulton, Rural Development Services
- Simplot Australia Pty Ltd , Field Services Team, in particular Peter Hardman, Frank Mulcahy, Chris Russell and Field Officers
- Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research (TIAR) for linkage with R&D projects including presentations at workshops
- Grower Group leaders and members

Appendix: Training priorities (2007)

Number of growers from each group nominating each topic as a training priority
(agronomic topics in normal font, business management topics in bold font)

Topic	Regional group (N=number in group)							Total (46)	%
	Yolla (4)	Sassafras (8)	Gawler (9)	Deloraine (8)	West Pine (10)	Scottsdale (7)			
Irrigation	4	8	7	8	10	5	42	91	
Productivity	4	8	5	6	10	7	40	87	
Planting and Seed	4	6	9	8	6	7	40	87	
Soil Conservation	4	8	5	6	10	7	40	87	
Harvesting	2	8	7	8	10	1	36	78	
Contract Size	2	6	7	6	8	7	36	78	
Farm Planning	4	6	5	6	8	5	34	74	
Mechanisation	2	8	5	6	2	5	28	61	
Future Planning	4		5	6	10	3	28	61	
Co-ops	4		7	6	6	5	28	61	
Buying Groups	0		9	4	8	7	28	61	
Business Management	4	6	7	4	10	-3	28	61	
Economies of Scale	4	6	7	2	6	1	26	57	
Land Tenure	4		5	8	8	1	26	57	
Bench Marking	4	5	5	8	2	1	25	54	
QA	0	2	3	4	6	3	18	39	
Succession Planning	2		5	6	4	-3	14	30	
Energy	4	0	-3	-2	0	3	2	4	

Appendix: Evaluation survey

Simplot Potato Grower Group Evaluation

1. Participant Feedback Survey

1. Contact details (Please note that individual responses are CONFIDENTIAL. However, providing your name and postcode will assist us managing participant feedback)

Name (Optional)

Postcode

2. My property size

Less than 150 ha

Between 150 & 300 ha

Greater than 300 ha

3. Location (or Grower Group)

Deloraine

Legerwood

Scottsdale

West Pine

Burnie

Sassafras

Cressy

Seed Growers Group

Simplot Potato Grower Group Evaluation

4. Rate how each of these Grower Group activities have met your needs (only answer for those activities you have participated in)

	High	Medium	Low
Potato Futures 2007 - 2010	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Water Management (water planning; field walks; group discussions; field day)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Annual seed grower workshop	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Annual harvester workshop	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Business planning workshops	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'On Track with Potatoes'- CTF & GPS workshop 2010	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'Land Leasing and Share Farming' workshop 2010	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Study Tours (Deloraine Group 2008; Seed Group 2009)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What do you do differently as a result of these activities?

5. Do you have any other comments regarding the Grower Group activities in Q4?

6. Simplot circulate a grower newsletter "SpudNews"

What topics or types of information would you like to see MORE of in the SpudNews?

What topics or types of information would you like to see LESS of in the SpudNews?

Do you have any other comments regarding the SpudNews?

Simplex Potato Grower Group Evaluation

7. For each of the following topics, rate the importance of a grower having knowledge and skills in this area.

	High Importance	Moderate Importance	Low Importance	Not Important
Irrigation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Productivity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Planting and Seed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Soil Conservation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Harvesting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Contract size	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Farm Planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mechanisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Future Planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Co-ops	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Buying Groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Business Management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Economies of scale	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Land Tenure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Benchmarking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality Assurance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Succession Planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Energy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People Skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
GPS equipment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Precision farming	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Variable rate Irrigation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pests & diseases	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Soil carbon	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Carbon Trading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Controlled traffic farming (CTF)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial management (budgeting; gross margins)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information technology (e-mail; Internet; spreadsheets)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Which of these topics would you like more information, training or field days provided?

8. Are there any other topics in addition to those listed in Q7 that you consider as being important and you would like more information about?

Simplot Potato Grower Group Evaluation

9. What are the key areas of knowledge, skill and abilities that YOU need to run YOUR farm business (think about the key decisions YOU make on the farm)?

