

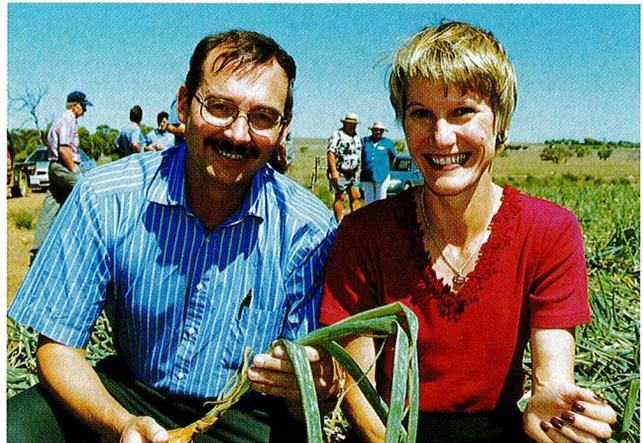
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Tim Groom is the Chairman of AOIA

The major focus of the Australian Onion Industry Association (AOIA) over the past twelve months has been on the introduction of a Research and Development Levy. Consumer Research and minor use of Agricultural chemicals have been recognized as issues of national relevance.

The humble onion is a common ingredient in raw or cooked form in many of the worlds cuisines, but as the range of cuisines available to the Australian consumer continues to widen, we cannot assume that these patterns are the same now as they were ten years ago. One only has to look at Australian cities to see the incredible diversity of races and cultures, and the range of foods that go with them. Consumer research is aimed at gaining a better understanding of these changes. Onion growers continue to rely on the availability of safe and effective agricultural chemicals to produce crops in a viable manner. Onions are considered a 'minor use crop' by chemical manufacturers, who will no longer pursue the registration of products for specialised and limited use where there is insufficient payback for the liability involved. The Onion Industry is to look after itself in this area, but it must have the funds to support product review. Existing research programmes, particularly in Queensland and Tasmania, will be integrated into a national levy when it comes to fruition. AOIA's members want to be in control of any funds raised from a national R & D levy. This has been voiced strongly over several meetings, and it is considered that an onion specific levy is the best way of achieving this. The National Residue Survey (NRS) continues to be relevant and successful, and the NRS levy collection mechanism will dovetail neatly into the collection of a new R & D levy.

AOIA must be able to document to the Federal Government that industry consultation has been thorough and exhaustive and that there is widespread agreement to the introduction of an R & D levy. Once satisfied, the levy has to be gazetted and passed through Parliament. The Horticultural Research and Development Corporation (HRDC) will administer the levy, and match industry funds on a dollar for dollar basis. It is intended to hold a Strategic Planning Workshop at Griffith in November



Above: Tim Groom (Chairman) inspects a South Australian onion crop with AOIA Executive Officer, Judi Prosser

1999 to prioritise research areas, and finalise the levy amount, which presently stands as a range, including NRS, of \$1.60 to \$2.00 per tonne. This workshop will be the springboard for a submission to HRDC.

Outside of the levy, AOIA has been involved with AUF in urging a uniform approach on quality assurance from the major supermarket chains. At the time of writing it appears our voice will be heard. The proposed "cost recovery" based AQIS charges have created very serious concern amongst onion exporters. AOIA has been lobbying to ensure that onions do not burden charges totally disproportionate to their value.

AOIA meetings continue to provide an important means for those involved in the industry to exchange ideas and information. Successful meetings have been held in Murray Bridge and Melbourne.

I would like to pass on my thanks to the support of the executive committee, in particular Doug Marks, Trevor Twigden, Stephen Marks, John Salvestrin, Mark Hickey and Alan Carey. The support from Alan Duff and Alan Boulton on R & D matters has also been appreciated. A special thanks goes to our Secretary Judi Prosser, without whom the association would not be able to run.

Defend and promote the onion. This is AOIA's main reason for being, with a membership that includes growers, consultants, packers, exporters, wholesalers and retailers.

