



# ONIONS AUSTRALIA | 2017

Latest Research & Development news



Study paves way for soil testing service



Area freedom from onion smut in SA

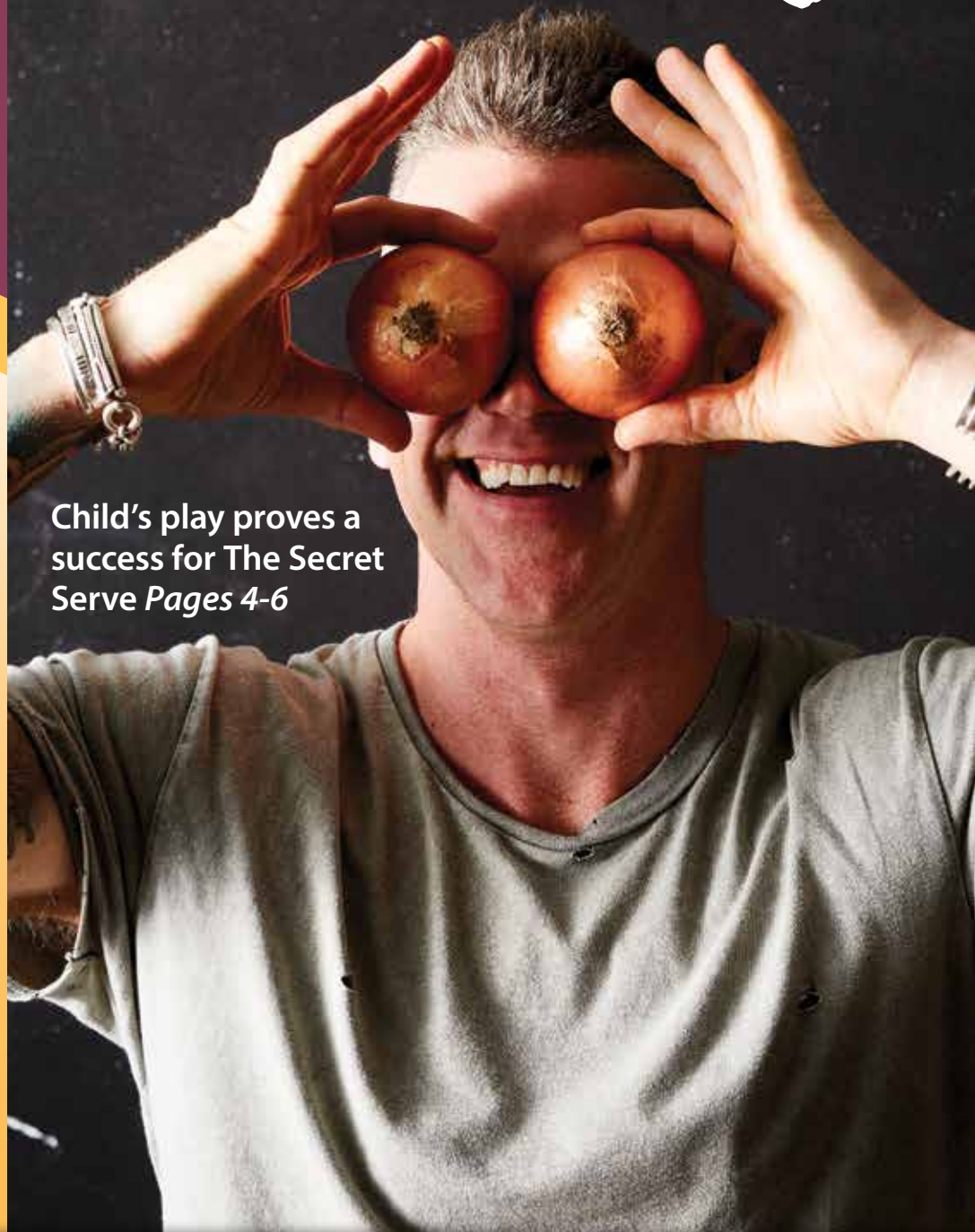
# AUSTRALIAN onions



Diversification slices towards new venture  
Page 12-13



Industry welcomes new Strategic Investment Plan  
Page 10-11



Child's play proves a success for The Secret Serve  
Pages 4-6



# Bejo Onions

Hybrids for the premium market

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## Redwing

For sowing September - early October

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## Delgado

For sowing September - early October

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For sowing July - early August

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For sowing September - early October



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# Welcome

## Welcome to Onions Australia's 34th edition of our annual magazine.

2017 has been a significant year for the industry, with the finalisation of the 2017 – 2021 Australian Onion Industry Strategic Investment Plan, an incredibly successful first year for the Secret Serve marketing campaign, and planning and development around an industry-first new look Biosecurity Plan for the sector – read all about these key issues in this issue!

Other highlights in this year's annual magazine include the latest on updates on R&D projects underway or recently finalised that are utilising your levy funds, feature articles including diversification efforts being undertaken by onion packing and distribution company 'Just Onions'; the lifting of the final onion smut quarantine exclusion zones in South Australia, and a Q&A with the newest member of the Secret Serve family – chef and healthy life advocate, Scott Gooding.

All the usual updates are also included, such as the state round-ups and the latest minor use permit details.

As always, please do ensure you stay in touch with Onions Australia office to offer any feedback or suggestions on ways we can ensure you're kept best up-to-date on all industry activities.

We hope you enjoy the read, and we look forward to another proactive and exciting year ahead!

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### Onions Australia Executive Committee

Peter Shadbolt (Chair)  
Alan Thierry (Deputy Chair)  
Kees Versteeg  
Andrew Moon  
Dean Metcalf  
Darren Wood  
Darren Rathjen  
Michael Williams  
Lewis Lydon  
Greg Bragg  
Chris Eastwood  
Rohan Shadbolt

### Chief Executive Officer

Lechelle Earl



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# From the Chair

Well it has been a steep learning curve for myself this year as Chair of Onions Australia.



I should start off by thanking first of all our CEO Lechelle Earl for all the hard work she puts in to her role. I don't think anyone could deny her passion for the onion industry.

Thank you also to the Executive Committee who take time out of their busy schedules to attend meetings and be part of our conference calls.

Some of the highlights as I see them this year are as follows:

- Co-hosting Hort Connections along with AUSVEG. This was a fantastic event attended by almost 2000 delegates with a vast array of speakers, trade shows, networking opportunities, reverse trade missions, and a few nights of entertainment and sponsored events.

We were very grateful to have Dr Bill Dean from the US and Jacob Wiskerke from the Netherlands present at the onion stream to share their vast wealth of knowledge on everything onions. Plans are already in motion for the 2018 Hort Connections event which will be held in Brisbane in June. With so much happening at Hort Connections we are looking at possibly holding our Executive meeting before it

starts, so as not to miss out on any of the organised events. We also considering having our speakers present at more than one session in 2018.

The Secret Serve marketing campaign is continuing to gain momentum with hundreds of instore demonstrations already done and dusted. Moving into its second year the focus will include a lot more social media exposure with the recruitment of some key high profile ambassadors to help spread the onion word (make sure to get up to date on the campaign by reading the Secret Serve feature in the pages following!)

The Onions Australia constitution has been updated and brought more into line of how OA actually operates. Alan Thierry and Dr Richard Jones have spent many, many hours working on the changes and the Executive members have all agreed to recommend it be adopted by the members at the OA AGM.

The Industry's Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) for the next five years has been approved by a committee, and that will sit as a guide to how growers' research and development funding can be spent. There is a heavy bias towards export which will hopefully open up opportunities to set up trade missions for growers interested in exporting into the future. With this in place there is now an ability to partner alongside AUSVEG, working in with their existing knowledge and expertise.

The current onion season - from most reports - has been encouraging with the earlier variety growers probably having one of their best years ever. Prices throughout this season for later storage type onions have remained average, in line with demand.

The OA office continues to run smoothly with phone calls and emails from potential sponsors, overseas buyers, customers,

companies wanting to connect with onion growers, happening on a daily basis. The OA website, E-Newsletter and Facebook page are all continuing to grow, with more and more growers using social media to connect with all aspects of the industry.

All in all I think it's been a great year for OA with some very exciting opportunities ahead.

Cheers,

**Pete Shadbolt**  
Chair OA

# From the Office

**In my mind there is no question that onions were front and centre this year – with our humble onion the talk of the horticulture industry.**



While I have an obvious bias to all things onion, I feel proud of the way that Onions Australia has represented our industry during the past 12 months.

In July I clocked up seven years with OA, an occasion which caused me to reflect on the magnitude of changes and challenges that we have faced.

With that in the back of my mind, I can honestly say that the OA of 2017 bears little resemblance to the OA of 2012.

One of the major highlights of this year was the opportunity to co-host Hort Connections in Adelaide in May – with more than 2000 delegates in attendance.

Even though OA co-hosted the National Horticulture Convention in Queensland last year, this year was the inaugural Hort Connections event – bringing together the National Horticulture Convention and PMA.

This was an enormously successful event which showcased great team work between OA and our major sponsors. One of the main highlights was the Monsanto Seminis and OA hosted Growers' Breakfast, which featured outstanding information exchanges and networking.

The attendance of Dr Bill Dean from River Point Farms in the US and Jacob Wiskerke from Wiskerke Onions in The Netherlands was another highlight, with more than 60 people attending their international speaker sessions.

Following on from the speaker sessions, I was honoured to tour Tasmania with Dr Dean. It was a real privilege to be able to tour Sumich and Charlton Farm Produce and see how much the one on one interactions were appreciated.

It was also very humbling to be able to watch growers and agronomists undertake meaningful conversations about international best practice.

This year OA has continued to build on its longstanding key strategic partnerships with all aspects of the onion industry. Our major sponsors' support ensures that we are able to host outstanding conferences and provide optimum networking opportunities.

Teaming up with our sponsors ensures that the most up to date industry advancements are communicated directly with growers, making sure that cutting edge developments are relayed direct.

While all of this has been occurring, The Secret Serve marketing campaign has continued to build.

The Secret Serve website has been a huge success, with thousands of people signing on to access recipes and health information, ensuring that the onion message continues to spread far and wide.

This has occurred in conjunction with OA's increased social media presence which has focussed on keeping the discussions about onions going, front and centre.

Using the OA website, Facebook page and Twitter feed we interact with thousands of people each week – not a bad reach for the humble onion!

In summary I would like to thank the members of the OA Executive Committee for their support during the year, and the team at Cox Inall Communications for their tireless work in helping to deliver the onion industry communications project.

