



State round ups – 2019/20 season

The Onion Project hosted its first webinar in early May, where several industry representatives provided guests with a state by state season update.

Gregg Bragg and Michael Sippel from Terranova Seeds Australia spoke about conditions in South Australia and Queensland respectively, while Tim Groom from Wynyon provided an overview of the onion season in Tasmania.

Ian Locke, Export Facilitator with the Tasmanian Fruit & Vegetable Export Facilitation Group also gave an update on the work the group is doing to prepare Tasmania, and the broader community, for the exporting of horticulture products in 2021 and beyond.

South Australia

In South Australia, harvest concluded in the first week of May. A record heat wave in December saw the state experience 10 days of above 40-degree temperatures which proved tough on the varieties of onions reaching maturity at the time. This caused issues with neck rot and crop damage occurred due to heat affected bulbs. Temperatures in January were back to normal and it began to cool down from February onwards which was ideal for harvest. South Australia experienced excellent harvest conditions during February and March with little rain.

Overall, growers were relatively happy, with crops varying from region to region. Early crop bulb size was small, although some crops were high yielding and prices were strong. South Australian growers are facing issues with fusarium basal rot, particularly the Mallee and Murray Bridge regions where temperatures are higher.

Packing has been a challenge as growers find it hard to shift large brown and red onions due to restaurant closures and the unwinding of the March/April panic buying. With the closure of processing and restaurant trades, limited supermarket trade, and while Australia remains in lockdown due to the COVID-19 crisis, growers are concerned for the start of the season.

South Australia has since started seeding, with the season ahead looking to be influenced by water allocation and the COVID-19 induced lack of restaurant trade.

Queensland

Following the completion of harvest in November/December 2019, Queensland recorded lower yields due to lack of rain, with the state receiving up to two inches of rain for the entire growing season. Although they were down on yield, prices were reasonable, and overall Queensland experienced a great season.

So far in 2020, Queensland has experienced little rain and with planting occurring in March/April, growers who don't receive winter rain may face challenging conditions. The state has seen a significant amount of hybrid onions planted in early March, which is not a traditional time to plant. Looking ahead, we'll see these early hybrid varieties coming on the



market in mid-September, which may clash with growers storing onions in the south.

The shortage of Tوترil and availability of other herbicides is a concern to growers, as is the labour shortages that come with backpackers repatriating back home due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Queensland growers rely wholly on a hand harvest through the Seasonal Worker Programme and are hoping restrictions are somewhat lifted around harvest time in September. With the outlook forecasting a wetter than usual winter/spring, this could also put pressure on labour as growers will all want to harvest at the same time, and with limited labour able to harvest onions, it could force a price war on the available labour pool.

Tasmania

Last season was an extremely strong export season for Tasmania, on the back of the hot, dry weather Europe received, resulting in higher demand and prices. The 2019 growing season in Europe has been much more normal, seeing demand drop for Tasmanian supplies.

Tasmania had a good planting season, with crops going in on time and coming up well. The state received cold, windy weather in early November, although temperatures warmed up in December and crops began to grow. Having received little rain from early September through to early January, crops were supplemented with irrigation, resulting in good yields and a positive start to the season.

Harvesting began 10 – 14 days late due to cold weather, resulting in the late lifting of early crops in mid-January and delays in harvesting. April was particularly wet, and yields were good, up on last year. The quality of the onions so far is good, although growers are seeing some staining from late harvested onions.

In terms of the market, Tasmania had a busy season exporting to Europe and local demand increased significantly due to panic buying in March. Local demand is now back to normal and Tasmania won't see the export into countries they've seen in previous years, such as South East Asian markets, due to COVID-19 restrictions. With limited exports, marketing the last of the Tasmanian crop may be difficult.

Growers in Tasmania have started planting next season's crop and are positive about what the future holds.

Export update – The Other Side

Helping to facilitate collaboration and disseminate information regarding how Tasmania will export horticulture products from 2021 and beyond, is a current focus of the Tasmanian Fruit & Vegetable Export Facilitation Group (the Group).

The Other Side project aims to map a pathway for the relaunch of Tasmanian exports into international markets post COVID-19.

The Group is focusing on a number of considerations, including workforce and labour, social



distancing restrictions, the changing dynamics of grading and packing products, technology, freight and logistics, availability of inputs, food safety and continuity and the importance of branding and marketing the benefits of the Tasmanian product.

There are many key trends and issues the Group believe are important for industry to consider in order to begin exporting again. The Other Side project contains important information for all Tasmanian businesses, growers, packers, exporters and the broader supply chain.

Ian acknowledged the attendance of his colleague Peter Hockings from Growcom in Queensland. Peter in Queensland, Ian in Tasmania and Manus Stockdale in Western Australia/South Australia are Vegetable Export Facilitators under Hort Innovation's project, VG16085. VG16085 was recently extended to include export awareness and readiness services to onion growers.

For more information on The Other Side project visit:

<https://mailchi.mp/55bd9dc9f1e6/welcome-to-our-first-newsletter-6414044?e=b47d30a99d>

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