

## SA GROWER

# Innovation remains crucial for success

**POTATOES SA**  
ROBBIE DAVIS, CEO

INNOVATION is an over-used word in every sector, industry, government and country at the moment.

It's not as if innovation is a 'new' phenomenon.

In fact, what we really mean is progress to survive both commercially and environmentally in a sustainable way.

Think of the 'stump-jump' plough invented in SA in 1876 by Richard Bowyer Smith. Was this called innovation?

Probably not. It was entrepreneurial to solve the particular practical problem of preparing the Mallee for cultivation.

The previously over-used word was 'strategy'.

I'm not a fan of either word, but I am an advocate for clever, smarter, unique and more efficient ways to increase agribusiness productivity.

Ernst & Young delivered a report *Agricultural Innovation - a National Approach to Grow Australia's Future*

on behalf of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources on how to modernise Australian agricultural innovation on March 5.

I'm not completely sure how one 'modernises innovation' and I must take some of the blame as I contributed to the report in my capacity as a primary producer and horticultural industry stakeholder.

There is no doubt Australian agriculture is highly successful in producing premium food for the global marketplace; the industry has relied upon intuition and the need to do things differently in an attempt to remain competitive.

This is despite the many institutions and bodies put in place across different jurisdictions and commodities that actually limit the effectiveness of our innovation investments.

Looking ahead, Australian agriculture faces unprecedented change, driven by changing global markets, increasing international competition, technological

disruption, transforming industry structures, climate variability and change, water scarcity and increasing threats from exotic incursions.

The National Farmers' Federation has set an ambitious target for a \$100-billion agriculture sector by 2030.

World class 'innovation' - that is, cleverness - will be essential to drive the transformational productivity gains required to meet this target.

The report makes recommendations aimed at benefiting all participants in Australia's agricultural innovation system, including researchers, research and development corporations, industry representatives, producers, processors, investors, government agencies and companies across the start-up, accelerator and incubator communities.

There are five recommendations in the report:

- Strengthening leadership for strategic direction, but also for improving connections, collaboration, and culture.



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

- Balancing funding and investment to solve short-term challenges as well as targeting transformational and cross-commodity outcomes.
- Establishing world-class innovation practices including disruptive thinking, ambition and entrepreneurship to maximise opportunities from our investments;
- Strengthening the regions to maximise innovation uptake and provide regions with a greater role in national priority-setting; and
- Establishing the next generation innovation platform for our data, physical infrastructure, and

regulatory environment.

We clearly need to harness the power of knowledge to make our agricultural systems more competitive, prosperous and sustainable. In my view we need to address the following:

- Australian agriculture must be a price setter, not taker.
- Australia has the capital and talent.
- We need to combine and conquer, and abolish tribalism.
- We need to foster a national community that respects and reveres agriculture.
- We can be a leading source for agtech, precision agriculture and sustainability globally.

- We must establish a new research paradigm to enable a competitive research advantage.
  - Agriculture must work across other sectors and not in isolation, adapting innovation for mutual benefit.
  - Australian agriculture must be flexible, responsive and attract 'outside of the industry' and international intellect to provide insights and synergies.
- Innovation or smart thinking has always been and will continue to be critical to our success, as we explore and unlock new opportunities both domestically and internationally.
- This is not new.