Onions Australia continues to be held up as an outstanding example of best value for money delivery of R&D funding direct to growers – returning levy payers' funds straight back on farm through the communication of the latest industry information.

With this in mind, our focus remains on ensuring we stage high quality events, filled with information, education and networking opportunities in order to bring out the best in our industry.

These conferences rely on the generosity of our key strategic partners and sponsors and OA is proud to be associated with such reputable businesses who have demonstrated genuine interest and investment in the national – and international – onion industry.

Without support such as this, OA would find it difficult to continue to advocate for our growers – the fundamental reason we exist.

So with that in mind, may your yields be bountiful and prices high, and bring on 2018.

**Lechelle Earl**  
CEO OA

# Secret Serve a Success!

Contact Craig Perring | Marketing Manager | Hort Innovation | Ph: +612 8295 2342 | Email: craig.perring@horticulture.com.au

**At not quite 18 months young, the very first marketing campaign for the onion industry has returned some big results and is promising an extremely bright and layered future!**

The 'Secret Serve' campaign was launched in May 2016 in response to industry data showing that onion sales had plateaued in terms of both consumption and production in the decade prior.

The campaign is being managed by Hort Innovation on behalf of the industry, and is funded using the onion marketing levy. At its core, it was developed to increase consumption of onions – and in turn production and grower profitability – by targeting Small Scale Families.

Hort Innovation Marketing Manager Craig Perring said Small Scale Families are characterised as time-poor parents of children aged between four and 12 trying to achieve the impossible: offering an extra serve of vegetables to their children.

"It was an ambitious movement but we identified very early on that the way to keep these Small Scale Families eating onions was to teach the parents that prepared the right way onions can become a reliable and hassle free serve of veg for your children's mealtime," Craig said.

"What made this even more ambitious was the fact we are marketing selling something that we rarely show visually! The whole premise of the campaign is around hiding onions and creating awareness that they are one of the easiest vegetables to hide in meals from vegetable-avoiding kids!

"So showing healthy, easy meals and snacks but actively avoiding showing the product itself meant that the text and supporting messages created for The Secret Serve really have to work that extra bit harder to attract and maintain the attention of the audience."

Through significant background research and multiple market tests, the campaign has achieved great success, encouraging not only parents to enjoy onions, but ensuring their kids get an extra serve of vegetables in their day too.

All measures tracked by Nielsen sales data (Average weight of purchase, frequency and spend per occasion) for the target demographic are up versus 18 months ago when the campaign started.

Craig Perring said this can be attributed to the success of the campaign because the same growth is not seen in any of the other Nielsen segments (Such as singles, childless couples, established families or seniors), and this segment was specifically targeted.

"As far as our goal of increasing frequency of purchase and the average weight of purchase of onions among parents of kids aged 4-12, we've succeeded. Small scale families are cooking with more onions, more often," he said.

"We've also completed two stages of campaign tracking that have shown an improvement in agreement with the statement, 'Onions are an easy way to include another serve of veg in a meal for kids' amongst people who have seen the campaign.

"Most impressively, prompted recall of the campaign and message comprehension have consistently been around 18% for both stages of tracking, which exceeds industry averages of 5%.

Further to the key successes around the initial goals of the campaign, there have also been great results in sales data in the demographic of families with children under six:

- Increased their average spend on onions per meal occasion from \$1.70 to \$2.00
- Increased how often they buy onions from 2.7 to 2.9 times per week
- Average weight of purchase from \$4.70 to \$5.90.

The success of the campaign was recognised earlier this year, named as a finalist in the PMA 'Marketer of the Year Award', announced at Hort Connections in Adelaide.



## STAGE ONE RESULTS

- Conversion rate of 35% average from sample to purchase in-store over from 994 in-store demos to date
- Over 19,000 Facebook followers
- 49.3% of website traffic is returning “customers” showing strong recall and message comprehension
- More bagged sales of onions
- An increase in our target demographic of Small Scale Families purchasing more onions more often and in larger quantities.



Examples of recipes developed by the Secret Serve

Craig Perring says the success of the campaign in such a short amount of time is largely thanks to industry support.

“Onions Australia, namely Lechelle Earl, as well as the Onions Australia Chair, Board and Growers have been paramount in supporting this program,” Craig said.

“Hort Innovation is acutely aware that this campaign could not have been achieved without their input and guidance.

“Working with the onion industry that has had faith in the research and marketing expertise that Hort Innovation provides as a business is definitely one of the key successes of this campaign.

“Onions Australia and the Strategic Investment Advisory Panel (SIAP) has been very supportive of the program and work done to date.

“Working collaboratively with the Mushroom industry with over 1200 in-store demonstrations together in the first 12 months of the campaign was also another major key marker of success.”

## ONION HEALTH REPORT

As part of the broader marketing campaign, Hort Innovation produced an “Onion Health Report” in April 2017.

The media uptake was nothing short of phenomenal.

Hort Innovation had set a target of five million people, however the report reached in excess of 12-million people.

Onions Australia CEO Lechelle Earl said the focus on, and media interest in, the health benefits of the onion was an important step in the campaign.

“From the very beginning of discussions around how to market our product, I was a firm believer in ensuring all sectors of the consumer market were aware of the health facts around our humble onion,” Lechelle said.

“This is one of the most useful and important marketing tools the industry has – the truth!”

Hort Innovation’s Craig Perring said the incredible consumer uptake and national media interest in the Onion Health Report showed that consumers likely knew that onions were healthy but did not understand the health properties completely.

“The Onion Health Report was a turning point in The Secret Serve campaign,” Craig said.

“From explaining the immunity benefits, to the connection to gut health and immunity, it also gave the campaign a real voice in definitively stating that the onion can certainly be counted as one of recommended daily intake of five serves of vegetables.”

## STAGE TWO

For all of its early successes, Hort Innovation is acutely aware that the space The Secret Serve is working in is a very competitive sector of the market.

Read the report in full at:  
[www.secretserve.com.au/assets/Onions-Health-Report-2017-Spreads.pdf](http://www.secretserve.com.au/assets/Onions-Health-Report-2017-Spreads.pdf)

“There are some big industries and brands that run major ‘above the line’ marketing campaigns to ensure that they can maintain market share and basket space to get prime real estate in store,” Craig Perring said.

“The fruit and vegetable sector presents people with plenty of choices both seasonally and creatively and the fruit and veg is vying for their product, brand or category over another.

► *Onion Health Report*



# Secret Serve a Success!

"Our research has shown that keeping tabs on food trends and creating a campaign that makes life easier for the main grocery buyer or household cook to feed the family well, easily and quickly is well recognised by consumers.

"The whole foods and paddock to plate movements are all fantastic for primary produce in general, but the majority of everyday mums are still looking for convenience above all else for the majority of their mealtimes."

A developing trend the campaign is focusing on is the idea of "easy multi meals" which allows the household cook to get multiple meals out preparing one recipe.

The year ahead will see the campaign focus on the development of an E-Book which will deliver four multi meal recipes that produce 12 meals in total, that will be supported and distributed via social media, with the extra support of new Secret Serve advocate, chef Scott Gooding. (Get to know Scott in the feature article on page 8!)

## **GROWER SUPPORT – GET INVOLVED!**

Local onion growers are encouraged to use Australian Onions marketing logo, in conjunction with their own, on their packaging to help get uniformity and recognition of the campaign across the market.

Onions Australia Chair Pete Shadbolt said it's important that all growers are advocates of the program to help spread the net to capture not only the current target demographic, but others as well.

"We're all responsible in playing a part in supporting the success of The Secret Serve for many years to come in an effort to "future proof" the industry," Pete said.

"Getting the multi-meal e-book and health report findings out to their wider community would be a huge boost to the reach of the Secret Serve campaign and ultimately, to sales for industry.

"The more support and involvement we get from the growers and industry the better the program will be – it's a very exciting time to be an onion grower!"



▶ Secret Serve advocate, Chef Scott Gooding







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# Get to know Scott Gooding: Secret Serve Advocate & Onion Appreciator!

## **YOUR FACE MIGHT LOOK FAMILIAR TO SOME! WHERE HAVE WE SEEN YOU BEFORE?**

I was lucky enough to be on Season 4 of reality cooking show 'My Kitchen Rules' and share my passion for making healthy food simple yet delicious. I went on the show with two clear motivations; to showcase to Australia that healthy food can be full of flavour and easy to whip-up, secondly – not make a complete fool of myself!

It was a great experience, albeit stressful, and it's certainly helped me to have a bigger voice within Australia and beyond. It's allowed me to share my message around real food, nutrition and encourage folks to cook more at home.

## **YOUR FOOD FOCUS IS VERY MUCH ON CHILD NUTRITION THESE DAYS, WHY IS THAT?**

To be honest it's a focus on the whole family! I try to break down the barriers that parents have around cooking healthy meals at home. During my travels around the country I've learned there are a number of common misconceptions that people have

that means they might avoid cooking a healthy meal at home: home cooking is time consuming, expensive and tastes bland. So each and every day I attempt to share a message to bust these myths by showing delicious looking recipes. I don't even talk about the health benefits of the dish – instead I just celebrate the ingredients and make it look and sound amazing! Then I simply hope people find that tantalising enough to try it themselves!

## **HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO MAKE THE EVENING MEAL A FAMILY AFFAIR?**

It's incredibly important this day and age. Never in our history have we been so connected with the help of social media but at the same time, so disconnected. We have to almost make a concerted effort to talk and reconnect on a primal level - through basic communication and making eye contact. One of the best opportunities to do this around the dinner table. If you can entice the kids to help you in the kitchen too then that's an added bonus.



**WHY DO YOU THINK THERE'S A RENEWED FOCUS AND EAGERNESS FOR FAMILIES TO EMBRACE THE 'WHOLE + HEALTHY FOODS' MOVEMENT – ALBEIT TIME POOR, FULL TIME WORKING PARENT FAMILIES!**

Generally speaking people are becoming more health-aware and grasping the idea that food can be therapeutic and medicinal, which I think is incredibly exciting! The best gift you can give to your kids is to offer them home-cooked, familiar, comforting food using real food time after time.

