



MEDIA RELEASE

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SPUD GROWERS HEAD BACK TO SCHOOL

Potato growers are utilising the winter crop break to head back to school to hone their management skills.

ECG McMillan campus at Warragul is hosting seven students undertaking the Australia-first Diploma in Horticulture specialising in potato production.

The students attended campus for a five-day intense training period where they were given access to industry experts, undertook field trips and workshops.

ECG Trainer Tony Pitt said the two year course aims to develop a new generation of potato farm managers capable of dealing with current and future challenges.

“Until now there has been no accredited pathway for people in the potato industry to progress their production management skills. This course covers everything from managing plant and soil health, chemical use and safety, weed pests and diseases, managing staff, as well as sustainable land use, occupational health and safety management, and how to develop production and marketing plans.”

He said a continuing challenge for the industry in Australia was the management of Potato Cyst Nematode (PCN) which had been recently detected in Thorpdale.

A presentation by Executive Officer of the Victorian Potato Growers Council Laura Bowles updated students on the progress of the National PCN Management Plan. Mrs Bowles is project managing the plan which aims to provide agreed, uniform regulations and protocols to contain or eradicate the disease, and minimise impact on affected businesses.

Mrs Bowles said many of the students were involved in farms within a PCN positive area or under property or area freedom zones.

“We have 3 known PCN positive growing areas within Victoria, with most other areas undergoing regular testing. The frustration for farmers within these known areas is that they are operating under different state regulations and protocols. Regulations also vary across each state so there is quite a lot of confusion. “

Students spoke about their experiences working in a PCN positive area and the legislative requirements, costs and paper work involved.

Mrs Bowles told the students that the National PCN Management plan would play an important role in giving growers clear guidelines and confidence to manage PCN if they are affected so they can continue to grow potatoes and have pathways into local and interstate markets. She said the National Committee is due to meet later this year to discuss a final draft of the plan which will then be released to the National industry for comment.

The process of putting together a management plan that is acceptable to the national potato community has been a priority for the industry for some years now.

During her visit, Mrs Bowles commended ECG for initiating this first Diploma course for the potato industry.

“An increasing number of potato farmers are reaching retirement age so encouraging a new generation of leaders is critical. These students have grown in confidence and knowledge since starting the course. We are watching the future of our industry use the knowledge they have gained through this course to make informed contributions to industry meetings and events. It is fantastic to see.”

For more information on the Diploma of Production Horticulture (Potato Production Specialisation) phone ECG McMillan on 03 5622 6000 or visit: www.ecg.vic.edu.au

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ECG students discuss PCN issues.

Back from left Thorpdale farmers David and Stuart Jennings

Front from left student Pauline McPherson, Exec Officer Victorian Potato Growers Council Laura Bowles, Thorpdale farmer Dale Ingleton, and Colac farmers Kelvin Cook and David Scott.