10. Thinking about the previous three questions (Q7-Q9), can you identify and list any gaps or industry needs?

11. Any other comments relevant to the Simplot Potato Grower Groups?

12. Thank you for taking the time to complete the feedback survey. Would you like a copy of the completed report?

YES / NO

If YES, Your Name

Postal Address

Or e-mail address

Appendix: Summary report 'potato futures 2010'

Potato futures 2010

Summary Report to Potato Field Services (Ulverstone) *Simplot Australia*

Donna Lucas
August 2010



Level 4, The Central Building, 29 Elizabeth Street
HOBART TAS 7000

• Quality • Outcomes • Confidence •

1. The activity

Three half-day workshops were held, 2.00 -5.30pm at:

- Ulverstone, Aug 4th, The Beachway Motel
- Scottsdale, Aug 5th, Scottsdale RSL Club
- Longford, Aug 6th, Longford Football Club

2. Who was involved?

- Presentations:
 - Season overview - Peter Hardman (Simplot)
 - Soil DNA - Robin Harding (SARDI)
 - Powdery scab - Frank Mulcahy (Simplot)
 - Tomato-potato psyllid - Frank Mulcahy (Simplot)
 - New cultivars - Mark Heap (Simplot)
 - Seed study tour – Rob Graham (Simplot)
 - Leasing and sharefarming - Sue Hinton (RDS) & Donna Lucas (RDS)
 - Precision farming - Frank Mulcahy (Simplot)
 - Variable rate irrigation – Michael Coote (grower) (Sue Hinton at Ulverstone)
 - Simplot GPS project – Ed Blanchard (Simplot)
 - Where to from here - Peter Hardman (Simplot)
- RDS Staff – Donna Lucas, Sue Hinton
- MC:
 - Ulverstone: Wayne Meagher (Simplot)
 - Scottsdale: Stuart Millwood (Simplot)
 - Longford: Lee Brazendale (Simplot)
- Total attendees (approx): Scottsdale 30; Longford 35; Ulverstone 60.

3. Was the event what participants expected?

Average satisfaction of the workshop overall, was 4.3 out of 5.

Most popular sessions were:

Session	Ulverstone overall rating* (out of 5)	Scottsdale overall rating* (out of 5)	Longford overall rating* (out of 5)	Overall across all three workshops+ (out of 5)
Tomato-potato psyllid	4.5	4.2	4.4	4.4
Powdery Scab	4.4	4.3	4.1	4.2
Soil DNA monitoring tools	4.1	4.2	4.4	4.2
New cultivars	4.2	4.3	4.1	4.2
Precision farming	4.2	3.9	4.4	4.2
Variable rate irrigation	4.0	4.1	4.3	4.1

* average scores for the session overall, relevance, usefulness, and well run.

+ average scores for session overall, relevance, usefulness, and well run – across all three workshops.

The most popular sessions included those covering:

1. Pests and diseases
2. New cultivars
3. Precision farming (including variable rate irrigation)

Growers rated these more popular sessions higher with respect to relevance, usefulness, ran the session well and the session overall.

Both precision farming and variable rate irrigation were more popular at Longford compared to Ulverstone or Scottsdale. This technology is more relevant to growers in the Northern Midlands than say North West, due to the more variable and challenging soils (growers at Longford rated these two sessions higher for usefulness and relevance).

Panel sessions were less popular this year than in 2009. In 2009, there were small group discussions just prior to the panel session – did this discussion improve the panel session?

The least popular sessions (based on overall ratings) were:

- Seed study tour
- Leasing and sharefarming
- Panel session
- Simplot GPS proposal

Growers felt that the two least relevant and least useful presentations were:

- Seed study tour
- Leasing and sharefarming

4. Is it worth doing again?

What could be better:

- Better name tags for presenters
- More growers attending
- One grower who called prior to the event was unable to attend an event from 2-5pm as she needed to collect young school children.
- Having all presentations printed in the booklet
- When selecting topics, consider those topics which a majority of growers see as relevant and useful. Topics which are relevant to a small group may be best delivered through other forums. Growers tend to prefer production related topics; evidenced through which sessions were most popular and also topics that they said they would like more information on. However, at any workshop there will always be some sessions which are less popular than others, even though they may be important.

What worked well:

- Field Officers contacting growers the day before to remind them about the event.
- Bringing Robin Harding from SARDI worked well – the topic was relevant and useful for growers; growers heard about a project which was funded through their grower levies. It was also useful for Robin to hear from growers – providing two way communication between researchers and industry.
- Some growers were asked, informally, whether they liked the current potato futures format and whether they would prefer a different format. All growers responded that they liked the format (note however that only growers who did attend were interviewed, and not those who didn't attend).

5. Performance

Performance against objectives:

The following objectives were very well achieved:

- To foster a partnership of continuous improvement
- Growers hear about and give feedback on current projects

At each workshop, 100% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that:

- "Overall the workshop provided me with information on the latest technology and research"
- "Overall the workshop provided sufficient discussion time"
- "Overall the workshop provided me with an opportunity to network with the Simplot Field Services team"

(See graphs in attachment).

Performance against outputs:

All outputs were delivered on time.

The quality of workshop presentations was generally good. This could be improved through preparation of presentations well before the event.

Several presentations were not included in the workbook, as they were not prepared in time (due to the particularly busy time, with several workshops during July).

Performance against budget:

The workshops were delivered on budget.

Funding of \$5K was secured from the DED. The DED were particularly interested in funding "business" session and therefore funded the Leasing and Sharefarming session in particular.