**IN SAYING THAT, HOW IMPORTANT ARE CAMPAIGNS LIKE THE SECRET SERVE TO ENGAGE WITH FAMILIES AND REMIND THEM THAT NUTRITIOUS MEALS DON'T HAVE TO BE DIFFICULT OR EXPENSIVE?**

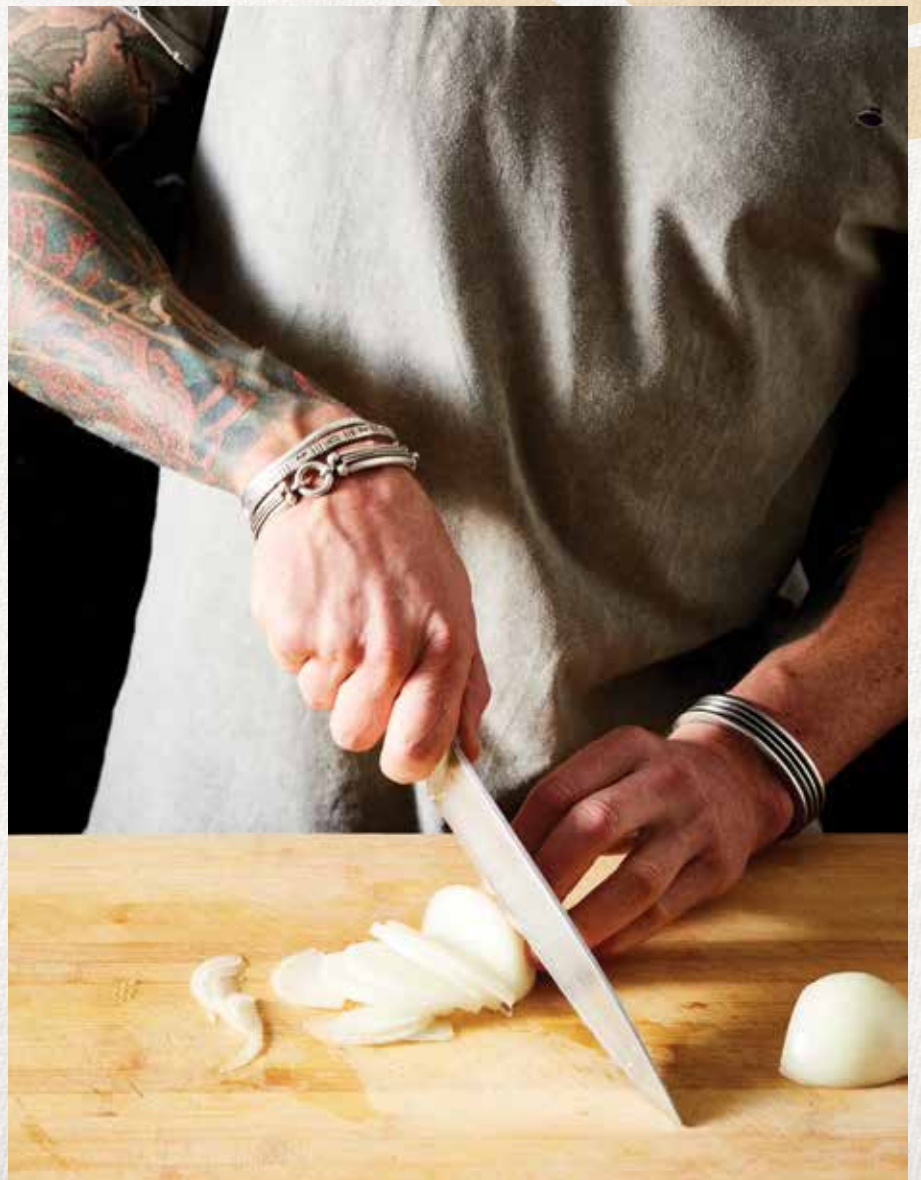
Cooking with real food is the biggest lever you can pull to influence your health. Therefore helping families do this in a more economical way is key to success. Cooking healthy CAN be quick, simple and delicious!

**IT WOULD SEEM THAT THE NEW SECRET SERVE E-BOOK FALLS VERY MUCH IN LINE WITH YOUR FOOD PHILOSOPHY – BUT WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE THAT THE HUMBLE ONION WAS A VEGGIE WORTH PROMOTING?**

For me the humble onion is the 'base' to many of my recipes so having the opportunity work with Onions Australia was super exciting. Personally I try to always make veggies the hero of my dish with protein as the 'condiment' – our veggies should be celebrated! Onions in particular, are incredibly beneficial for our gut as they provide us with valuable pre-biotics. We are becoming aware of just how significant and important a healthy gut is for general health and cognitive function, so I'm a big believer in sneaking some onions into our recipes at any opportunity to keep our gut happy.

**IF YOU COULD COOK YOUR FINAL MEAL – WHAT WOULD IT BE? AND IT BETTER INCLUDE AN ONION!**

That's easy! I've had a passion for the more unusual cuts of meat since I was a boy, growing up in pubs in and around London, so it would have to be liver with onions and brussel sprouts!



# Onion Strategic Investment Plan

**The Onion Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) will help ensure onion levy funds are invested in the priority areas identified and agreed upon by the onion industry.**

The investment of almost \$8 million over the next five years in R&D, extension and marketing activities is poised to produce \$23.86 million in benefits for the onion industry, providing three times the current benefit cost ratio to onion growers and service providers along the value chain.

The plan represents the Australian onion industry's collective view of its R&D and marketing needs over the next five years (2017 to 2021).

The Onion SIP was developed by Hort Innovation and facilitated in partnership with industry representative bodies and the Strategic Investment Advisory Panel (SIAP).

Chair of the Onions Australia Executive Committee, Pete Shadbolt, said following the development of the SIP, the next five years promises to be an extremely exciting time for the onion industry.

"This plan is extremely extensive and provides a solid framework for our industry wide vision, which amongst other initiatives, will endeavour to improve the oversupply problems, relative to current demand, that myself and other Australian onion growers have encountered in recent years," he said.

"Export growth through market diversification in Asia and the Middle East is imperative to industry profitability, as it will remove excess volume from the domestic markets and subsequently drive upward price pressure."

Mr Shadbolt, who grows 40 hectares of onions on his 500 hectare property "Scotties Point Farms" at Beverford in northern Victoria, stressed the importance of a collaborative approach with other horticulture industries.

"In order to leverage industry R&D funds

more effectively, we have the opportunity to work alongside the SIPs for other row crops," he said.

## The onions SIP, deconstructed into four major outcomes:

1. Reduced costs and improved returns to growers through improvements in business and production skills
2. An informed engaged industry results in greater ability to respond to market shifts
3. A combined marketing approach working in harmony to show the versatility of onions to increase consumption
4. Export growth achieved through market diversification and product customisation, to support and maintain domestic pricing.

Fellow onion grower Aaron Haby, who grows 60 hectares of onions at "Forster Hill" near Walker Flat in the Murrumbidgee region of South Australia, echoed the positive comments about the SIP, and added that he's excited at the prospect of improved agronomy practices.

"Driving profit means minimising input costs, and the best way to achieve that is through increasing crop yields and reducing reliance on chemicals," Mr Haby said.

"Given the challenges we've faced in securing access to chemicals and the costs that come with applying for multiple different permits, more research into other preventative solutions is required.

"This can be achieved through better access to good agronomic services, with a focus on integrated pest management (IPM) and improvement of soil health."

**"EXPORT GROWTH THROUGH MARKET DIVERSIFICATION IN ASIAN AND THE MIDDLE EAST IS IMPERATIVE TO INDUSTRY PROFITABILITY AS IT WILL REMOVE EXCESS VOLUME FROM THE DOMESTIC MARKETS AND SUBSEQUENTLY DRIVE UPWARD PRICE PRESSURE." PETE SHADBOLT, CHAIR OF THE ONIONS AUSTRALIA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.**

From a consumer engagement perspective, Onions Australia Chief Executive Officer Lechelle Earl said the opportunity to implement a holistic marketing approach to demonstrate the versatility and multiple health benefits of onions, will be of huge benefit to the industry.

"The average 2017 food consumer is increasingly more intrigued by the health benefits of food within their daily diet, but even so, many consumers aren't aware of the wide range of health benefits that onions deliver," Ms Earl said.

"On the back of the successful first stage of "The Secret Serve" marketing campaign that we launched in May last year, we very much look forward to the continued collaboration with Hort Innovation, and building more awareness about the health attributes of onions.



"I think the SIP shows that we are entering a golden age of horticulture in Australia, with the roll out of these industry SIPs, as well as the recent launch of the "Taste Australia" campaign, which plans to grow hort exports significantly by 2025."

### Major challenges for the SIP:

- Oversupply relative to current demand
- Stagnant category demand
- Declining industry profitability and high costs of production
- Inconsistent best practice agronomic advice
- Lack of robust industry data, including market intelligence
- Climate change
- Biosecurity risks
- Potential loss of market access.



▶ Aaron Haby, SA onion grower.

Read more about the SIP from Hort Innovation Relationship Manager Brad Mills on page 31.

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# Next best thing since sliced... onions

**Paul Williamson is a husband and father of one. He also describes himself as the designated cook at home and rates slicing onions as the bane of his existence.**

"The tears, the fuss, the mess – it's my least favourite part of making a meal!" he said.

Mr Williamson is also the head of Pakema Consulting; a business advisory group that specialises in governance, strategic planning, business review and improvement, and long term growth.

"I guess you could say I'm a 'CEO for hire' for a lot of businesses," he said.

In January of 2017, Victorian onion packing giant 'Just Onions' tapped him on the shoulder to do just that.

"They were interested in some feasibility work being done around sliced onions, so I embarked on a research journey around marketability and if indeed there was a market for the product," Mr Williamson said.

"Early on we could identify that a number of other products in the niche market of prepacked or sliced goods were quite popular, for example lettuce, pumpkin, premade fruit salads and products like that.

"The big question was whether or not that would translate in to onions. There was no way to really get a handle on whether or not there was any sort of glimmer of a guarantee for any level of success without jumping in and giving it a go – which was pretty daunting!

"For a successful company like Just Onions who have a great understanding of the prepacked and wholesale market, it was definitely a risk to diversify in such a way that involved tackling the retail market."



► *Yumions Director Alan Thierry with Paul Williams*

It was this major shift in the way business would be done, and also the high cost for entry in to the market due to the investment necessary, Paul Williamson said the process definitely raised a lot more question than answers.

"We could all agree that if the company was going make the step and commit to diversification then preparing the product and making it shelf-ready would initially have to be done with as little financial cost as possible to ensure limited to nil over-capitalisation," Mr Williamson said.

With a lot of pre-planning, researching and endless budget considerations, Just Onions committed to the project and invested in packaging equipment but made an early decision that would ensure limited expenditure.

"Through a partner that has a long standing relationship with Just Onions, we have out-sourced the peeling and slicing of the product."

