

Final Report

International Prune Association Conference 2015

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Delivery partner:

Australian Prune Industry Association

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Summary

The International Prune Association (IPA) holds a Conference every 18 months in order to receive updates, discuss and exchange information on:

- The global prune industry supply/demand situation and outlook
- The best practice production techniques and new techniques
- Recent research projects in all producing countries
- Promotion initiatives aimed at increasing consumption of prunes

The IPA has the following objectives:

- To set up a permanent link between world prune producers
- To co-ordinate actions aimed at protecting producers' interests
- To increase world consumption of prunes
- To encourage and develop the exchange of up to date information concerning production and market trends between members
- To organise meetings between members of economic interest

Further, membership of the Association is open to:

- Prune growers
- Prune growers/packers recognized as significant growers by the members of their country
- Organisations representing prune producers

Objectives

The global outlook for the prune industry has improved significantly in recent times, with lower production ensuring that global supply and demand are much more in balance. The latest market reports suggest that much improved prices are being paid for this product.

The IPA Conference is an important forum that brings all the major players together with the aim of building co-operation across the producing countries and ensuring a sustainable future for the industry.

The continuing exchange of international supply and demand data, as well as co-operation in relation to research into nutrition and health aspects of prunes, are good examples of this co-operation.

The objectives of the project include:

- Information sharing. The IPA conference and associated field trips provide delegates and observers with access to important information about the world market outlook as well as factors impacting production levels. Gathering the information is important in assisting Australian prune growers to become more competitive.
- Awareness. Delegates and observers are made aware of different aspects of prune production and processing from other prune producing countries.
- Technology transfer. Delegates are able to gather information about new technologies and innovations developed by other member countries.
- Networking. Delegates and observers, who participate in this conference event, are able to establish contacts with growers, processors, packers, marketers and researchers from other member countries.
- Co-operation. Participation at the IPA conference enables the Australian industry and other IPA member countries to work together to achieve benefits for producers in all member countries.

Keywords

Italy
Sirmione
Dried Plum
Prunes
Dehydration
Pitted
Non-pitted
Quality
Brix
Itinerary
Contacts
Study Tour
Report
International
Conference
IPA
Marketing
Research
Processors
Solar
Sun-Drying
Bone Health
Nutrition

Outcomes

The expected outcomes or objectives of the Study Tour have been outlined in the Summary.

An outline of how these objectives were met is detailed below:

- Information sharing. The IPA country members each presented a Country Report sharing information on production and sales statistics, quality assurance, promotions and the outlook for the prune industry in their country.
- Awareness. Delegates and observers discussed new and existing aspects of prune production and processing during the conference. Elements were shared in the Country Reports as well as in the "Quality Round Table" discussion.
- Technology transfer. Several guest speakers shared information on new and improved technology in the prune industries and delegates observed some of this new technology on the field trip.
- Networking. Delegates and observers, who participated in this conference event, were able to establish contacts with growers, processors, packers, marketers and researchers from other member countries sharing details and continuing to stay in contact after the conference has finished.
- Co-operation. An important aspect of the conference was the "Quality Roundtable" and this was used very effectively to allow member countries to consider the direction they needed the global industry to head and reach agreement on a global promotional strategy.

Results of Discussions

Australian's attendance at the IPA Conference has confirmed the value of ongoing liaison and networking with major overseas producers of dried prunes.

All members who participated and the industry stakeholders who read the reports, have gained a better understanding of the global dried prune industry and most importantly, the improved outlook for dried prunes as a result of the reasonable balance in world supply and demand.

The findings from the IPA Conference have been outlined in summary articles published in The Vine publication (a joint Dried Fruits Australia, Australian Table Grape Association magazine) which is distributed to all prune growers on a quarterly basis. The first article was published in the April – June 2015 edition of The Vine and the second article was published in the Jul –Sept 2015 edition.

In addition, a report was prepared, presented and discussed at the Annual Growers' Conference held on 8th September 2015 in Griffith, NSW.