6. Actions and recommendations

- SpudNews report on potato futures; and future articles on topics growers want to know more about (especially: GPS, soil DNA, variable rate irrigation, new varieties)
- The work book should be reviewed – format, value, cost.
- Ensure that all presentations are prepared well in advance.
- Follow up meeting with Caleb Wright from the DED regarding future opportunities with the DED (e.g. for precision farming work).
- Consider funding opportunities to bring guest speakers from overseas (e.g. New Zealand, U.S.A. and Europe) on topics that growers want to know more about such as tomato-potato psyllid, precision farming, soil disease management.

7. Attachments

- Evaluation and feedback summary

Participant evaluation and feedback:

I would like to know more about:

Ulverstone:

- GPS
- Variable rate irrigation
- GPS mapping, DNA
- Overall package for precision ag (variable rate, spraying, downloads etc)
- Different varieties
- New seed varieties

Longford:

- Variable rate (3)
- DNA on seed spuds
- Precision farming
- Powdery scab
- Potato psyllid
- GPS

Scottsdale:

- Disease research eg pink rot, rhizo etc,
- DNA monitoring tools (2),
- biofumigation,
- IPM,
- Variable rate N application through pivot,
- Disease and powdery

What worked well:

Ulverstone:

- Most sessions,
- DNA,
- The whole thing

Longford:

- Good overview,
- DNA,

Scottsdale:

- Presentations were concise and informative
- Time management
- Good speakers
- Great day
- Very informative (if only I could retain all of it!!)
- Presentations

What could be better:

Ulverstone:

- Leasing session a bit simplistic

Longford:

- Only one panel session?

Scottsdale

- Maybe some local examples of DNA results
- More growers should attend (mainly the best ones)
- Name labels
- Encourage more farmers

I wish I had done more of.....

Ulverstone:

- GPS
- DNA
- Variable rate irrigation

Longford:

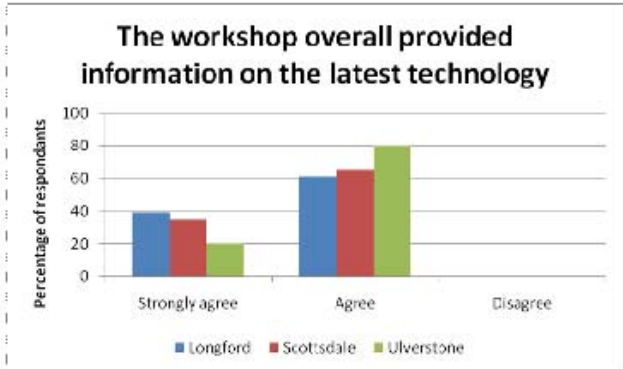
- GPS (2)
- Variable rate technology

Scottsdale

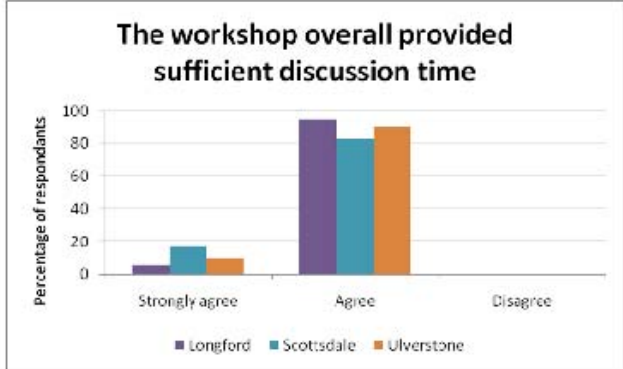
- DNA monitoring

Growers were asked to rate the following three statements:

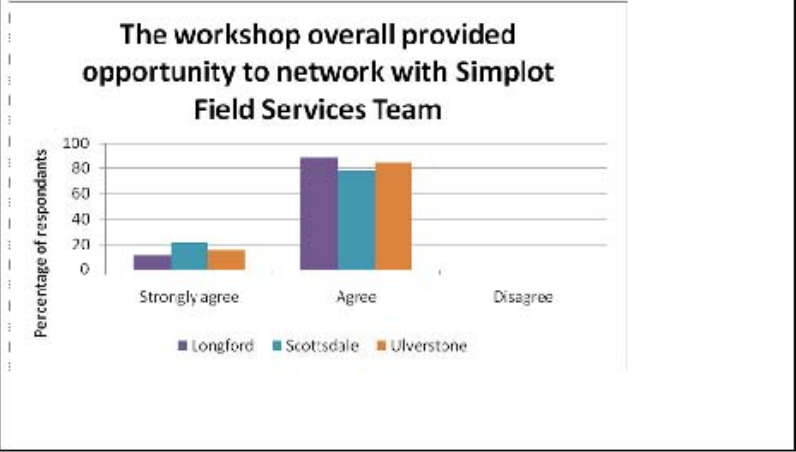
- **“Overall the workshop provided me with information on the latest technology and research”**



