

*National Vegetable Industry Centre Newsletter***Onions Australia AGM - 2012**

Tony Napier, NSW DPI, Yanco

The 2012 Annual General Meeting of Onions Australia (OA) was held on Friday 19 October 2012 at Toowoomba. The day started with a field trip to Gatton with a tour through Qualipac's packing shed. Qualipac are large vegetable producers in southern Queensland with a focus on broccoli and onion production. Delegates who went on the field day had a chance to see the packing operation plus their storage and curing facilities. The field trip finished with a tour through the QLD University at Gatton, inspection of some fungicide trials and a visit to a local grower's farm to see hand picking of red onions.



Red onion harvest at Gatton.

After lunch, the AGM dealt with association matters, financial reporting plus some reports from HAL and the National Residue Service. There were also some short presentations of major research projects including the onion stunt project, the DAD's onion white rot project and the Iris Yellow Spot Virus project being led by Andrew Watson and Jianhua Mo at Yanco Agricultural Institute. The state round-ups are always of great interest as it is a good opportunity to find out what's happening with onion production in other states around Australia. All states reported on the crippling low prices last year and are looking for a much better season this year. A summary of the state round-ups are as follows:

Tasmania – Plantings are down by about 20% but at this stage expect the yield to be down by only 10%. There are not many onions left in storage and expect those to be packed and sold soon. Large packers dominate in Tasmania with the majority of their onions sold on the export market. Most export markets are currently giving low returns except for Japan where the demand is still quite strong.

South Australia – Plantings are similar to last year with tonnages expected to also be similar to last year. There are some reports of losses due to wind damage and onion stunting but still unclear how much will be lost. The onions still in cool storage are good quality but should be cleaned out by mid November.

Queensland – Plantings are down by about 20% but the reduction is all mainly from the early varieties. The area planted to mid and late season varieties are about the same as last year. Queensland growers are not expecting to have any large onions over the next two months with mainly table size onions on offer. The current quality of Queensland onions is excellent. There are much less red onions this year, probably due to the imported red onions we all saw on supermarket shelves last year over the Christmas period.

Western Australia – Plantings are similar to last year. It has been very dry with rainfall down by 40% causing some salt problems in their ground water. The salinity problems may result in the loss of some good agricultural land. All open-air stored onions were sold by the end of July with only small quantities of cool stored onions remaining.

New South Wales – Estimated plantings in the Riverina is up by about 15% from last year. An estimated 620ha was sown in the Riverina but there have been some crop losses and tonnage is expected to be less than last year. It has been very dry with virtually no rain since the widespread heavy downpour in March. The dry conditions resulted in no issues at sowing and no delays in getting the crop sown on time.

Overall there was some optimism at the meeting with the possibility of a vacuum in onion supply about the time we get to Riverina's onions and hopefully much better prices than last year.



Onions Australia AGM - continued

Reg Miller Award

This year's recipient of the Reg Miller Award was Dr Richard Jones. Richard was a plant breeder for Yates seeds for many years where he developed a range of early and intermediate onion varieties for the Australian industry. Recently he has become more involved in Onions Australia and currently sits on the Industry Advisory Committee. Senator Barnaby Joyce was at the conference dinner on Thursday 19 October to present Richard with the award. Barnaby Joyce was the dinner speaker for the conference where he talked about some of the challenges involved with politics.



Dr Richard Jones

Levy review process

The submission to change the onion levy has been sent to HAL who in turn have forwarded it on to DAFF for their consideration. The levy currently stands at \$2.00 per tonne with \$1.60 for R&D and \$0.40 for the National Residue Service. If approved, the levy will change to \$4.00 per tonne with \$2.90 for R&D, \$0.10 for Plant Health Australia membership and \$1.00 for a marketing levy. The process is still ongoing and expected to take another 6 to 12 months and may be implemented by the 2013/14 crop.

Minor-use permits

The issue of minor-use permits was discussed at the meeting and what needs to be done to ensure Onions Australia keep them all current. Onions Australia are keen to keep on top of this issue and are looking at the best way to make sure all applications are submitted in a timely manner. Also Onions Australia are looking at the best options to generate efficacy and residue data if required for permit applications.

Testing imported onions

Australian onion growers require their onions to be tested for chemical residues (MRL tests) before selling to the export and domestic market. This is part of a food safety program for Australian consumers. These tests have been conducted for many years on Australian grown onions and there has never been a problem. At the meeting, Onions Australia discussed the possibility of conducting some MRL tests on imported onions. Funding options are being considered by Onions Australia to conduct this testing.



Inspecting fungicide efficacy trials at the conference.



Is this a description of how big QLD onions grow?

The 2012 Onions Australia annual magazine has now been printed and will be posted shortly to all members of the association. For any enquires or more information on the association, you can contact Onions Australia on 08 8725 8862 or office.onionsaust@bigpond.com

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