HIA's Hortlink online magazine will publish an article in late 2015.

Implications for Australian Horticulture

The IPA conference has again confirmed that growers in all member countries are facing similar issues to those confronting growers in Australia.

Reduced availability and rising cost of labour, strong competition from other crops, reduced government funding for research, unpredictable weather conditions (drought) and reduced supply and high cost of water are just a few of these.

The world prune orchard has stabilized as the rapid expansion of prune plantings in Chile and Argentina have has stopped and the rapid removal of prune plantings in the US and France has slowed. This means that the world production levels are low. Another factor which has contributed to low stocks are poor crops worldwide, due to environmental factors. This has resulted in an increase in price in turn increasing returns to growers.

Australia may be able to take advantage of the stabilised world prune orchard and increase plantings slowly to avoid supply and demand issues. Controlled growth was the message conveyed to the member countries.

The US industry continues to invest significant funds into health and nutrition research – providing results which benefit the global dried prune industry.

This health and nutrition information will be used in worldwide promotions so all member countries are promoting the same message.

The Chilean sun-drying (solar) technology may be implemented in Australia as we have similar climatic conditions to Chile. Further investigated in the technology may be beneficial to see if it suits the Australian conditions. Sun-drying may help the industry reduce the cost of production for growers and may reduce the industries carbon foot print. This might make it more sustainable and cost effective. This may also be used in promotional activity to promote a clean-green sustainable industry.

Dissemination of Information

Following the IPA Conference, all delegates were required to provide input for a joint report on their observations and conclusions.

As a result, summary articles were published in *The Vine* (July - Sept 2015 edition Vol. 11 Issue 3).

Prior to the study tour an article was published in *The Vine* (April - June 2015 edition Vol. 10 Issue 2).

Grant Delves (APIA Chairman) and Ann Furner (IDO) reported on the IPA Conference to members at the organisation's AGM and Annual Growers' Conference on 8th September 2015.

All presentations at the IPA Conference can be found on the IPA website; www.ipaprunes.org

Itinerary

15th IPA World Prune Congress

SIRMIONE, ITALY, MAY 25-31, 2015

Working Sessions

Monday, May 25th

17:00	Executive Committee Meeting	Villa Cortine Palace Hotel
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Tuesday, May 26th

09:00	IPA General Assembly	Villa Cortine Palace Hotel
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10:30	<i>Coffee break</i>	
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11:00	IPA 15 th World Prune Congress Opening	Villa Cortine Palace Hotel
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11:30	IPA Statistical Update	Christian Amblard
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12:00	Producing Country Reports:	
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12:00	Australia	Grant Delves
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12:20	Chile and Argentina	Andres Rodriguez
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12:40	France	Dominique Botteon
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13:00	<i>Lunch</i>	
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14:30	Conference resumption	
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14:30	Italy	Alberto Levi
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14:50	Serbia	Aleksander Tomic
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15:10	South Africa	Dappie Smit
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15:30	United States of America	Donn Zea
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15:50	<i>Coffee break</i>	
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16:15	Effects of dietary supplementation with prunes on attainment or peak bone mass during growth and development in mice	Dr. B. Halloran
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Wednesday, May 27th

09:30	Opening technical session	Villa Cortine Palace Hotel
09:45	Prune sun drying process in Chile	Erick Cea
	Focus on sun-drying in South Africa	Chris Krone
	Elements on dehydration in France	Jean Luc Jagueneau
11:00	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
11:30	Producing 30-Brix puree from pulp	
	Remaining on prune pits after pitting	Andrea Rustichelli
12:00	Localizing irrigation rates with diversified	
	Qualities of soils in the same orchard	Maurizio Marmugi
12:30	<i>Lunch</i>	
14:00	Round-table: "Evolutionary Aspects of Quality"	
	Safety: MRL's and traceability	
	Information: "Clean Label" food products	
	Cultural requirements: origin, ethic production, sustainability	
16:00	End of session	

