

## GM onion project proceeds in NZ

Crop & Food Research's application for a contained field test on genetically modified onions falls within the government's recommendation to "proceed with caution", says Crop & Food chief executive Paul Tocker.

The application to the Environmental Risk Management Authority is to develop onion plants tolerant to the low-toxicity, biodegradable herbicide glyphosate.

Crop & Food onion scientist Dr Colin Eady said test plants will have a gene added to make them tolerant to glyphosate. The same gene has been used overseas to develop herbicide-resistant soybean, corn and canola, crops that have been grown commercially overseas in large areas for some years.

Onion bulbs in the field will be lifted after the first year, so no pollen will be produced in the proposed field test, said Dr Eady. "Occasionally a small number of onions bolt to seed in the first season—these bolters are very obvious and will be removed long before they flower," he said.

Mr Tocker said, "The GM onion contained field test is a carefully chosen model aimed to answer important environmental impact questions with negligible risk to the environment. Any application for commercial use of the herbicide-resistant onions will be at least eight to 10 years away."

# Reg Miller Award 2003

**2003 REG MILLER AWARD WINNER REG RUGE** was involved in the onion industry for many years. His involvement in developing and building ground-breaking onion machines enabled mechanisation of various aspects of onion production. Notably, he was involved in the development of individual harvesting machines and onion lifting equipment and pioneered the use of the rod weeder idea brought to Australia from the USA by Gordon Marks, adapting the rod weeder and engineering it for harvesting onions.

Reg worked for many years with B & G Myers machinery and AG Ware. Because of his interaction with growers we enjoy a great variety of machines for harvesting onions, which in the hands of other engineers have continued to evolve from the beginning concept. We would all be the poorer had we not received the benefit of a dedicated professional engineer's abilities; Reg not only saw the onion industry's need to mechanise, he made it happen.

With his pioneering mechanisation work, Reg Ruge certainly has made his mark on the SA onion industry, and for this he is awarded the 2003 Reg Miller.

**Special note:** The AOIA executive committee was unable to locate Reg Ruge to present him with this year's Reg Miller Award. If any readers know of his whereabouts or have any information on how to get in touch with him or his family members, please contact Jody Magerkorth on (08) 8531 1577.

## No more tears?

The UK's new Supasweet™ "tear-free" mild onion may eliminate tears in the kitchen, but onion growers may shed a tear of joy based on early sales reports. Several tons of the sweet onion sold in the first two weeks of its release to the market in July this year. If the researchers who helped develop the onion are correct, however, importers supplying sweet onions to the UK may need a shoulder to cry on. Research indicates the Supasweet™ could reduce the need for about 50,000 tonnes of imports, in addition to helping increase onion consumption in the UK.

To successfully grow the Supasweet™, onion growers must follow strict production protocols covering the soil selection, crop nutrition and irrigation. The crop has to be carefully monitored for flavour strength throughout its growth, and harvesting is done by hand. The onions are refrigerated post-harvest to retain flavour and freshness. The final product, according to Bedfordshire onion grower Paul Cripsey, is an onion that's "less than half the strength of traditional cooking onions and a good deal milder than other supposedly mild onions."



## Yates deal covers new ground

International vegetable seed companies South Pacific Seeds (SPS) and Enza Zaden recently completed a deal to purchase Yates Vegetable Seeds in Australia and New Zealand. All the current YVS staff were to be offered employment with the ongoing businesses.

Yates has begun trading as Terranova Seeds in Australia and New Zealand, with Enza Zaden Australia set up to manage the acquisition of the research and plant breeding operations in Narromine and Pukekohe.

SPS will manage Terranova as a separate company reporting to a separate board of directors. Warrick Chudleigh will continue as the manager of Terranova and will sit on the board. Terranova Seeds will also continue to operate as a competitor to SPS.

Terranova Seeds will continue to market the products from the former Yates breeding programs in Australia and NZ. Enza Zaden will market these products to the export customers. Terranova Seeds will continue to market commodity products to some export customers.

For more information, contact Warrick Chudleigh on (02) 9725 1200 or e-mail [warrick.chudleigh@yates.com.au](mailto:warrick.chudleigh@yates.com.au).

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