

## MEDIA RELEASE

Monday 3 June 2013

### **SOUTH AUSTRALIAN SCIENTIST AWARDED 'RESEARCHER OF THE YEAR'**

On Saturday evening during the 2013 AUSVEG National Convention, Dr Kathy Ophel Keller, a research scientist at the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) received the coveted National Award for Excellence in Research.

Dr Ophel Keller has been acknowledged for the contribution of her team to the horticultural industry, particularly the potato industry. The research, in collaboration with the Victorian State Government Department of Primary Industries (DPI), the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, has developed soil DNA diagnostic tests to assess the risk of diseases which reduce yield and tuber quality caused by powdery scab, root knot nematode, *Rhizoctonia*, and common scab.

Robbie Davis, CEO of Potatoes South Australia Incorporated, which represents the potato industry's entire value chain, was present with other industry stakeholders at the Convention and Gala Dinner at which the awards were made.

"This award demonstrates the dedication to agricultural and horticultural research in South Australia and the importance of the potato industry to the state, national and international horticultural sectors. SARDI is a partner in the Australian Potato Research Program (APRP) and this co-operative research headed by Dr Ophel Keller will result in practical detection and options for disease management," said Ms Davis.

This program has completed its third year of delivering soil and plant health outcomes to industry. In July 2013, a testing service for growers ('Predicta Pt') will be available to growers from SARDI's molecular diagnostic centre, led by Dr Alan McKay. SARDI researcher Michael Rettke has developed an agronomic advisor manual, which focuses on the interpretation of soil test results, and the review of the basic biology of each pathogen. It summarises relationships between pathogen DNA and yield loss, and links the soil test levels to appropriate disease management strategies.

"The industry is delighted that Dr Ophel Keller has been recognised for the enormous contribution she and her team have made to potato research and it is fitting that a South Australian scientist has been honoured. In South Australia, potatoes represent the largest horticulture contribution to gross food revenue and the state produces 80% of the nation's fresh washed potatoes. South Australia is also the largest producer of potatoes in an industry worth in excess of \$1/2 billion," she added.

The South Australian Research and Development Institute has world-class capability in applied Research and Development (R & D) for the potato industry value chain in the areas of plant health, pest and disease management, the identification of pest and disease problems, biosecurity, climate risk management, irrigation and salinity management post-harvest innovation and packaging, sensory testing, food safety and export market access.

ENDS

**For interviews and further information contact:**

Robbie Davis 0427 084 319