The other major consideration – and question on everyone's lips – was how to guarantee shelf life for a fresh, sliced product.

"A lot of time and effort went in to researching the integrity and shelf life of the onion once it was sliced and packaged," Mr Williamson said.

"Of course this whole process meant very little if we couldn't ensure a hygienic, fresh and flavoursome outcome by the time the consumer open the pack and included it in their evening meal."

The sliced onion is placed in the pack and sealed with nitrogen to take the oxygen out and ensure a tight seal – and time tests returned great results.

"We've tested through to 21 days and there's been no change in the product at all," Mr Williamson said.

"After three weeks the onion is still fresh and dry and we've been amazed at how well they've kept."

"All the feedback we've received from retailers is that they don't want product on the shelf for any longer than 20 days anyway, so we feel like we've got that aspect of the project sorted out successfully."

Hitting retail shelves in early July with dozens of stores throughout Victoria on board, the waiting game for solid and comparative feedback is now in full swing.

"We've no doubt that the product will be more popular in the spring and summer months, for use on the barbecue and in salads and more summer uses like that," Paul Williamson said.

"But we believe the cooler months are actually the best time to start trialing as we're just not in a position at this early stage to be able to supply thousands of orders without the inevitable fine tuning that will have to be done in the months ahead.

"Now we're sitting tight to see if there are repeat orders and of course continuing to forge new relationships with retailers throughout our base in Victoria.

"The more independent shelves we can put to product on the better. That will help us to build a case to speak to the major chains sometime in the next 12 months and see what we can offer each other in the future.

"The process takes time but we're ready to start those conversations because we wouldn't have got to this point without a level of confidence."

While diversification is a key focus for the recently formalised Strategic Industry Plan, when asked if it's the right move for every farm or business in the onion sector, Paul Williamson advises caution and due diligence.

"Risk and innovation go hand in hand when it comes to diversification," he said.

"There's a lot of methodical work that has to be done to get to a point where you can positively say that the core business won't be impacted by the decision to diversify.

"In saying that, Just Onions have ticked all the boxes and there's no reason why this won't be every bit as successful as the core arm of their packing and wholesale operation.

"There's a lot of truth in the sentiment that if you don't innovate your product you'll die on the vine!"



# BIOLOGICAL SERVICES



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# Study paves way for soil testing service to enable onion growers to identify the risk of onion stunt before planting

Onion project VN13003, Research Provider South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI), Michael Rettke, Barbara Hall

The project *Managing soilborne diseases of onions (VN13003)* focused on improving management of onion stunt.

A strategic levy investment under the Hort Innovation Onion Fund, the research developed the knowledge required to deliver a testing service to enable onion growers to identify the risk of onion stunt before planting, so they can implement appropriate management strategies to reduce losses. Onion stunt, caused by *Rhizoctonia solani* AG8 reduces the size and quality of onion bulbs, and is a major problem for the Australian onion industry.

Most decisions to reduce the impact of soil borne diseases, including onion stunt, need to be made and implemented before crops are planted. So the first objective of the now completed project was to develop the basis for a testing service to enable growers to determine the risk of onion stunt before planting. Using pathogen DNA soil tests for *Rhizoctonia solani* AG8 and *Pratylenchus neglectus* previously developed for the grains industry, pre-plant soil sampling strategies were evaluated and refined for use in onion paddocks. The sampling strategy and testing methods developed to measure pre-plant DNA levels of *Rhizoctonia solani* AG8 in the soil provided a useful indication of the risk of onion stunt. Growth and productivity of onions in 43 paddocks located in the Murray Mallee region of

South Australia were monitored over two seasons to generate the data on which risk thresholds were established.

This research demonstrated sampling prior to or early in the preparation of ground for sowing provides the best estimate of disease risk for onion stunt. The established protocol involves collecting four separate soil samples, each consisting of 40 cores from along transects around an onion pivot and testing the four samples individually to assess disease risk. Prediction of disease risk for onion stunt was improved by including the pre-plant numbers of *Pratylenchus neglectus*. This nematode was also associated with large areas of reduced plant growth and loss of yield in paddocks in the absence of *Rhizoctonia solani* AG8.

While knowing the risk is important, growers need cost effective management strategies to turn this information in to a financial benefit. To build on knowledge of how to manage the risk posed by *Rhizoctonia solani* AG8 to onion crops, trials were conducted to assess the impacts of rotation crops, nurse crops and other pre-plant practices. For example, at sites where a high risk of onion stunt existed, the effectiveness of breaking up

the fungal structure of *Rhizoctonia solani* AG8 in the soil by intensive cultivation and deep ripping to reduce disease risk was confirmed. Importance of the choice of cereal used as a nurse crop and the timing of the nurse crop removal were demonstrated in relation to minimizing competition with the onion seedlings and reducing the build-up of *Rhizoctonia solani* AG8 at this critical growth stage.

The project *Managing of soilborne diseases of onions (VN13003)* was a strategic levy investment under the Hort Innovation Onion Fund. It was funded by Hort Innovation using the onion research and development levy and contributions from the Australian Government.



Current knowledge on onion stunt has been collated in a "Best Practice guide for onion stunt", which is accessible to growers on the Onions Australia website.

Growers interested in pre-plant pathogen DNA testing to assess disease risk or monitor onion crops should contact Michael Rettke at SARDI on 0401 122 124 or by email; michael.rettke@sa.gov.au.





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# Detection and management of bacterial diseases in Australian allium crops

Onion Project VN13005 Research Provider: DAF Queensland, Researchers: Cherie Gambley and John Duff

**Now due for completion, the three-year project *Detection and management of bacterial diseases in Australian allium crops* (VN13005) has been investigating bacterial diseases of onion crops in order to improve understanding of their introduction, spread and survival.**

It will build the industry's capacity to manage bacterial diseases – including bacterial blight of leek (caused by *Pseudomonas syringae* pv. *porri*), which affects onions and shallots – and to enhance preparedness for potential incursions of exotic diseases, such as *Xanthomonas* leaf blight of onion.

The project started in 2014 in response to an outbreak of bacterial blight of leek (*Pseudomonas syringae* pv. *porri*, or Psp) on onion and shallot crops in Queensland's Lockyer Valley growing region during the 2010 to 2012 seasons.

One of the key areas of this project's work is in relation to control methods. The researchers note that while there are currently no products registered by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority specifically for the control of bacteria in onion crops, there are over 40 copper-containing products registered for other uses in onions – with potential to expand the registered use of some of these products for the control of bacterial diseases.

Investigation of these products are continuing along with the testing of non-copper products that may be effective control measures. There was also the

ongoing screening of commercial onion varieties for resistance or tolerance to *Pseudomonas syringae* pv. *Porri*.

The full report and findings will be published later this year by Hort Innovation.

The project *Detection and management of bacterial diseases in Australian allium crops* (VN13005) is a strategic levy investment under the Hort Innovation Onion Fund. It is funded by Hort Innovation using the onion research and development levy and contributions from the Australian Government.



► *Symptoms induced in onion by *Pseudomonas syringae* pv. *porri*. The bright yellow central leaf is a result of a phytotoxin produced by the bacterium under cold conditions. The infection points of the bacterium are seen on the older leaf as tan water-soaked lesions which have joined together.*

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# INFINITO® - NEW FUNGICIDE MODES OF ACTION INVALUABLE FOR SA GROWER

The Murray River in South Australia is a good place to grow onions, but it does bring with it a particular set of challenges, mainly around disease management.



That's because, as Swan Reach grower Peter Dettloff explains, being located in the river valley means his property receives a sea breeze most nights during the growing season.

"It does help cool things down overnight, but it also brings its fair share of issues with humid air and a high risk of downy mildew outbreaks," he says.

Mr Dettloff says the impact of downy mildew can be severe, depending on how the disease is managed.

"If you're not vigilant with regular inspections of your crop and nipping it in the bud at the early stage, you can get very significant crop loss," he explains.

"I'm in my crop basically every day of the week monitoring for outbreaks and as soon as I see something, we undertake a control program as soon as possible.

"Having said that, we maintain a fairly vigilant preventative program with regular preventative fungicides to keep the disease out in the first place."

Mr Dettloff says downy mildew resistance to fungicides has been a concern, as up until recently there have been a small number of active ingredients available in the marketplace to control the disease.

"The fact it's new chemistry is very significant – the biggest problem we've had with a lot of the current downy mildew controls is basically there's only two main active ingredients that suit our system," he explains.

"We applied INFINITO once and we got very good control, very effective – the plants that I'd identified in the crop that had downy mildew symptoms were definitely cleaned up in one application.

"It meant we didn't have to follow up and try to control downy mildew when the crop was at the crop fall stage.

"If you've got mildew still active inside the canopy once the canopy starts to fall and close, it's near enough to impossible to control," he explains.

INFINITO also showed good compatibility when the Dettloff's applied it on the downy mildew-affected crop, putting the product out with foliar nutrient to give the crop a boost.

However, compatibility wasn't the only bonus Mr Dettloff found with the new product.

"The fact it has only a seven-day withholding period meant that I would have no issues with chemical residue once the crop was harvested."

Perhaps the most significant aspect to the registration of INFINITO in the market is the options it will give growers to manage disease resistance.

"Disease resistance is a big issue, so as a grower you certainly look at trying to bring anything with new chemistry into the program to minimise those issues – it's a great step forward for the industry as a whole."

Mr Dettloff says the new chemistry in particular bring benefits to smaller operations like his.

"We can't afford to lose crop for whatever reason, basically we try and get a return off of every acre we grow.

"Using INFINITO as part of a disease management program to make sure we don't crop with severe downy mildew outbreaks is going to be very advantageous for us I believe."

More information on INFINITO can be found at [crop.bayer.com.au/infinito](http://crop.bayer.com.au/infinito)

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# Onion rust research complete

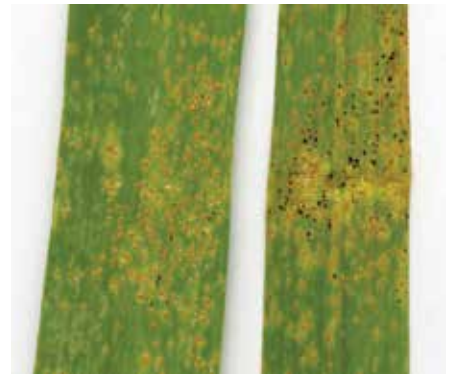
Onion Project VN13001 Andrew Geering, Alistair McTaggart, Terri Weese, Chanintorn Doungsa-ard and Roger Shivas, Queensland Alliance for Agriculture and Food Innovation, The University of Queensland.

