

SA GROWER

Value-adding curbs waste

POTATOES SA

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AUSTRALIAN studies indicate that about a quarter of horticulture production is lost inside the farmgate.

Most of this is thought to be avoidable, with roughly 80 per cent of these losses able to be eliminated.

Last year I was awarded the RIRDC Rural Woman of the Year Award for SA and I employed the \$10,000 bursary to discover how the European Union and United Kingdom were being challenged (and winning) in a similar environment.

The project investigated the need for Australian agricultural and horticultural industries to increase productivity through decreasing pre-consumer food loss and post-consumer food waste in the value chain, particularly at the farmgate. There was a focus on the potato industry; the world's third largest food crop.

The study tour revealed European practices in value-adding to graded-out (waste) horticultural product pre-farmgate. In Europe,



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

the use of byproducts/co-streams has enabled a maximising approach to the use of food generally. The major difference is the EU government-led initiative to curb waste entirely across the horticultural value chain that has been derived from an environmental perspective, not an economic one.

There is no doubt that the environmental imperative driven by many small landholders provides a different perspective to challenges in Australia. But the key issues of value-adding are the same.

Australian industry and governments are failing in their response to reducing

waste and increasing profitability at farmgate.

The processing sector in Europe is taking responsibility for waste reduction by adopting a total chain approach and is working transparently with its supply chains in a non-competitive way to reduce food losses, starting on-farm.

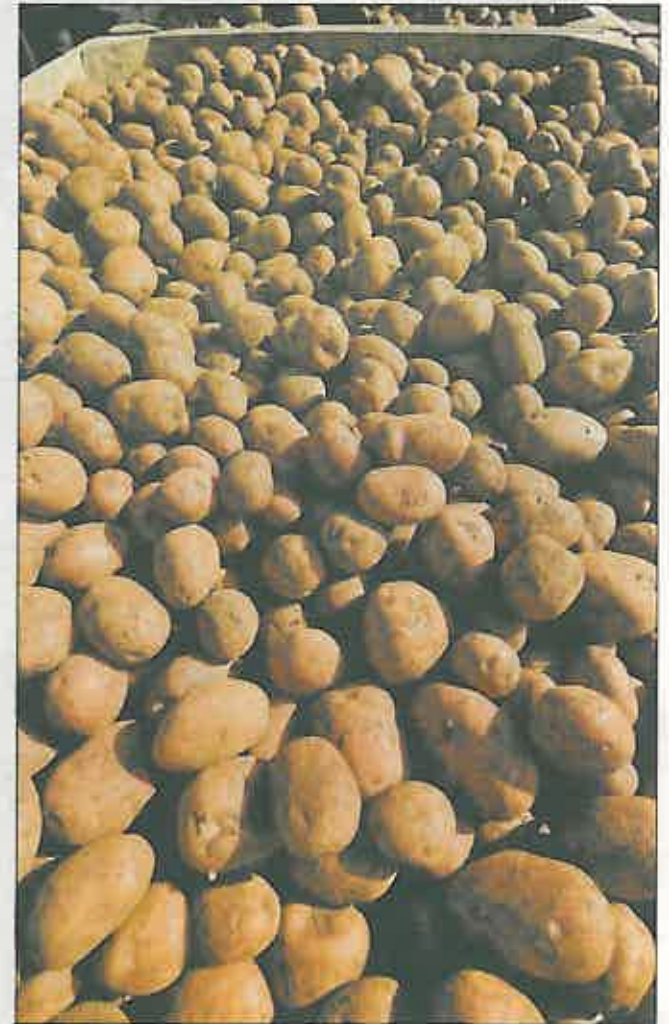
This tour provided valuable research into understanding under-valued waste streams, particularly in the potato industry and wider horticulture sector to determine viable options for value-adding food loss and industry waste. It was understood that research

and technology in the EU (including the UK) was comparatively advanced in the transformation of 'waste' into value-added products.

Key recommendations include:

- Using clever packaging to extend shelf-life
- Value-adding of out-grades/off-cuts for 'ready-meals' and potato products of high net worth
- Starch, high value protein and cellulosic fibre production
- Biogas and fertiliser production as byproducts
- Extension of value chains in the fresh sector to include processing facilities in a collaborative model
- Establishment of REFRESH Australia through a government initiative and partnership.

Many of these recommendations are being initiated. But this study also highlights the need for an industry-led, government-supported food waste fund enabling investigation, innovation and alleviation of the industry-wide productivity drain caused by on-farm food losses.



The Australian horticulture industry is lagging behind Europe in developing value-adding options to reduce 'waste' along the supply chain.