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Chair, OA

The 2008 season has generally seen better returns for growers, although these are needed to meet higher input costs. In the past 12 months, fertiliser costs have doubled on average, and chemical, fuel, and water costs have also seen significant increases. Most growers across the country have been affected by the continuing drought, which has resulted in severe water restrictions, especially in the Murray Darling Basin, which has seen a slight production shift to other regions.

Onions Australia has been working towards some exciting changes for our industry, which are being rolled out after extensive planning, and funded by Horticulture Australia Limited with oversight by the Industry Advisory Committee.

The industry communication project includes our website at <www.onionsaustralia.org.au>, which is finally online. This is notable in and of itself, but the site also provides a link to the centrepiece of the communications project: the OnionSTAT data collection system.

OnionSTAT will provide industry members with much-needed improved survey results. I encourage growers and packers to support the new data collection system as it will be of enormous benefit both to the individual and the industry. It is currently being rolled out to Industry Captains across Australia. Read more about it on Page 24.

As the website grows, it will continue to serve all levy payers with regular updates including

research and development results from programs endorsed by the Industry Advisory Committee. Also included on the site are newsletters, upcoming events (such as the industry trip to New Zealand in 2009), and some links are available to association members only. The website will be a beneficial way to expand communications with all sectors of the onion industry.

Onions Australia regularly meets with Plant Health Australia (PHA) to review biosecurity, as we become increasingly exposed to exotic pests and diseases through global marketing. Since we suffer the expense and inconvenience when an incursion occurs, we need to remain vigilant and aware of on-farm biosecurity measures (see Page 29) and communication, which will allow a swift response and containment, when and if necessary. As signatory to the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD), Onions Australia will coordinate with PHA to put in place containment and eradication programs—valuable lessons have been learnt from incursions in other industries.

The Onions Australia Executive Committee and Industry Advisory Committee have been working towards goals identified in the *Onion Industry Strategic Plan 2006–2011* with significant achievements and progress on:

- communication and information;
- onion market growth;
- building and expanding the industry's network and leadership.

As my two years as chairman draw to a close, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all executive members for their commitment and our executive officer, Joanne, for her dedication and efficiency over the past 12 months. I have also enjoyed the pleasure of working with so many industry-focused people striving to build a stronger future for everyone in the Australian onion industry.