**Rust diseases, caused by fungi in the genus *Puccinia*, are considered the most serious biosecurity threats to the Australian bulb onion industry.**

However, there is decades-old confusion about the taxonomy of the onion rusts, mainly because many of the economically-important species were described in the 19th century in Europe, and morphologies were not described in sufficient detail, type specimens were not lodged, and the hosts were sometimes not identified to species level.

In the absence of a workable classification scheme, it is impossible to implement any kind of a biosecurity plan in Australia for exotic onion rusts. Rust diseases already occur here on close relatives of the bulb onion but at the beginning of this project, it was unclear as to the precise identity of these fungi and how they could be differentiated from exotic onion rust species, if in fact there were any.

The project *Classification of the onion rust complex and development of rapid diagnostic assays* (VN13001) was a strategic levy investment under the Hort Innovation Onion Fund. During the course of this project, a large panel of rust specimens from *Allium* species in Australia and overseas were assembled and the fungi classified using DNA sequence data, morphological features and host range. Six fungal species were recognized, but it was only possible to confidently assign names to two, namely *Puccinia porri* and *Puccinia mixta*, for leek and chive-infecting isolates, respectively. Three rust species resembled previous descriptions of *Puccinia allii*, but given the ambiguity in what constituted *P. allii* in the strictest sense, a conservative taxonomic approach was taken and the species informally named *P. allii sensu Gäumann*, *P. allii sensu Koike* and *P. allii sensu lato*. The final species that was described was only distantly related to the previous five, and was represented by two specimens of garlic chives from Thailand and the Philippines. Of the three *P. allii*-like species, two were present in Australia, and the third, *P. allii sensu Koike*, only recorded from California, where it caused major yield losses in garlic crops in 1989-90. It was demonstrated that *P. mixta* had been recorded once in Australia, in 1971, but likely failed to establish given the lack of subsequent records. *P. porri* was common in Europe, but our evidence suggested it was absent from Australia.



► *Onion rust on garlic, *Puccinia allii* on *Allium sativum* [Alliaceae]*

To aid in identification of *P. porri*, a diagnostic PCR assay was developed and demonstrated to be specific for its target. An attempt was also made to develop a similar assay for *P. allii sensu Koike*. However, we were unable to locate preserved specimens of this species from California, and in contemporary surveys, only *P. porri* was found.

We were unable to find any specimens of rust disease on bulb onion, either from Australia or overseas, and in a literature search, there were no recent records of disease on this plant species.

We conclude that the risk posed to the Australian bulb onion industry by exotic rust species has likely been overstated in the Industry Biosecurity Plan.

The project *Classification of the onion rust complex and development of rapid diagnostic assays* (VN13001) was a strategic levy investment under the Hort Innovation Onion Fund. It was funded by Hort Innovation using the onion research and development levy and contributions from the Australian Government.



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# Enhanced National Bee Pest Surveillance Program is rolling-out

Project: Enhanced National Bee Pest Surveillance Program (MT16005); Research Provider: Plant Health Australia. Project Leader: Rod Turner, Report Author: Jenny Shanks

**An estimated 65 per cent of agricultural production involves pollination from honey bees, including the onion industry, where onion seed is 100 per cent dependent on pollination.**

Australia's honey bee industry is fortunate enough to experience freedom from many overseas pests that can adversely impact on the production of honey, bee products, and the delivery of pollination services.

Australia's freedom of exotic pests like Varroa destructor has been achieved not only by Australia's isolation, but in many respects through the success of the National Bee Pest Surveillance Program (NBPSP). Established in 2000, the NBPSP is a post-border early warning system for the detection of new incursions of exotic bees and bee pests. It involves a range of surveillance activities performed by apiary surveillance teams across 33 key sea- and air-ports. The NBPSP has developed and improved with each year of operation, and because of the PHA-led project MT14057 Statistical Review and Redesign of the NBPSP funded by Hort Innovation in 2016; from 2017 we will see a significant boost in support through pollination reliant-industries, research and development

agencies, and the governments which will run through to the end of 2021.

The Enhanced NBPSP 2016–2021, which officially commenced December 2016, covers surveillance activities across the eight State and Territories. A key improvement to this Program is the increase in surveillance activities every six weeks, which will significantly increase the likelihood of early detection of exotic bee pests. In addition, the enhanced NBPSP will incorporate five new ports, including Mourilyan and Mackay in Queensland, and increase the type of surveillance activities around the International Airport in Canberra. These new ports will be working towards full operation by the end of 2017.

We will also see an increase in the number of honey bee hives (called sentinel hives) to a total of 184 over 33 ports nationally, arranged within 2-3km of the port. This lifts our Varroa, Tropilaelaps and Tracheal mite detection sensitivity. Catchboxes targeting

exotic bee swarms are also increasing this year as well as the repositioning to ideal locations around 17 of the highest risk ports for exotic bees. Surveillance for exotic pest bees is increasing by deploying more teams on the ground with butterfly nets, sweeping floral resources around ports aiming to catch foraging exotic bee species, this a key method for targeting pests like Asian honey bees.

Since December 2016, 2,767 data records of surveillance activities performed nationally have been collected by State and Commonwealth government operators and volunteer beekeepers. To maintain a high level of involvement and enthusiasm by these operational staff; PHA will be increasing its engagement with jurisdictions. This will be achieved through port visits, workshops and meetings and industry conference attendance. To date; PHA has visited the NBPSP ports of Tasmania, ACT and South Australia. Visiting these ports has been





vital in getting an on the ground feel for surveillance, understanding implications and identifying areas for activities, and building upon the relationships between government and industry. There are scheduled plans for visiting the remaining jurisdictions by the end of 2017. In addition, PHA bee biosecurity project officers have attended Queensland Beekeepers Association annual conference, Tasmanian Beekeepers annual conference and South Australian Apiarists Association annual conference.

There are several new exciting enhancements and activities planned over the next 12-24 months that require an element of Research and Development prior to inclusion. The ongoing improvements to this world leading bee pest surveillance program significantly improves the ability to detect exotic bee pests, effectively protecting the honey bee industry, and the approximate \$1.8 billion per annum agricultural production system that is estimated to be responsive to honey bee pollination.

- ▶ *Left: Floral sweep netting performed at Kurnell, Sydney NSW targeting exotic foraging bee species. PHA: Jenny Shanks.*
- ▶ *Below: Catchboxes are positioned around key seaports aiming to capture exotic bee swarms which may arrive on ships and cargo. Sabine Perrone [www.bsaso.com.au](http://www.bsaso.com.au)*

The Enhanced National Bee Pest Surveillance Program (MT16006) is funded by Hort Innovation using research and development levies from nine pollination-dependent industries – including the onion industry – with co-investment from the Australia Honey Bee Industry Council and Grain Producers Australia, and contributions from the Australian Government. In-kind contributions for the implementation of the program are also provided through each state and territory's Department of Agriculture, and volunteer beekeepers. At a national level, Plant Health Australia coordinates and administers the program.



# Integrated Pest Management support for the onion and potato industries

Onion Project MT16009 Research Provider: IPM Technologies Pty Ltd, Research Lead: Dr Paul A Horne, [www.ipmtechnologies.com.au](http://www.ipmtechnologies.com.au)

**A five-year project to support the uptake of integrated pest management officially started in December 2016 and is being carried out by IPM Technologies based in Victoria.**

The project *An IPM extension program for the potato and onion industries* (MT16009) aims to increase the adoption of integrated pest management (IPM) by supporting onion and potato growers to improve pest management with minimal pesticide use and a reduction in associated costs.

It is funded by Hort Innovation using the onion, fresh potato and processing potato levies, with contributions from the Australian Government.

The program will include workshops, the use of demonstration sites with commercial crops, and the production of materials such as articles, guides and case studies distributed in industry channels. The project will also be responsible for training advisors in IPM across all major onion and potato growing districts in Australia, and involve a collaboration between growers, re-sellers, advisors and IPM Technologies.

Participatory IPM demonstrations in commercial crops will be used to address

the need for existing information on pest management to be made available to the onion and potato industries (growers and advisors) in a form that will encourage practice change from a pesticide-based strategy to a more sustainable approach.

In April and May 2017 IPM Technologies successfully delivered three workshops for onion and potato growers and advisors in South Australia, in Virginia, Mannum and Mount Gambier. These workshop were well attended and at the end of each session growers and advisors agreed to establish on-farm demonstration trials to implement the IPM strategies that we developed with them during the workshop.

Over the coming season the project team will make several visits to each trial site and maintain regular contact with the collaborating growers and advisors, to help them make pest management decisions week-by-week.

With the threat of tomato potato psyllid, the project has also received additional funding from the potato growing and processing industries specifically for activities related to the pest. These have included workshops on Tomato Potato Psyllid (TPP) management, potato IPM case studies and a monitoring guide for TPP.

The outcome of this project will be improved pest management with minimal use of insecticides in Australian onion and potato production. There will be a direct economic benefit to growers due to reduced crop losses and reduced costs associated with pest control, and worker and environmental safety will be improved as a result of reduced reliance on and use of insecticides.

The project also aims to ensure the best preparedness for the onion and potato industries to deal with exotic pests, for which a pesticide-based strategy will not provide adequate control.

Each season the program will extend to cover additional potato and onion growing regions, and the next major onion growing region planned to be serviced is Tasmania.

The project *An IPM extension program for the potato and onion industries* (MT16009) is a strategic levy investment under the Hort Innovation Onion Fund. It is funded by Hort Innovation using the onion research and development levy and contributions from the Australian Government.

▶ *Angelica Cameron from IPM Technologies discusses IPM with grower Tony Cummaudo and his agronomist*



All growers trialling or implementing IPM under the project are offered ongoing email and phone support. For more information please contact Dr Paul Horne at IPM Technologies: 0419 891 575 or [paul@ipmtechnologies.com.au](mailto:paul@ipmtechnologies.com.au). Website: [www.ipmtechnologies.com.au](http://www.ipmtechnologies.com.au)

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#### **FEATURES**

- Resistance to bolting
- Excellent bulb shape and size uniformity
- Intermediate resistance to Pink Root
- Main planting slot



**Shrike  
(SV9463NH)**

Shrike is harvested from January to March and holds up well in the heat of summer. Shrike grows vigorously with a high tolerance to bolting with intermediate resistance to Pink Root.

