

A.O.C.C. Chairman's Report

Gordon Marks is Chairman of the Australian Onion Co-ordinating Committee.



During the second 12 months of my chairmanship, I have seen the onion industry in severe trouble and also in a remarkable position in regard to marketing of the crop.

The severe trouble was in finding space on ships going north to Europe to export the record crop. The result of space shortage was that some onions left too late and were a financial disaster for those that were forced to ship late.

The remarkable situation as far as marketing goes was that the shippers and exporters, by losing money on exports, guaranteed a very good price to those people back in Australia who kept onions. Unfortunately for Queensland, this was helped by Mother Nature ruining Queensland's early crops.

This situation may not happen again. So any new growers need to be sure they have a market for their onions, otherwise we will be back to the bad old days when speculators ruined the industry for the genuine grower.

We do have genuine interest in exporters wanting to ship onions again this year, but space is a problem and freight increases coupled with our higher valued dollars all makes the job difficult. It is truly getting to be the job for professionals to find their way through the maze of all the problems associated with exporting onions.

Following are some of the positives and negatives in our industry as I see them:

Positives

Australia does have acceptance of its onions on world markets, providing we land them when the market needs them.

Tasmania did the Australian image a lot of good this last season, with ideal dry harvesting resulting in marketing good above average quality. Congratulations!

The mainland had some good outturn, some even better than Tasmania, but, unfortunately had some disasters too, and buyers tend to remember the bad. We in the industry need to develop our expertise to only export top quality.

The A.O.C.C. is being perceived more and more as the united voice of the onion industry and as playing a vital role on behalf of the grower and the exporter: that is very good for all sides of the industry. The

A.O.C.C. shipping body has got together remarkably well this year and Peter Clements, our shipping co-ordinator, has to take no small amount of credit for this. Good on you, Peter!

We have maintained our independence as an organisation free from bureaucracy, despite pressures from Canberra, which has recognised our wish and our right to remain so.

Negatives

Not joining The National Farmers Federation I think has been a mistake: the industry is financial enough to afford it.

Some of the tactics used by some exporters left a bit to be desired and certainly don't give growers confidence to commit a percentage of their crop for export, which we need. Most exporters, though, did an excellent job, I hasten to add.

The waterfront continues to be a negative also. The slow action being implemented by the Federal Government to improve that area leaves a lot to be desired. All of Australia's standard of living depends on exports, thus the waterfront is important to us all. Politicians have been grossly negligent in allowing this to happen and will pay the price some time down the track.

That's enough negatives. Many thanks to all those people who contributed and attended meetings. Once again Reg Miller has done a sterling job, so a big thank you. Thanks also to John Salvestrin and Phil Sinclair for putting together our magazine, the Australian Onion Grower. I have every confidence in their ability.

Finally may the industry give everybody in it all of the rewards that people in the industry expect to get.

Cheers,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Marks', written in a cursive style.

GORDON MARKS