Thursday, May 28th

08:00	Technical Tour	
17:30	Executive Committee Meeting	Villa Cortine Palace Hotel
19:30	Official group photo	Villa Cortine Palace Hotel

Recommendations

For the Industry:

- That the Australian Prune Industry Association should continue to maintain direct contact with relevant IPA member countries so as to keep Australian growers fully informed about market trends and new technologies that may be adapted for use by Australian growers.
- That the Australian Prune Industry Association continues to evaluate new and old varieties and include rootstocks at the variety trial sites.
- That the Australian Prune Industry Association encourage all growers to deliver a consistently high quality product, that is safe for the consumer.
- That the Australian Prune Industry Association encourages new investments into value added products, helping to reduce waste and increase returns to growers.
- That the Australian Prune Industry Association encourages new investment in sun-drying technology to reduce the industries carbon foot print. Sun-drying innovations outlined by the Chileans look very promising and may be considered as an alternative to traditional dehydration, reducing the costs and therefore increasing the grower margins.
- That the Australian Prune Industry Association investigate consumer requirements to tailor products to meet their needs. There is a need to better understand what consumers want or need to know about dried prunes and to strategically promote both existing and new prune products.
- That the Australian Prune Industry Association investigate new markets and export opportunities.
- That the Australian Prune Industry Association encourage slow steady growth to reduce the chance of a boom/bust cycle as seen in the past, emphasizing that quality is high on the agenda.
- That the Australian Prune Industry Association continues to better educate consumers about the health benefits of prunes, changing the focus from just digestive health benefits.

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Contact List

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2. Alberto Levi – Italian Dried Prune Industry

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Appendices



Australian representatives are the Gala Dinner, Sirmione, Italy. May 2015.



Peter Raccanello, Yenda prune grower, inspecting Alberto Levi's prune orchard in northern Italy. May 2015.



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Grant Delves
Chairman

APIA NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

Chair

Grant Delves

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Michael Zalunardo

Paul Carver

Tony Toscan

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Congress presentations give prune growers hope



Australian growers showed their commitment to improving the prune industry sending 13 delegates to the 15th International Prune Association (IPA) Congress in Sirmione, Italy. This was the largest delegation from member countries, and with Peter Calabria from Yenda Producers Co-Operative the only non-grower present, proved strong grower dedication.

Led by IPA President Alberto Levi, the Italian team did a fantastic job in organising a very informative congress in a spectacular location. All member countries France, Italy, Australia, United States, Serbia, South Africa and Chile shared very exciting information about new technologies but also shared their recent experiences with increased pressure from consumers and the down turn in the market.

Country updates

Australia: Grant Delves opened the talks from member countries, outlining the Australian prune industry's renewed vigour. He talked about controlled expansion of the Australian industry with the main focus on good quality prunes. It is important to supply consumers with consistently high quality prunes where both processors and growers can improve their profitability, he said.

Chile: Andres Rodriguez explained to the congress that Chile was unique in the fact that they exported the majority of the prunes grown. In 2014/2015 Chile produced just over 60,000 tonne of finished products consuming just over 800t (less than 2% of production) domestically. Chilean prunes are sent to over 35 countries including the US and Australia, with Mexico and Russia their biggest markets.

There was a small debate about the tonnages per hectare grown in Chile however it was settled that they produce 5.5t dried fruit per hectare.

Argentina: Argentina is no longer a member of the IPA, and so no representatives were present at the congress. Reports suggest Argentina grew 10,000t in 2014/2015 with 35,000t predicted for 2015/2016.

United States: The US is focusing on increasing the value of prunes rather than increasing the volume. Representing the Californian Dried Plum Board, Sunsweet Growers Co-Operative Chief Executive Officer Dane Lance said growers should aim to grow big prunes. Those growers who produce big prunes will survive and both processors and growers will be profitable, he said.