#### **FEATURES**

- Smooth brown skin and attractive globe shape
- Stands up against heat
- Stores well
- Intermediate resistance to Pink Root
- Late planting slot

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# Minor use permits for the onion industry

Through the Onion industry minor use program (VN16000) in the Hort Innovation Onion Fund, levy funds and Australian Government, contributions are used to renew and apply for new minor use permits for the industry.

These submissions are prepared and submitted to the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA). This work is also complemented by research into new chemical controls for pests and diseases.

All current permits are in the table below as current as at September 2017. All growers should confirm details of all permits via the APVMA portal: but that growers should always confirm details of all permits via the APVMA portal (<https://portal.apvma.gov.au/permits>)

There are also data generation projects that support permit applications. Earlier this year, Hort Innovation was successful in securing 26 grants totaling \$1.2 million for chemical access to facilitate research, through the Australian Government's agriculture and veterinary chemicals grant funding (Agvet).

For the onion industry, the grant funding is supporting a new study with AgNova with its 'Zampro' fungicide product that's being evaluated for use in onions for the control of downy mildew. This project is due for completion in February 2020 and if the data is supportive, this will be a new label registration for the onion industry.

A previous AgVet grant funded data-generation project to undertake residue studies to renew the current Bentazone-sodium permit for onions for the control of broadleaf weeds has been finalised and the residue reports submitted to the APVMA for evaluation or the continuation of the permit.

There are currently a handful of new permit applications and permit renewals with the APVMA for assessment as of September 2017.

These include:

- A new permit for the use of haloxyfop-p (Verdict) for the control of storksbill and various grass weeds in bulb onions
- New permits for the use of ethofumesate (Tramat) for the control of grass and broadleaf weeds in onion crops
- A permit renewal application has been submitted with residue data for the use of bentazone-sodium (Basagran) to control broadleaf weeds in onions.

## CURRENT PERMITS

Permit IDS	Description	Date Issued	Expiry Date	Permit Holder
PER13119 Version 3	Diazinon / Onions / Onion thrips	06-Mar-12	31-July-18	AOIA
PER14602 Version 2	Boscalid (Filan), Iprodione (Rovoral Aquaflo & Chlorothalonil (Bravo) / Onion seed & Onions / Neck Rot ( <i>Botrytis alli</i> )	24-Jul-14	30-Sep-18	AOIA
PER13698 Version 3	Phosphorous Acid Lettuce – leafy & hydroponic / Downy Mildew Fennel and bulb (allium) vegetables – bulb onion, garlic, leek, shallot, spring onion and tree onion / Suppression of Downy Mildew Coriander & Parsley / Root Rot	01-Oct-12	30-Sep-22	Hort Innovation
PER14773 Version 2	Bentazone-sodium (Basagran) / Onions / Broadleaf weeds	16-Apr-14	30-Jun-18	AOIA
PER80282	Alpha-Cypermethrin / Onions / Onion thrips	16-Dec-14	30-Nov-17	AOIA
PER80060	Dimethenamid-P (Frontier-P Herbicide) / Bulb onions / Nut Grass Jurisdiction: For use in WA only	31-Aug-15	31-Jul-18	VGA, WA

All current minor use permits for the industry are searchable at [portal.apvma.gov.au/permits](http://portal.apvma.gov.au/permits). Permit updates are also circulated in Hort Innovation's e-newsletter, Growing Innovation, which levy-paying members receive monthly. Sign up for free here <http://horticulture.com.au/membership-application-form/>

# See your levy at work in the new HORTLINK!

Don't miss the latest edition of Hort Innovation's Hortlink, which provides an update on all new, current and recently completed levy-funded activity in each levy industry. Check out the onion section at [www.horticulture.com.au/hortlink-2017-edition-3/onion](http://www.horticulture.com.au/hortlink-2017-edition-3/onion).

Hortlink includes easy-to-read project updates, results and resources you can use in your business, plus case studies, industry contacts and more. You can choose to browse the whole onion snapshot or use the interactive project list to jump straight to the information you want. Also look

out for new the 'ACT NOW' tags to easily identify project resources and information you can make use of straight away.

Stay in the loop with your levy by becoming a member of Hort Innovation, the grower-owned, not-for-profit research and development corporation for Australian horticulture. Paying a levy doesn't automatically make you a member, but signing up is free at [www.horticulture.com.au/membership](http://www.horticulture.com.au/membership).



## The Greater Hamilton Region peels back the layers for you to grow onions

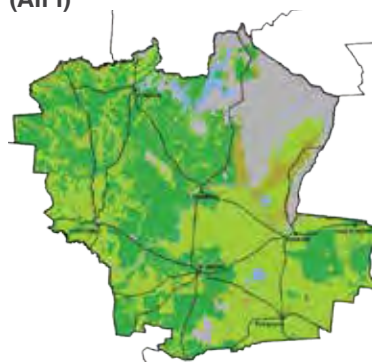
The Greater Hamilton region is ripe for further agricultural diversification and investment, thanks to high rainfall, fertile soils, above average returns and future water availability.

Our Land Capability modelling demonstrates that onions are well suited to our region, now and into the future.

**We invite you to dig in and grow in Greater Hamilton!**



Onion Land Suitability in Southern Grampians - 2050 (AIFI)



Not suitable		Suitable	
■ Permanently NS	■ 60% - Moderate	■ 70%	■ 80%
■ Public Land	■ 90% - High	■ 100%	

**We welcome you to our region to experience for yourself the onion growing opportunities. Please contact:**

**Hugh Koch**

Manager Economic Development and Tourism

**T** 03 5573 0238

**M** 0409 797 446

**E** [hkoch@sthgrampians.vic.gov.au](mailto:hkoch@sthgrampians.vic.gov.au)

[growinggreaterhamilton.com.au](http://growinggreaterhamilton.com.au)

# SA exclusion zone lifted

**As of October 3rd, 2017, South Australia was officially considered onion smut free.**

It's an auspicious date, marking 15 years since the last detection in the Murraylands region.

"It's a really big moment for the onion industry," Nick Secomb from the Department of Primary Industries and Regions, South Australia (PIRSA).

"More than anything it's recognition of the industry's efforts to bolster their biosecurity practices, which has led to the onion sector really being ahead of the game in this space."

Onion smut was first detected in Australia in the 1940s.

Nick Secomb says management strategies have changed significantly over this time.

"The South Australian government starting working heavily in this space from the late 1970s through to 2010," he said.

"Around 90 per cent of the state's onion crop was surveyed every year, which resulted in a number of detections, the last being in 2002."

In 2011 only four standing quarantine areas remained and a national agreement was reached between government and industry that the high level surveillance was no longer needed thanks to industry efforts.

"Over the past six years there hasn't been any more onion smut found at all, so this final area at Bow Hill marks the end of an era," Nick Secomb said.



"The onion industry in South Australia has become incredibly self-reliant in this space and it's a great example of what can be achieved when an industry comes together and agrees to shoulder the majority of the responsibility."

One of the guiding industry figures throughout the process to reduce government inspections and confirm industry commitment was Yvonne Smith from Bowhill Produce Pty Ltd.

"For decades onion fields in South Australia were inspected for onion smut early in the season," Yvonne said.

"Initially this may have been practical, but as area planted increased and over a larger geographical area, it became a burden on PIRSA.

"There was the economics of course, but it also became harder for them to have the manpower to conduct their inspections at the appropriate time required."

When the SA government moved towards cost recovery process in many of their agricultural services, including the inspection of onion smut, industry had a new concern on its hands.

"It meant that the grower would individually have to pay for inspections," Yvonne said.

"Not only was this to be a huge cost burden to growers, but we believed it was an unnecessary one.

"My argument continually was that we were already inspecting every row, of every field, of every grower, which meant we were proving every year that onion smut did not exist."

Yvonne said while there had been small breaches, it equated to only a very tiny percentage of total producing fields.



"When the data of forty years of complete inspections was considered, these breaches were statistically insignificant," she said.

"Of course because of the previous protocols for virtually 100% inspection, it was unlikely and unwise to suggest that we do no inspections at all, particularly given there had been a recent incursion, regardless of how small it was. "

Yvonne said both government and industry agreed that it was not wise to ignore the possibility of the disease existing, so vigilance remained strong and a new working arrangement was reached.

"We just needed to be sensible. So from there we entered into a regular sample inspection policy, with complete inspections of areas where incursions had been detected, to enable the determination that onion smut was not present in SA," she said.

"In the end, we were able to remove the ridiculous rigours of full inspection protocols, avoid the cost of inspections being passed on to growers, and have now reached a status of freedom from the disease.

"Whilst it took some work from growers and PIRSA to achieve this, I applaud the fact that it could be done cooperatively with a sensible outcome as a result. "

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**Grow a better tomorrow.**

# Update: Development of an onion white rot forecast model for Tasmania

Onion Project VN14001 Dr Suzie Jones and Calum Wilson, Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (University of Tasmania)

**Beginning in 2016, this project is developing a forecasting model for the serious fungal disease – onion white rot – for infection periods in Tasmania.**

It will identify conditions that precede high-risk infection periods, and help in understanding optimum timings of fungicide applications for control of white rot.

Data was collected from field and planter bag trials to model onion root growth and white rot infection risk in the 2016/17 season. Field and planter-bag trails are currently being established to collect data for the 2017/18 growing season. Onion root growth data will be collected from six commercial fields for three planting periods: May, July and September. Planter bag trials are being established at the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture Vegetable Research Facility to collect data on the conditions that precede root infection. To provide additional data on conditions that promote infection, soil temperature and moisture will also be monitored at an additional three fields (one for each planting period) that are considered to be at risk of developing onion white rot infection

From the data there will be three versions of the forecast model created for growers, to account for three key onion planting periods: May, July and September. The data will be presented as a fact sheet detailing for each planting window the combinations of soil temperature, soil moisture and crop growth stage that signal the start of infection periods.

The project *development of a white rot forecast model for Tasmania* (VN14001) is a strategic levy investment under the Hort Innovation Onion Fund. It is funded by Hort Innovation using the onion research and development levy and contributions from the Australian Government.

► *The field onions image shows disease symptoms and the other images are of the planter bag trials*





# Hort Innovation Update with Onion Industry Relationship Manager Brad Mills

The new onion Strategic Investment Plan is here.

Working with onion growers, industry representatives and other stakeholders, Hort Innovation has recently developed and published the new Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) for the onion industry. Input into the development of the SIP included consultation meetings with growers and Onions Australia representatives, online validation and review by the onion Strategic Investment Advisory Panel (SIAP).

