

Collaboration vital for success: Robbie

ROBBIE Davis is the chief executive officer of an organisation that majority of South Australians consume on a daily basis, and has seen the industry complete many projects that not only benefit the growers, but also have advantages for exports and sustainability.

Hailing from Narrung, Robbie is the second to share her thoughts on the industry she is so passionate about with *SmartFarmer's* Q and A.

How did you become involved with Potatoes SA:

Following almost 10 years living in South East Asia, I returned with my family to the land as a producer of beef cattle. After a position in the state government overseeing international trade and investment in that region, I worked as an agribusiness consultant and was on the board of the Murraylands/Riverland Regional Development Australia.

I enjoy the challenges of start-up businesses and despite no former experience in horticulture, I knew that my skills were transferable,

in fact beneficial, to a differently perceived sector. I had appropriate academic qualifications and also appreciated that potatoes are the third most significant food crop globally and grossly under-profiled.

How many potato growers are there in SA:

The association represents the industry's value chain from production to consumer. This 'whole of value chain' focus is critical and is the association's point of difference. The association represents some 2000 people across that chain in SA alone; perhaps 70 are producers.

What is the industry's contribution to the state:

It is estimated that the industry contributes \$202 million to the state's gross domestic product and \$440m value-added. But, many of the SA-based businesses have operations interstate. SA is the nation's largest producer at some 385,000 tonnes of a national 1.2m tonnes.

The state also produces 80 per cent of Australia's fresh

washed potatoes, which are largely exported to the eastern seaboard.

What changes have you seen within the industry during your time as CEO:

Like all sectors of agribusiness, the potato industry is becoming significantly corporatised and rationalised. This will continue and the smaller survivors will provide high value niche products for niche markets. There is a critical need to both increase consumption (as in all developed economies), increase value-added product, increase certified seed use and exports, and reduce pre-farmgate loss through valorisation. The latter is critical to increase primary production margins.

Have you been involved with any projects with Potatoes SA?

Projects include industry-funded success of generic marketing in the food sector in 2013, innovative nutrient management in the Australian potato industry from 2014-16, export strategy for the Australian potato



Potatoes SA chief executive officer Robbie Davis has been involved with many industry projects that have helped shape the future of the industry.

industry, in-market (SE Asia) value chain mapping for the export of fresh and seed potatoes from SA, transformation of graded out potatoes into pure, nutritious, premium food products targeting pediatric, geriatric and convenience market segments.

Ongoing projects include the development of a premium SA vodka from waste potato peel and potato puree, demonstrating the functional benefits of ingredient replacements in products across a number of different premium categories.

Where do you see the potato industry progressing to in 10 years' time:

The industry's size is negligible on a global scale but

its significance can increase through maintenance of continuing biosecurity advantages, particularly in the certified seed sector. The recent market access to Indonesia with supply of relatively disease-free seed particularly to the SE Asian crisping market (growing at 30 per cent annually) will increase.

There will always be a need for collaboration but to our trading partners, 'Brand Australia' and what represents must prevail in marketing all products. The industry must view itself as part of the 'food industry', and work at partnering for export. Our value-add is pathetic at best and must improve to sustain

the industry.

If you could chat with anyone in the world, who would it be and why:

Stephen Fry, his use of the English language is so extraordinary in every way; unique, funny, shocking, tender, informed, sad, honest and so readable. If only a tiny portion of the population would aim to articulate as he does.

What's your proudest achievement with Potatoes SA:

There are many association achievements including gaining market access for seed into Indonesia, the review of the horticultural award and projects in potato waste transformation.