THE EFFECTS OF SEED PRODUCTION PRACTICES ON THE PRODUCTIVITY OF THE SUCCEEDING WARE POTATO CROP

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SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

OCTOBER 2010
I wish to thank the University of Tasmania and the School of Agricultural Science for supporting this project
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am always reminded of my Father’s saying “you only see what you know” and as a consequence “you must you look for differences and unusual patterns in your observations of nature”.

I am profoundly appreciative of the guidance support and encouragement, advice and patience given so freely by my supervisors Dr Phil Brown and Dr Mark Boersma throughout my candidature, and “teaching an old dog new tricks”. I must also remember Dr Rowland Laurence who suggested at my retirement “come and do something with us!” Words not easily forgotten.

To my wife Alida, to my daughters Elanna, Amanda and Benita along with their respective families who have supported and encouraged and assisted me in my pursuit of knowledge about the potato I will be eternally grateful. To Benita and her husband Andrew, a special thanks for saving my work when the PC crashed and their great help with all those references.

The assistance of Leon Hingston in the conduct of the investigations at Forthside Research Station and data manipulation was greatly appreciated along with Linden Head, Trich Saunders, Mark Richardson and Ann-maree Donoghue for field and grading operations and Gordon Tuck who cared for the soil temperature recordings. I was dependent on Lyndon Butler and Vaughan Trebilco for land preparation and continued crop husbandry of trial sites over several seasons. Ray Hart Vegetable branch Manager made records and library facilities available, along with the help of Beverley Nicholson.

Thanks to Sharon Elphingstone, Seed Certification Officer for alerting me to possible seed sites. Seed growers Kim Braid and Alan Berry gave access to their respective seed crops to establish test seed lots. Chris Russel, Rob Graham Peter Hardman and Frank Mulcahy and Sharon Saunders of Simplot Australia are thanked for valuable assistance.

To my two good friends Corowa Yaxley and Bill Washington I thank you for your time in proof-reading this document and hope you learnt as much about the Potato as I did about English grammar and writing. Thanks also to Jane Bouchard for the tedious job of preparing the references.

I also wish to thank Doris Blaesing, Peter Johnson and John Maynard for access to seed material from their respective experiments for ware tuber evaluation.

Thanks also to the potato growers of Tasmania and colleagues who, over many years added to my knowledge of the amazing tuber “the Potato”. These people also remind me of the motto which my father and brother quote:-

“The Lord himself decreed that the way of the man on the land shall not be easy.”

Easing the life of those who feed us is a benefit to all.
ABSTRACT

The project examined the effects of seed potato production on the performance of the seed in the following ware crop. The research was conducted in Tasmania, Australia, where the temperate maritime climate supports a lengthy growing season and a low aphid borne virus pressure permits crops to be grown to senescence, or defoliated if prevention of oversized tubers is desired. Harvest in the relatively cool autumn/winter may be delayed many weeks after skin set as soil temperatures do not fall below -1°C often. These factors permit a greater range of seed crop management options than is present in most other seed production regions of the world. Significant variability in the performance of seed lots grown in Tasmania has been documented, and could not be accounted for by differences in storage conditions, suggesting that seed crop production conditions may be responsible. Recognition of this possibility by the potato industry in Tasmania was the impetus for this project.

Seed tubers of cultivar Russet Burbank produced under various nitrogen and phosphorous nutrition, and planting density treatments were found to perform in the following season without significant differences in emergence date stem number or yield. Significant seed production practice effects on seed performance were found where planting date, time of defoliation and time of harvest following defoliation treatments were imposed. The results of the study confirmed that differences in ware crop growth and yield may be at least partially attributed to seed crop management practices. Sufficient evidence was generated to support the conclusion that, under Tasmanian production conditions, planting seed crops early in the season and defoliating prior to full crop maturity along with harvesting shortly after defoliation will increase the likelihood of producing seed tubers with higher productivity in the following season.

The seed performance responses found following seed crop defoliation date treatments were not consistent, ranging from no differences between defoliated and non-defoliated treatments to ten percent differences in yield. It was
concluded that the stage of development or physiological status of the plant at the time of defoliation determines the effect on seed physiological status at harvest. In addition, significant differences in seed performance were noted between seed harvested shortly after defoliation and seed harvested after extended storage in the soil following defoliation. The behaviour of in ground stored seed following the stress associated with defoliation suggested that recovery from stress may be possible during seed development even when stems are removed. This capacity for recovery may explain differences in seed tuber responses between studies examining effects of early defoliation treatments.

The effect of seed production practices in seed physiological quality was shown to be complex, but with increasing importance placed in ware crop production on attaining consistent high yields of tubers in narrow size ranges, the capacity to manage seed physiological quality is very relevant to the potato industry.
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