The SIP was released in August and is available from Hort Innovation's Onion Fund page, [www.horticulture.com.au/grower-focus/onion](http://www.horticulture.com.au/grower-focus/onion). It will help guide Hort Innovation's management of investment programs for the onion industry over the next five years, laying the foundation of decision-making in levy investments and representing the balanced interests of the industry. The very important function of the SIP is to ensure levy investment decisions align with industry priorities.

## Some of the key outcomes incorporated in the SIP include:

- To expand the consumer market and increase the consumer demand for fresh onions domestically
- To position onions for export in selected markets
- To increase onion productivity.

It includes 22 different strategies that will guide investments required to achieve these outcomes for the industry.

A key change with the new SIP is an increased priority for the development of new markets for Australian onions, both domestically and in key export markets that have been identified with growth potential, including Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, Qatar and Bahrain.

## Strategic Investment Advisory Panel helping put new plan into action

At its first advisory meeting following the finalisation of the new SIP, the SIAP recommended early investment priorities including facilitation of an onion export market development plan, an audit on the costs of exporting, onion product differentiation options, and several international study tours. Work on developing these investment options will occur over the next few months.

## Look for the new Hort Innovation Onion Fund logo

You may have noticed there's been a little snipping to the name and logo of Hort Innovation recently. Because industry has come to us as simply 'Hort Innovation', rather than 'Horticulture Innovation Australia', that's what we're now officially called.

Onion growers and stakeholders will also notice the introduction of a handy new logo specific to the industry. You can now look for the 'Hort Innovation Onion Fund' logo (pictured below) to quickly and easily identify projects and outputs related to the strategic investment of your levy.

You'll begin to see this logo pop up on the resources from projects funded by the onion levy, from fact sheets and videos to handbooks and reports.



► Brad Mills

**Hort  
Innovation**  
Strategic levy investment

**ONION  
FUND**

# Guiding good farm biosecurity for onion growers

Onion project VN15001, Research Provider Plant Health Australia, Lead contact David Gale Project Officer, Canberra

**Australia's freedom from many of the exotic pests that affect production overseas provides the onion industry with both a production advantage as well as real trade benefits.**

Biosecurity planning provides a mechanism for the onion industry, governments, and other stakeholders to assess current practices and future needs to protect against, or minimise the risk of, new pests and diseases becoming established. The identification, prioritisation, and management of key biosecurity risks, through development and implementation of a biosecurity plan, are critical to industry biosecurity preparedness activities.

The five-year project *Review of the National Biosecurity Plan for the onion industry and development of a biosecurity manual for onion producers (VN15001)* is aiming to deliver both a national plan for industry and an on-farm biosecurity resource for growers. The project is a strategic levy investment under the Hort Innovation Onion Fund and is being carried out by Plant Health Australia (PHA), in close consultation with Onions Australia.

Work on review of the biosecurity plan for the onion industry began in October 2016, with a meeting of industry members and scientific experts to identify the highest priority exotic pests and diseases for the onion industry. This list is used to prioritise future resources for pests considered to be of most importance and greatest risk of establishing and spreading in Australia.

The second step in reviewing the biosecurity plan has involved identifying activities that will assist the industry and government prepare for potential pest incursions. To achieve this, a meeting of experts was held on 17th August 2017 in Adelaide, and 44 actions have been identified for inclusion in the implementation table that will guide improvement of biosecurity measures for industry and government.

The next stage of the process is endorsement of the biosecurity plan, including implementation table, by both the industry and government, followed by its e-publication in early 2018. This project will also include an annual meeting to review any new pests that may threaten the industry, assess biosecurity priorities, and ensure that activities recommended in the biosecurity plan are being implemented.

In addition to the biosecurity plan, this project will also support growers at the farm level by producing a biosecurity manual for onion producers. This manual will include sections on how to identify and report pests and diseases of biosecurity significance to the onion industry as well as information on practical steps that can be taken at the farm level to minimise the risk of new pests entering the farm. Development of the manual began on 18th August 2017, with input from growers and key industry representatives

including Onions Australia CEO Lechelle Earl, Executive Committee Chairman Peter Shadbolt and executive members Andrew Moon and Dean Metcalf. Ongoing consultation on the drafting of details within the manual will be undertaken.

The manual and the biosecurity plan are expected to be delivered in early 2018.

"The project *National Biosecurity Plan for the onion industry and development of a biosecurity manual for onion producers (VN15001)* is a strategic levy investment under the Hort Innovation Onion Fund. It is funded by Hort Innovation using the onion research and development levy and contributions from the Australian Government."



► Scientists and onion industry representatives met to discuss the Biosecurity Plan in Adelaide in August 2017



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# State Round Ups - 2016/17 Season

## South Australia

**Greg Bragg**

It was a very challenging growing season in South Australia with a very cold September (2016) resulting in wide spread bolting in early crops, which was then followed by an unseasonably wet summer. This brought about its own challenges, in particular Fusarium basal rot in the mid-season varieties. The Fusarium was put down to the high rainfall, which was then followed by high temperatures - not ideal for growing onions.

Early prices were very good, but as the season progressed prices have come back which is pretty normal for this time of the year. Growers are optimistic that prices will firm - generally quality is good, particularly the late grown varieties.

The early sown onions seemed to have germinated well. Winter has been cool and dry, which has enabled growers to sow into ideal conditions. From what I can determine, hectares may be up slightly due to an increase in the early plantings.

## New South Wales

**Lucy Gurciullo**

We had a good start to the season with early onions being planted in April and May. We had more rain than normal in the winter, which caused a problem with late planting in August - some areas were not able to plant late crops.

All crops grew well with a very mild spring and there was only a few problems with weed control in places. It was good to see an increase in the price of onions - a long time coming! The area sown for the 2017/2018 season is about 750 hectares which is much the same as the season just gone.

Early crops have all been planted and are growing well, and late crops have been planted too. Hopefully this season will bring good prices again!

## Victoria

### NORTHERN VICTORIA

**Peter Shadbolt**

Last season saw one of the best seasons on record with higher than average yields along with higher than average prices, but unfortunately higher than average bolting (as high as 30 per cent).

A nice hot dry summer made for great harvesting conditions, which then led to a pretty high quality onion packout. No onions are currently stored in Northern Victoria.

Planting for next season is well under way, with a small acreage of later onions planted in August/September.

Hectares and varieties planted this year will remain the same as last year.

### SOUTHERN VICTORIA

**Frank Powell**

Last season saw great above average yields, following a very good growing season.

Disease wise there were no major issues throughout the season.

Good rainfall means that this season is shaping up well.

Planting was underway in August/September.

## Tasmania

**Andy Doran**

Well what a contrast of seasons to date, from the floods along the north-west coast of Tasmania in June and July, 2016 which ended up being the wettest on record, and here we are 12 months later with the driest June and July on record!

Considering the wet weather last year, planting conditions ended up being quiet good. However due to the wet weather, some areas did not plant at all and the overall total of hectares planted in Tasmania was down by at least 10 per cent.

Once again considering the climatic extremes experienced last season, the quality of onions at the end was exceptional.

There were minimal signs of downy mildew and white root rot in the 2016-17 season. This was mainly due to better grower practices and low pressure during the growth of the crop.

The season saw milder than usual growing conditions, but a late summer warm in February-March finished off with good growing and harvesting conditions. The quality and yields of onion crops were well above the average for the season.

Onion drilling for the 2018 harvest started in April-May, with some crops having to be irrigated due to cold, dry and frosty conditions. On the plus side, this meant that the sowing conditions were very good, and combined with some timely follow up rain allowed for excellent crop emergence.

Plantings for the 2017-18 season remain similar to last year.

The combination of a strong Australian dollar and the ever increasing input costs of growing onions, means that exporting to Europe and Asia will be a challenge in the future. The main focus seems to be on domestic supply within Australia.



# State Round Ups - 2016/17 Season

## Queensland

### Michael Sippel

Last season saw a continuation of hot, dry harvest conditions throughout the spring period. As a result, quality was high and was met with strong demand at the start of the packing season.

Plantings for the year were considered average for brown onions but slightly increased acreages of red onions.

Most of the smaller growers were able to clean out their sheds of brown onions relatively early in the season, leaving just the red onions to pack. Some of these were going out the door as low as five dollars per bag, as growers looked to cut their losses with the persistent hot weather having an impact on shelf life.

The 2017 season has started with the estimated area planted slightly increased on last year. Last season's brown onion demand, coupled with the rainfall event that occurred after Cyclone Debbie, has led to more optimism.

Crops currently in the ground are looking very good on the back of a warmer than normal winter period.

Seedling emergence in the Downs region has been the best we have seen in many years, due to the warm winter. Locally, early season white onions are just starting to be packed, with quality being very good due to the ongoing dry conditions.

## Western Australia

### Michael Patane

A good growing season was experienced early to mid-season, but a mild summer meant the late harvest crop didn't cure as well as expected. It wasn't hot enough, which caused a few quality issues, but the yields were still good.

The reds were of good quality, but slightly smaller for us this year.

Export pricing was similar to last year, with local pricing slightly lower.

Early in the season (April to July) the market demand for export browns was quite strong, however some buyers were over supplied and very fussy on product this year compared to last year.

As for the export whites – they didn't seem to travel well this year, which resulted in minor claims on almost all consignments.

Plantings for this season will be similar to last year.



# Business Directory

The below listed members are paying members and have opted on their membership form to be listed in our OA magazine. If any of the above member details have changed and/or are incorrect, please advise OA. If you are a paying member and would like to be included in above, please advise OA.

