

Australian Onion Association CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Doug Marks is
Chairman of the
Australian Onion
Association

As predicted, 1992 was another year of over-supply. Prices returned to growers for most of the season of \$2.50 to \$4.00 per 20 kilo bag was below the cost of production.

However, prices at the retail level of 79 to 99 cents per kilo were common and, unfortunately, did not reflect the low prices Australian growers were receiving. Approaches were made by the Australian Onion Association to the Prices Surveillance Committee to investigate the high discrepancies that were occurring.

The only way the industry will deviate from the over-supply situation is for growers to focus on quality rather than quantity. There is no logical reason for producing extra tonnage if it has to be virtually given away at ridiculous prices.

Exporters have had a difficult year with intense competition from New Zealand and South American countries. It is expected that 1993 will also be difficult with Tasmania proposing to market more onions on the mainland of Australia as a consequence.

A positive step by this year's exporters was sending an observer on the Morton Bay vessel which carried onions to Europe. Problems were identified, recorded, discussed and served to be of great assistance in directing exporters in their endeavours of pursuing produce arriving in better shape overseas.

A Promotions Committee was formed in 1992 that strongly believes that we have a healthy

product that requires promotion. The problem is finding a way of funding the promotions, for without funding all endeavours are limited. As there are no longer any manufacturers of onion bags in Australia, our Association is endeavouring to have the tariff lifted from imported bags



Doug Marks (Chairman) and his wife Joy at a recent A.O.A. meeting.

which would save the industry up to six cents per bag. The Association proposes that growers in turn would reimburse the Association two cents per bag, which would enable our industry to promote onions.

Another positive event in this depressed year was having Graham Blight, Chairman, National Farmers' Federation, speak at our September meeting. I believe there is considerable benefit in being part of NFF and it should be reconsidered in the future. Even if the AOA was a non-voting member, there would still be ample room to have an input into the policy of NFF.

I believe continued membership of Australian United Fresh with its benefits, such as Fresh Produce Watch (Pesticide issues) and its generic promotion of fruit and vegetables, is important.

The Association is planning towards having a meeting and field visit in the Pukokohe district of New Zealand in 1993 or perhaps 1994, depending on our fortunes or otherwise.

Membership of the Association is growing in numbers and diversity. A number of members have asked that we look at membership categories and voting rights. With some states having financial difficulties in meeting the State subscriptions, we need to consider whether the voting system, that has served us well in the past, is the most suitable system in the future. The matter will be discussed at the Annual Meeting in Devonport in November.

Thanks, again, on behalf of the onion industry to John Salvestrin for his contributions; "Onions Australia" is serving the industry well.

Finally, I would like to thank all sponsors and keynote speakers for this year. Thanks also to the Committee and especially Reg Miller for his untiring works for the benefit of this great industry.

I wish everyone a more prosperous year in 1993.

DOUG MARKS

