

Boom time for Crookwell spud growers

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CROOKWELL seed potato growers are reaping the rewards of a great season, with yields almost double normal expectations.

With the harvest well under way, growers are achieving 20-plus tonnes to the acre - against their usual 10 to 12 tonnes. A leading grower Gary Kadwell said yesterday that the harvest was "best ever" for Crookwell seed.

"I was talking to a bloke the other day who is 92 and he hasn't seen one like it - that will give you an indication of how good a season it really has been," Gary said.

"I think this year we're actually going to set a new record."



Hard at work packing the potatoes delivered by the mechanical harvesters at Geoff and Margaret Fahey's "The Valley" property yesterday were Cheryl and Melissa Barlow.

The other good news is that there will be no difficulty selling the extra yield on the seed potato market. And at \$120 per tonne contract price, that's heartening news for growers, who have shared the problems of the long drought years with all other primary producers. Gary described the sale of seed as "very strong."

The bulk of Crookwell seed will be snapped up by South Australian growers, and those on the Atherton Tablelands, in Queensland. There won't be much in the way of ware potatoes, however - the only table spuds available will be those considered over-size for seed production.

Crookwell's reputation as the cleanest seed production area in the Southern Hemisphere has come as the result of new mini-tuber process developed largely by Crookwell growers in the 1980s and 90s, supported by a quarantine order against any foreign seed coming into the district.

"With that and the climate, we are free of viruses and soil borne diseases," Gary said.

But there is a blot on an otherwise blue horizon - a fight against potato imports from New Zealand is looming.

"Foreign spuds could introduce disease to our clean industry, and imports from across the Tasman must be stopped," Gary added.

"This is to stop the importation of zebra chip (a disease which affects the appearance of potatoes); we don't have that here and we don't want to bring it in.

"It's always an argument with free trade that things go out and they should be allowed to come back in, but any sane person would also think that if you are an isolated country and do not have a disease which causes major economic loss, it would be very important and wise, good policy to keep that disease out."



Source: <http://www.crookwellgazette.com.au/news/local/news/general/boom-time-for-crookwell-spud-growers/2160399.aspx>

Garry Kadwell