

SA GROWER

Innovative R&D essential

POTATOES SA

By **ROBBIE DAVIS, CEO**

WITH the recent focus on innovation and the over-use of the term – such as ubiquitous Centres of Innovation – one might think that it has come to represent nothing more than the pursuit of money at the expense of fundamental science that underpins all research and development.

But it is important to remember that without innovation, there is no progress.

Bringing new, innovative and exciting technologies to market requires a different way of thinking.

There are now more new ideas than people, and more markets than ever before in human history.

It is not enough to have a good product; innovation is as much about getting new products to the right market as it is about coming up with the idea in the first place.

The great news is that some of the most exciting innovations in Australia are coming out of the agriculture and food sector.

These are delivering products and tools that will help us adapt to a warming



Potatoes SA is the voice for seed producers, growers, fresh market, packers, processors, marketers, exporters, wholesalers and retail.

climate, meet the changing dietary preferences of an ageing and growing population, and helping make food production more sustainable and productive.

Traditionally, science

advances in agriculture have come from government-funded laboratories and academic institutions.

But as governments across the globe look to make scientific research deliver practi-

cal industry outcomes and be financially more self-sustaining, a shift is happening.

Agribusiness innovation is increasingly being found in partnerships and alliances between research organisations, governments and industry; from multi-national agribusiness giants with billions of dollars at their disposal all the way to small-scale start-ups.

It is about great concepts, passion and out-of-the box investment.

This is the real value chain at work – lab to paddock to plate.

Australia is a world leader in scientific research but we are ranked 76th globally for its extension into real world benefits, for example, innovation efficiency.

Similarly, Australia is at the bottom of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development rankings when it comes to the intensity of collaboration of universities and science institutes with industry.

This is because sources of funding have changed.

Governments have grown complacent, taking the con-

tinued supply of quality food for granted.

Consequently, public spending on R&D has declined.

A seemingly obvious solution to Australia's innovation inefficiency is the partnering of research institutions with the agribusiness industry.

But the industry itself is changing with mergers and acquisitions resulting in efficient R&D but a reduction in diverse, truly innovative, transformative ideas.

It is also decreasing the pool of potential partners for public investment.

A recent CSIRO study demonstrates that funding research and development throughout the research pipeline from 'blue sky' projects to translational science makes solid economic sense, regularly delivering more than a five-fold return on investment.

But the bigger global players often find this technology chase too disruptive to existing 'safe' core business strategies.

Only a relatively small venture capital environment for seed funding exists in

Australia.

Such effective partnerships would also provide business skills, access to other partners and mentoring, while incubation and acceleration would become the focus of the research partner, enabling researchers to concentrate on technologies with commercial potential.

Internationally, there is a much greater appetite for commercialisation and this is why so many Australian start-ups take their ideas overseas then return to the Australian market once they have become established.

We live in a global market and our connections must be global.

This means that our strong foundation of excellence in research must be in concert with industry to enable translation of this research into real world advantage.

We are not short of entrepreneurial human resources but we must make the connections to ensure that Australia's agricultural innovation is right up there with the world's best and is accessible to all primary producers.