Mr Lance emphasised the importance of actively promoting prunes and said there was a noticeable bump in sales when prunes were advertised on television. Last year alone Sunsweet processed 65,000t of prunes and spent \$23 million on advertising. In contrast, the Californian Dried Plum Board has an annual budget of \$4 million for promotions which is raised through grower levies.

The Americans believe acreage has stabilised. Theoretically world production could rise to 250,000t; however we do not want that as realistically we can only manage 230,000t.

To date for season 2014/2015 California produced just under 118,000t which is slightly under the 2013/2014 production of 131,000t.

France: Dominique Botteon told the congress that at the start of the worldwide over-production crisis (2009-2013) French prune production was at its peak with 14,000ha planted, of which 11,800ha were over five years old. Surveys in 2014 show acreage has fallen to 12,000ha including 10,800ha of bearing trees, producing 35 to 40,000t.

Over the last couple of years French Government aid has changed rendering some growers unprofitable and they have left the industry. To receive the government aid growers must prove that they are still viable by producing more than 2.5t/ha per year. If they accomplish these results they receive €1000/ha from the government.

A period of cold and rain at the time of harvest destroyed part of the 2014 crop and 36,000t was produced. Going into that season Mr Botteon reported France had 15,700t carried over, but the low crop yield meant that carry-over into 2015 is much lower at 9,000t. Heavy fruit drop after bloom indicates the 2015 harvest is also likely to be down, with estimates similar to last year.

The French consume 30,000t of prunes annually, the highest per capita consumption in the world. However, consumption is under threat as consumers demand better quality prunes. This has been compounded by less advertising and the result a slow decline in sales. To halt the decline the French are fighting back, and switching the focus of their promotion to the origin of prunes - Agen prunes.

Serbia: Serbia's association with prunes dates back to the Bronze Age, but they only joined the IPA this year.

Serbia has a staggering 78,000ha of orchards however only 3,200ha is dedicated to prunes, with American variety Stanley the major selection. Of the 8,700t of current production only 4% is dried.

In 2014 Serbia consumed 1,200t of prunes and they exported 7,500t. Serbia's prune association has 10 members which represents 70% of all Serbian exports. It was very interesting listening to Aleksandar Jovanovic and no doubt in years to come the IPA members will learn a great deal more about Serbian production.

Italy: Host country Italy is a relatively small producer of prunes with 1,360t grown and processed by three co-operatives in Italy in 2014. Despite the small production, consumption is high. To meet the domestic demand for prunes, fruit is imported with the majority already packed by Sunsweet.

Mr Levi said Italian growers did not receive government assistance anymore and as a consequence consumers were asked to pay more for prunes to absorb the increased costs of labour and energy.

South Africa: Prune production in South Africa has halved from around 580ha planted in 2002 to 276ha in 2014. Dapple Smit said Van Der Merwe was the main cultivar grown with 72% of the total area planted to this one variety. However the industry was actively looking for more low chill cultivars to commercialise.

Mr Smit said South Africa had many challenges which included: competition from fresh products. They recognised the need to increase production, but to do so in a sustainable way while managing quality and the importance of understanding consumers' preferences for pitted or non-pitted fruit if they were to successfully increase local consumption.



Tony Toscan, Peter Calabria, Frank De Rossi and Bruce Gowrie-Smith listen intently to the translations during the congress.



Alberto Levi's Orchard in Northern Italy.

Congress speakers

Several guest speakers were present at the congress and summaries of some of these presentations will appear in various issues of *The Vine*.

Quality round table

Mr Levi introduced a new concept to the IPA Congress in the form of a round table discussion on the 'Evolutionary aspects of quality'. In theory this was a good idea however the execution was not so good. As Mr Delves pointed out, 1hr 20mins of the 2hr discussion about quality had passed before growers were mentioned. Mr Delves believed growers should have been the primary focus of the discussion and was disappointed that the talk was so market orientated.

