

SA GROWER

Global conference discusses diversity

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Potatoes SA

TUBERS were the talk of the town in Cusco, Peru, when the 10th World Potato Congress and the 28th Congress of the Latin American Potato Association were held together for the first time.

Potatoes are a way of life in Peru with scientific evidence supporting the belief potatoes were domesticated as early as 10,000 years ago in the high Andean highlands of south eastern Peru and north western Bolivia.

The oldest archaeological findings were made in the area of Lake Titicaca, the area near Ayacucho and in the Valley of Chulca. More than 4000 varieties of native potatoes grow in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador at altitudes ranging from 3500 metres to 4200m.

The WPC is the most important international event for potato scientists and businesses. It is held every three years in a different country and is organised by the non-profit WPC Inc and local partners.

The 10th WPC was organised by Peru's National Institute for Agricultural Innovation, in collaboration with the International Potato Centre, the National Agrarian University La Molina, Peru's Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism and the Peru country office of the United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organisation.

The event drew more than 800 participants from 50 countries to the potato's centre of origin for four days of scientific presentations, networking, field trips and celebration of the potato's cultural and economic importance.

There were 12 delegates from Australia, including Potatoes SA Board member's Richard Haynes, Elders, and Brad Higgins, Westpac Agribusiness, VICSPA general manager Nigel Crump, Vic Department of Agriculture's Tonya Wiechel, *Good Fruit & Vegetables* editor Ashley Walmsley and Tas seed producers.

This year there was a large focus on agro-ecology and

food security.

Conserving potato biodiversity is critical to assuring food security for future generations. Small landholders across the Andes tend to plant their potatoes in chaqru, a mix of varieties to assure production in the face of unpredictable conditions.

Potato experts from throughout the world participated in technical sessions covering seven themes: climate change and potato agri-food systems, trends in consumption and markets, variety development and biotechnology, pests and diseases, crop management; post-harvest and processing technology, and potato diversity and its relation to breeding, nutrition and health.

While the technical sessions and plenary presentations made the WPC and ALAP Congress must-attend events for potato scientists and businesses, there was also an opportunity for 15 Peruvian students in agricultural sciences to experience the event through a scholar-



Potatoes SA board members Richard Haynes and Brad Higgins in Peru.

ship fund.

Day two of the WPC also marked the beginning of the "Imagine a World without Potatoes" campaign, through which the International Potato Centre will

partner with businesses to raise awareness of the potato's importance and generate greater demand for it.

We need to emulate this in Australia!

Following the Congress,

there were field visits to farms and experimental stations and side events, including the book launch of *The Potato: Pride of Peru*, published by San Ignacio de Loyola University.

There was even the setting of a Guinness World Record by preparing the world's biggest causa - a popular Peruvian appetiser made of mashed potatoes.

The 590 kilogram, 1.5m causa was prepared, displayed, and devoured by an eager public on the campus of Cusco's San Antonio de Abad National University.

The WPC International Committee has invited Potatoes SA to bid for the 2023 event.