

Growing with industry changes

HOW TIME FLIES. At the time of writing, I have been chairman of the Australian Onion Industry Association for some 10 months and here I am writing a chairman's report for *Onions Australia*. Just as well I learned to type well when I went to high school and, more so, took my son's advice when he told me to learn to operate the family computer—any mistakes or sentences that don't sound right can be easily deleted. My, how things have changed. Not only in my office, but also in the farming world.

Change—it is all around us and yet is our biggest fear. I have managed to overcome most of that in this position, having met so many wonderful people across Australia, wherever our meetings have taken us. Over time, we have visited all the major onion-growing areas in Australia and at most of the meetings we have had a good roll-up of farmers from the local areas. We have even had some do interstate visits with us just to gain a better understanding of how the onion production areas of Australia come together and overlap at times to give us a continuous supply of onions throughout the year.

I guess, at times, we all live in the world where someone's loss is another's gain. That seems to be the pattern for this year, especially with Queensland growers receiving very good prices for the current crop. Although there seems to be a slightly higher planting late in the season, whether the price holds remains to be seen.

The biggest change to the industry, I guess, has been the national onion levy, which has been up and running for a little more than 12 months now. The Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) has had several meetings so far and have set in train some funding for projects which I am sure will be of benefit to the industry in the long term. (For more on the levy-funded projects, see the section starting on page 7).

I must take the opportunity to thank Amani Ahmed from Horticulture Australia Ltd for her drive and determination to organise and pull together the IAC into a well-organised working group to look at the first round of projects and to allocate monies from the levy pool to get those first projects

off the ground for the betterment of the industry.

Our executive officer, Jody Magerkorth, has settled into her position with us and certainly is a well-organised person and by all means keeps me on my toes. Thank goodness for e-mail, which with Jody in South Australia and me in Queensland has enabled us to keep in touch quite easily.

At our annual general meeting in November, we will be putting forward some changes to modernise our constitution. Also, we will be putting forward a name change for the Australian Onion Industry Association, possibly to something quite simple and familiar—Onions Australia. Along with that we will also ask for a change to our logo to bring it in line with our possible new name.

We as an industry are going to be continually challenged, whether it be in the growing or marketing of our onions. There are so many forces out there that we seem unable to change, but we must look to the future and try to create change. One of our biggest problems lies in the fact that we often treat our fellow growers as the enemy. The change for better prices must come from the education of the consumers to know and to accept the cost of growing, packing and marketing of onions. What we do not have is any control of the difference in price from farm gate to the consumer. Maybe there is a lot of work to be done in this area. Maybe it has already been done with little success. We should not become complacent but proactive and pursue a better understanding of and build better relationships with this “in between” area of the marketing chain.

May I take this opportunity to wish all those involved in the industry a good, fruitful and profitable season, wherever it may fall, over the next 12 months.

I began this report talking about change. At a recent training conference I attended, there was a guest speaker talking about what Australia would be like if others had settled it, rather than the Europeans. The statement was that we as farmers spend so much time trying to grow the things that do not want to grow or live here and spend so much time trying to kill the things that do.

Glenroy Logan



Chairman's report