## Agronomy Services

### Agronico Pty Ltd

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175 Allport Road  
East Leith TAS 7315  
www.agronico.com.au  
jrshaw@agronico.com.au  
Phone 03 6428 2519  
Fax 03 6428 2049  
Mobile 0408 140 129

## Associations

### Onions Australia

Lechelle Earl  
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www.onionsaustralia.org.au  
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Phone 08 8725 8862  
Fax 08 8725 8863  
Mobile 0458 111 126

### Onions New Zealand

PO Box 10232  
WELLINGTON NZ 6143  
www.onionsnz.com  
Phone 0508 ONIONS (664667)  
Fax +64 4 471 2861

## Chemical Companies

### Agrichem

Paul Nott  
2 Hovey Road  
Yatala QLD 4207  
www.agrichem.com.au  
customerservice@agrichem.com.au  
Phone 07 3451 0000  
Fax 07 3451 0093  
Freecall 1800 654 758

### FMC Australasia

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North Ryde NSW 2113  
www.fmcaustralasia.com.au  
Freecall 1800 901 939  
Fax 02 9887 0911

## Government Departments

### Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water & Environment

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Fax 03 6278 2716  
Mobile 0417 104 747

### SARDI Horticultural Diagnostic Services

Barbara Hall  
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Urbae SA 5064  
www.pir.sa.gov.au/research  
barbara.hall@sa.gov.au  
Phone 8 8303 9585  
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## Grower

### Cliffview Farm Pty Ltd

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168 Stott Highway  
Swan Reach SA 5354  
dettloff@bigpond.com  
Phone 08 8570 2332  
Fax 08 8570 2332  
Mobile 0429 694 459

## Grower/Packer

### Bowhill Produce Pty Ltd

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bowhprod@bigpond.com  
Phone 08 8570 4187  
Fax 08 8570 4188  
Mobile 0427 704 188 (Kevin)  
Mobile 0407 608 238 (Yvonne)

### Ciampa Produce

Daniel Mead  
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Bordertown SA 5268  
ciampaproduce@bigpond.com  
Packing shed 08 8758 6223  
Mobile 0427 587 226

### Favara Farming Pty Ltd

Tony & Lucy Gurciullo  
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favara@mcmedia.com.au  
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Mobile 0427 137 684

### Sumich

www.sumich.com  
Phone 08 9440 7000

### Harvest Moon

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Fax 03 6428 2952  
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### Just Onions Pty Ltd

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justonions@bigpond.com  
Phone 03 5229 7499  
Fax 03 5229 7101

### LJM Produce Pty Ltd

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Fax 08 9720 1280  
Mobile 0417 938 819

### Moonrocks Aust

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# Business Directory

## Moore's Farm Fresh Vegetables

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Scottsdale TAS 7260  
enquiries@mooresfarmfresh.com.au  
Phone 03 6352 2734  
Fax 03 6352 2978

## Murphy Farms

Glenn Murphy  
68 Saviges Road  
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p.murphy@hotmail.com  
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Mobile 0428 779 931

## Paleso Enterprises Pty Ltd

Frank De Marco  
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Hanwood NSW 2680  
frank@palesoenterprises.com  
Phone 02 6968 5239  
Fax 02 6968 5250  
Mobile 0488 235 775

## Qualipac Produce Pty Ltd

M S 437 Warrego Highway  
Gatton QLD 4343  
www.qualipac.com.au  
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## Red Gem Growers & Packers

Robert Cerchiaro  
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Phone 03 5942 5205  
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Mobile 0419 105 259

## Rowett Onions

Tony Rowett  
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rowettonions@bigpond.com  
tonyrowett@bigpond.com  
Phone 08 8754 6130  
Fax 08 8754 6131  
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## Scotties Point Farms Pty Ltd

Peter Shadbolt  
169 Scotties Point road  
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scottiespointfarms@bigpond.com  
Phone 03 5037 6742  
Fax 03 5037 6512

## Willow Produce

Clinton Griffiths  
5536 Hunter Road  
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Mark Dobson  
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## Miscellaneous

### Barker Boy Fresh

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### Rathlyn Associates

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## Packaging

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Jeff Gibb  
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### J-Tech Systems

Michael Williams  
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### Pope Packaging

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Fax 08 8445 6622  
Mobile 0427 009 870

## Packers

### Monaghan Fresh Produce

Steve Monaghan  
8 Coragulac-Beeac Road  
Coragulac VIC 3249  
www.monaghanfreshproduce.com.au  
admin@monaghanfreshproduce.com.au  
Phone 03 5233 1207  
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Mobile 0418 523 193



# Business Directory

## Research

### AgNova Technologies Pty Ltd

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www.agnova.com.au  
info@agnova.com.au  
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Fax 03 98998500  
Mobile 0423 821 395

### Crop Protection Research Pty Ltd

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www.cpresearch.com.au  
dgriffin@cpresearch.com.au  
Mobile 0418 139 788

### Metcalf Biocontrol

Dr Dean Metcalf  
211 Wyre Forest Road  
Molesworth TAS 7140  
www.biocontrol.net.au  
metcalf@tassie.net.au  
Mobile 0409 054 323

## Seed Companies

### Bayer Vegetable Seeds

Jason Cooper  
PO Box 165  
West Beach SA 5024  
www.nunhems.com  
jason.cooper@bayer.com  
Phone 07 3908 5810  
Mobile 0408 178 410

### Bejo Seeds Pty Ltd

PO Box 5627  
Cranbourne VIC 3977  
www.bejo.com.au  
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Phone 03 9782 2811  
Fax 03 9782 2445  
Mobile 0408 664 492

### Lefroy Valley

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SEAFORD VIC 3198  
www.lefroyvalley.com  
nlaminski@lefroyvalley.com  
Phone 03 8779 2121  
Fax 03 8732 0308  
Mobile 0409 962 902

### Magnus Kahl Seeds

James Ryan  
6A Dairy Drive  
Coburg North VIC 3058  
www.magnuskahl.com  
james@magnuskahl.com  
Phone 03 9354 5780  
Mobile 0408 523 535

### Seminis

Darren Wood  
PO Box 6051  
St Kilda Rd Central VIC 8008  
www.seminis.com.au  
darren.leslie.wood@monsanto.com  
Phone 1800 364 846  
Mobile 0428 673 802

### Syngenta Seeds Pty Ltd

36 Newson Street  
Keysborough VIC 3173  
www.syngenta.com

### Terranova Seeds Pty Ltd

Tony Higgs  
Private Bag 118  
Wetherill Park NSW 2164  
www.terranoaseeds.com.au  
tony.higgs@tnseeds.com  
Phone 02 9725 1200  
Fax 02 9725 1066  
Mobile 0418 154 710

## Service & Supplies

### Biological Services

James Altmann  
PO Box 501  
Loxton SA 5333  
www.biologicalservices.com.au  
info@biologicalservices.com.au  
Phone 08 8584 6977  
Fax 08 8584 5057

### E.E Muir & Sons Pty Ltd

Paul Centofanti  
1104-1110 Port Wakefield Road  
Burton SA 5110  
www.eem.com.au  
pcentofanti@eem.com.au  
Phone 08 8280 8079  
Fax 08 8280 9506

### Neutrog Australia Pty Ltd

Angus Irwin  
288 Mine Road  
Kanmantoo SA 5252  
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info@neutrog.com.au  
Phone 08 8538 3500  
Fax 08 8538 3522

### Southern Soils

Jarrad Simcock  
www.southernsoils.com.au  
info@southernsoils.com.au  
Phone 1300 118 181  
Mobile 0438 198 100

## Wholesaler

Garlic Farm Sales  
sales@garlicfarmsales.net.au

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**Mark Dobson**  
General Manager

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M: 0408 140 508  
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W: [www.dobmac.com.au](http://www.dobmac.com.au)



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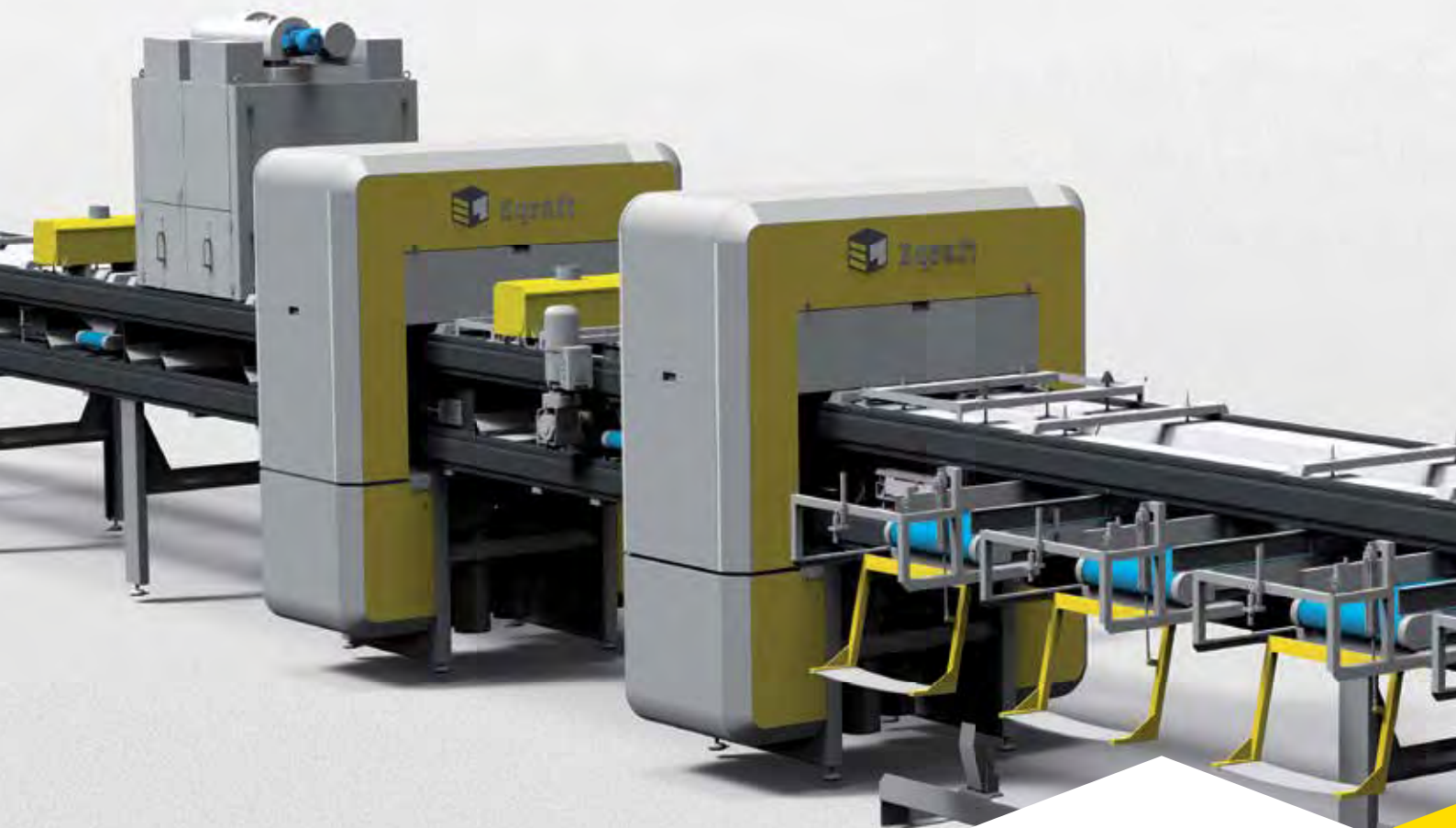
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