- **“Overall the workshop provided sufficient discussion time”**



- **“Overall the workshop provided me with an opportunity to network with the Simplot Field Services team”**



Appendix: Summary report - CTF & GPS workshop

CTF workshop

Summary Report

to Potato Field Services (Ulverstone)

Simplot Australia

Donna Lucas

August 2010



Level 4, The Central Building, 29 Elizabeth Street
HOBART TAS 7000

• **Quality** • **Outcomes** • **Confidence** •

1. The activity

One half-day workshop was held at The Beachway Motel, Ulverstone, Friday 9th July 2010, 10.00 a.m. - 3.00 p.m.

2. Who was involved?

- Presenters:
 - John McPhee (TIAR)
 - John McKenna (Grower)
 - Frank Mulcahy (Simplot)
 - Stephen Jobson (Tasmania Farm Equipment)
- RDS Staff – Donna Lucas, Maree Fudge
- Simplot staff – Peter Hardman, Frank Mulcahy, Simon Jones, Wayne Meagher
- Facilitator – Maree Fudge
- Growers – approx 12
- Others (agronomists, NRM people, service providers) – approx 10
- Total attendees including presenters – approx 30

3. Was the event what participants expected?

Average rating out of 5 (where 1 is excellent and 5 is poor):

	Rating out of 5
Venue	1.3 out of 5
Presentations – useful information	1.5 out of 5
Presentations – easy to understand	1.2 out of 5
Facilitated session	1.3 out of 5
Presenters – knowledge of topic	1.2 out of 5
Presenters – well-presented	1.1 out of 5

Comments on evaluation sheets included:

- Fantastic
- Excellent
- Very useful; hope to have more growers in future
- Would to have seen more farmers
- All good; more people would be better (e.g. farmers)
- Good day; well done :)
- Good

- Good day
- Good initiative; no complaints

4. What worked well, what could be better?

What could be better:

Attendees commented that there should have been more growers in attendance.

What worked well:

- Networking opportunity for growers and Simplot field staff.
- A growers' perspective (presentation from John McKenna).

5. Findings/ discussion

The aim was to facilitate some good discussion around the topic – this was generally achieved.

Opportunities and problems identified by participants during small group session:

What are the opportunities?	What problems or barriers do you see with CTF?:
Less tillage – better soil biology Better soil tilth Less work between crops Equipment sharing opportunities Less clods	Truck access and total land area use The old school mentality Product handling logistics on wider – more product per run Intake logistics with respect to faster harvest Industry diversity
Soil health: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality • yield Less cultivation – cost saving Less fuel Time saving Back on ground quicker Improve marginal ground	The cost – GPS Wash on wheel tracks Width ?? Beechworth Spraying already on 2m system Industry cost – standard Damage to crop – with different centres Agronomic changes Wheel centres for all crops What are you concerned about? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wheel track • Software • CORS set-up delay • Reluctance to adopt new technology • Big gear more difficult

What further information do you need?	What does this mean for growing spuds?
Equipment specifications and warranties	Jury out on yield in 3-row beds Amount dirt to lift on beds
Early days on vegetables Follow the trials FVRS (2014)	Usable harvest systems Yield information Clod - destoners

Where to from here?
 Standardisation and industry change?
 How to overcome or manage some of the issues with potatoes?
 Follow the trials and keep sharing information
 Harder crops – look at the really difficult issues / crops
 Getting farmers to information sessions?

Other comments and discussion included:

- Software – how do you decide?
- Concern about delays with CORS network
- More information required on agronomic changes with a CTF system
- Need more information on mold widths and bed widths
- 1.8m width in Midlands was originally about poppies and drainage, not about CTF.
- Wider the better for paddock, but mechanical limitation; and problems with road transport especially for contractors who are on the road a lot
- Peas matured earlier in more compacted parts of the paddock – now more uniform harvest (and probably also with broccoli and cauliflower too).
- “There was a time when PTOs and 3PL wasn’t standard... software and CTF systems will become standard over the next few years”
- Our work to date has been on ‘kind slopes’, we don’t know what steepness we can go to – there may be erosion on steeper sites.
- More work is needed on potatoes and carrots because they are more difficult

6. Actions and recommendations

- Follow up with young farmers network to investigate what format will help more farmers attend workshops.
- Write up the issues/ concerns/ opportunities for Spud News to increase distribution of the information.
- Include regular updates of trials in Spud News.

-
- Organise field days to follow the trials, use the field days to keep discussions open on the challenges the participants identified.
 - Investigate what business development funding opportunities may be available to help farmers off-set costs of changing machinery.
 - Follow up where/how growers can get more information on equipment specifications and warranties.
 - Follow TIAR trials and information

7. Attachments

- Evaluation and feedback summary