Agribusiness v COVID-19: And the winner is?
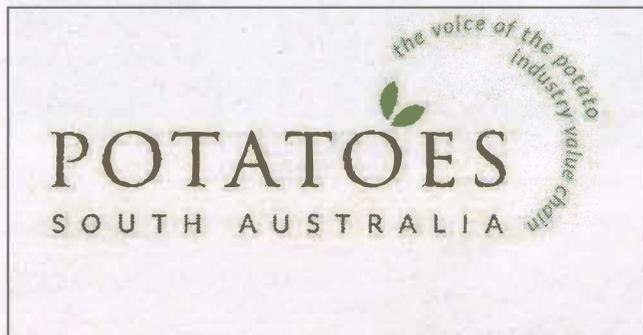
POTATOES SA

BY **ROBBIE DAVIS, CEO**

I HAD promised myself I wouldn't write about COVID-19, but here I am. It's also possible (and important) to put a positive spin on things.

TRADE IN FOOD

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation has warned that tariffs and export bans during the crisis could provoke food shortages around the world. This would be prompted by a shortage of labour despite promising staple crop production in key production systems. All trade barriers should be removed to allow and protect the flow of food.

Welcome to Australia! We produce enough food to feed 75 million people and our population is 25m. Between 80 and 96 per cent of the food on our supermarket shelves is Australian grown. We are net exporters, sending two-thirds of all food overseas. There is no risk to our food supply chain. As the pandemic worsens, the amount of food Australian primary producers grow hasn't changed, and it won't.

And the winner is: Agribusiness

BORDER CONTROLS

Many states have border restrictions in place. However, the agricultural supply chain will continue trading across borders, with Agriculture Minister David Littleproud announcing it will not be affected by shutdowns. Food production and supply are considered essential services.

And the winner is: Agribusiness

FRESH PRODUCE

Australia is renowned for some of the highest fresh food specifications in the world. With increased demand, supermarket chains have relaxed specifications for fruit and vegetables to meet consumer demand.

This means there is a reduced requirement to offer "aesthetically perfect" product. Skin blemishes, odd sizes and shapes, and light mechanical damage are now acceptable.

Currently, food waste costs the Australian economy $20 billion annually; pre-farmgate loss in agriculture is estimated at $3 billion, with horticulture contributing $1.7b. This is both unsustainable and scandalous.

By maximising supply we can meet this demand, ensuring continuity across the supply chain.

And the winner is: Agribusiness

PRODUCE PRICING

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission chairman Rod Sims has assured shoppers sharp price rises in fruit and vegetables are not price gouging by supermarkets.

Mr Sims said supermarkets had not altered their margins, but extra scrutiny on wholesalers was being applied. He said primary producers were benefitting, which should continue.

Unprecedented demand has left supermarkets without stock. Our food supply chain is simply adjusting to the increase in demand from panic buying.

And the winner is: Agribusiness

Agribusiness is essential to keep Australia moving. Governments understand and appreciate this. Agribusiness is finally recognised as essential!

NEED: The Fight Food Waste Cooperative Research Centre wants people to think about what they actually

Stockpiling food risks wastage

FOOD WASTE

SHOPPERS stockpiling groceries to prepare for COVID-19 are being warned against wasting food by a leading Australian authority.

Focusing on reducing household waste would save money and create less concern about running out of supplies, according to the Fight Food Waste Cooperative Research Centre chief executive officer Steven Lapidge.

The SA potato industry backs the message as it launches its own campaign reminding shoppers of the merits of the humble potato.

Dr Lapidge, based at the Fight Food Waste CRC in Adelaide, wants people to think more carefully about what they need to sustain their cooking and nutrition.

"International experience tells us food becomes much more valued during these trying times, and in turn everyone should focus on reducing their food waste," he said.

"We have seen the supermarket shelves cleared of staples and long-life products as a result of COVID-19 concerns.

"You can make up a healthy meal for your family without having to visit the shops."

Dr Lapidge referred to sustainable living websites that shared recipes for ingredients most households already had in their pantry or fridge.

– BELINDA WILLIS