A positive outcome of the discussion was the decision for all member countries to pool resources about the health aspects of prunes and to provide a consistent message about health in the various forms of media.

Technical tour

International delegates were invited to visit Mr Levi's 80ha orchard and processing plant Monte Re' during the technical tour. The orchard was planted over three years from 2010 and contains 55ha of prunes and 25ha of sour cherries which are irrigated using micro-sprinklers at a low pressure of 40ppm. Plant density is relatively low with 6.5m x 5m plant spaces and pruning takes 120hrs/ha. Glysophate is used to desucker. The 707's planted in

2010 were harvested for the first time in 2014: Mr Levi said this was a normal harvest for Italy, but Chile would have called it a light crop.

The Monte Re' processing plant has 16 drying tunnels that dry 100t of fresh fruit per day. The Australian growers were interested in the tray stacking technology and determining if aspects could be adopted back in Australia.

Delegates were shown new equipment which allows Monte Re' to produce prune puree from the flesh left on the pit after pitting. Andrea Rustichelli explained this process in detail during his presentation at the congress. This technology was impressive as they are turning what would have been a waste product into a valuable part of their business.

Next congress

Hector Claro of Chile was elected the new IPA President and Jean-Luc Jagueneau of France, Vice President.

The next congress will be conducted in San Diego, Chile in October 2016.

Funding

A large number of growers were able to attend the congress thanks to the funding provided by Horticulture Innovation. *DP14700 International Prune Association Conference 2015* is a Voluntary Contribution (VC) project. All delegates contributed towards the final project report and will take part in disseminating information to a wider audience.

New technology for sun drying



The cost of energy is too high in Chile to use conventional tunnel dryers and as a result 80% of Chile's prunes are sun dried.

Sun drying is affordable, costing 20c/kg dried fruit compared to conventional drying where the cost of gas is believed to account for 50-60c/kg of dried fruit.

Climatic conditions in Chile are very favourable for sun drying as rain rarely falls during the harvest months of January, February or March. A high level of radiation and areas of high wind also assist with natural drying.

Conventional sun drying in a drying yard can take up to 15 days; however the addition of plastic covers to create tunnels has helped growers significantly reduce this time (Table 1).

Furthermore, both the drying yard and drying bed processes require the fruit to be turned as it dries otherwise the pit sinks through the fruit and is very difficult to remove during pitting. Two people are needed to drag a rope under the fruit and turn it.

The fastest and most cost effective way to dry prunes in Chile is in a drying bed with plastic. New technology is proving to be promising as the industry aims to sun dry prunes in three days.

Swiss company CK2 is working closely with Chilean growers to develop a fully automated sun drying tunnel called 'Natural solar drying'.

One of the first steps in the project was to understand what growers required to enable efficient sun drying. From this, nine specifications were developed:

1. Develop a simple drying machine using solar energy to dry fruits
2. Drying plums in less than five days
3. Cost of the machine and process is less than the cost for standard sun drying process



Plums drying inside a CK2 solar tunnel.

4. Protection against rain dust and other contaminants
5. Use green energy and sustainable models
6. Easy and quick to load and unload
7. Scalable to dry large quantities of plums
8. Compatible for the drying of other fruits
9. Opportunity to patent.

Prototypes were built and after many trials the current product was developed. The new tunnel meets the specifications set by growers and has the following features:

1. Solar tunnel with motorised metal conveyor
2. Automatic loading and unloading at one side of the tunnel
3. Air forced tunnels: fans are driven by timer/temperature/moisture
4. Tunnel dimensions: length 50m, width 4m height 1.5m (adaptable)
5. Air temperatures up to 65°C
6. Dries plums in three days
7. Can be disassembled
8. Patent pending.

Each tunnel has the capacity to hold 36,000 kilograms of fresh fruit. It holds 18kg/m² over one layer of fresh fruit and has the surface area of 200m².

