

# Hort connections developed

## National conference aids grower network

BY ELIZABETH ANDERSON

HORTICULTURE producers from throughout Australia have been in Adelaide this week growing their networks as part of the inaugural Hort Connections conference.

The new event, merging the National Horticulture Convention and the Produce Markets Association conference Fresh Connections, attracted a national and international crowd to SA to hear the latest news in the industry.

Potatoes SA chief executive officer Robbie Davis said the decision to combine the two events was a "hallelujah" moment.

"It provides a united front for horticulture in Australia," she said.

"From an export point of view, it is a real strength to have that united conference. It is also cost-effective and brings in the whole industry."

WA potato grower Matthew Coccione, Beta Spuds, Mandogalup made the trip to Adelaide with his father Carlo to collaborate with others in the industry.

The Cocciones, who grow about 10,000 tonnes of potatoes annually and pro-

cess about 25,000t, said a national convention in a central location, such as Adelaide, was ideal.

"Events like this bring an enormous opportunity to network with other industries," Matthew said.

The three-day event, held at the Adelaide Convention Centre, took in a range of topics including global innovation, modern culinary trends and an Adelaide retail tour - showing off Frewville Foodland and Adelaide Central Markets.

There was also a focus on the availability of export markets, with the Australian Vegetables Export Seminar.

Ausveg export development national manager Michael Coote said growers were looking to either break into export markets or increase their export market share as a way to grow their business.

"There is enormous potential for Australian vegetable growers to break into new and existing markets and expand their production for consumers in key export markets such as Asia and the Middle East," he said.

"We want to ensure that all vegetable growers looking to



**A-PEELING EVENT:** Matthew and Carlo (right) Coccione, Beta Spuds, Mandogalup, WA, with Mitolo Group's Liam Connole and Callum Cormack and Potatoes SA chief executive officer Robbie Davis (front) at Hort Connections.

explore export markets have the tools at-hand to successfully do so."

Agriculture, Food and Fisheries Minister Leon Bignell said the event would

"plant the seed for innovation, networks and ideas" for horticulture, which generated about \$3.2 billion in revenue for SA in 2015-16.

PMA Australia-New Zea-

land Ltd CEO Darren Keating said the program had a range of topics including marketing, technology, biosecurity and food safety.

"It'll ensure our attendees,

including research organisations, input suppliers, producers, processors, marketers and retailers gain as much industry knowledge as possible," he said.