CK2 are seeing the many benefits of this tunnel as they dry large amounts of plums using limited man power, producing a product free of contamination. Successful trials of other fruits such as grapes and cherries have also been carried out.

Further work needs to be undertaken on a larger scale to ensure its cost effectiveness; however CK2 are planning to start new commercial partnerships in the near future.

Growers are under more pressure from consumers to be 'green' and use sustainable practices. The CK2 technology helps achieve this through to reducing the prune industry's carbon footprint by reducing the amount of prunes dried in conventional tunnels.

For further information on the CK2 tunnel contact Sebastien Jacot-Decombes
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Table 1. Comparison of four tried and tested Chilean drying methods for prunes.

	Days to dry	Average temp (°C)	Humidity	Ventilation required	Turning required
Drying Yard	15	30-35	Low	No	Yes
Drying Yard + Plastic	7	60-70	High	Yes	No
Drying Bed	10	30-35	Low	No	Yes
Drying Bed + Plastic	5	70	High	Yes	No
'Natural Solar Drying'	3		High	Yes	No

Bone health study continues



Preliminary research by Dr Bernard Halloran from the University of California, San Francisco shows a diet high in prunes may be beneficial for osteoporosis sufferers.

Dr Bernard Halloran from the University of California, San Francisco is studying the benefits of prunes for treating and preventing osteoporosis in mice, with the aim to develop treatments in humans.

Osteoporosis is a "skeletal disorder characterised by decreased bone volume and increased risk of fracture". The four main causes of osteoporosis

are: post-menopausal (estrogen deficiency), age-related, drug-induced and disuse.

It is quiet scary to know that everyone, beginning around the age of 30 loses bone and everyone if they live long enough will experience an osteoporotic fracture.

Bone volume is regulated by two populations of stem cells in bone - osteoblasts (bone forming cells) and osteoclasts (bone resorbing cells) - which work in concert.

Dr Halloran aimed to prove that the resorption of bone would slow or even stop in mice if they were fed a diet enriched with prunes. However, his study has shown that the consumption of prunes not only prompts the prevention of bone loss but it has helped prompt bone growth.

The mice in the study were fed a prune powder equivalent to 25 prunes per day for an adult. This is an unrealistic amount for most consumers however further studies aim to identify the active compound in prunes and determine how these compounds work and whether the results will be replicated in humans.

Ausprune growers are nervous that once the compound is identified it will be synthesised artificially and supplied to the consumers via a pill - reducing the demand for fresh prunes.

Dr Halloran predicts it will take another three years to discover the compound and begin human trials - only then can the industry confidently say that prunes help with bone health in humans.

Prunes take pride of place in regional cookbook

The ABC's Australia cooks competition has emphasised the importance of prunes to the Riverina, announcing a recipe in which they feature as one of the two winners for the region.

The competition was launched to start a conversation that would highlight Australia's regional food communities and produce a beautiful book full of regional recipes.

Judges looked over more than 200 entries and selected the final winners based on:

- Regionality - Showcasing local ingredients;
- Simplicity - Simple recipes that respect the ingredients; and
- Balance - Good flavour profiles and the need to ensure a balance of diverse recipes for the book.

Australian Prune Industry Association (APIA) Industry Development Officer Ann Furner entered her Prune, Sauterne and almond crème caramel recipe and was selected a winner to represent the Riverina.

"It's pretty exciting to have a prune recipe represent the Riverina, which is often referred to as the 'food bowl of Australia'," she said.



Prune, sauterne and almond crème caramel.

"We grow some amazing products here and I decided to feature three of them - prunes, Botrytis Semillon wine and almonds - in one of my favourite recipes. It's my own take on a traditional dessert from Piemonte in Italy, crossed with the classic Crème Caramel and is a great way to celebrate the Italian heritage of Griffith."

Announcing the winners, competition organisers said: "The recipes and stories have been inspirational and prove not only that Australians love to cook, but that there is a growing passion for eating good local ingredients."

Australia Cooks will be available from ABC stores next year.