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## CHINESE WATERCHESTNUT INDUSTRY

*Geoff Lodge (Eco-lodge-ic Australia)*

This past winter has seen approximately seven tonnes of fresh Chinese waterchestnut enter the Sydney and Melbourne markets, distributed mostly through Asian outlets. Sales in the Brisbane Markets were poor due in part to a preference by Asian retailers to deal directly with growers and by-pass the wholesale market. On the other hand, Sydney Agents with long term experience and established customers netted premium prices. Wholesale prices fluctuated during the season where they started at \$13.00 for corms greater than 38 mm and \$12.00 for corms between 30 and 38 mm; this decreased to \$9.00 and \$8.00 respectively by the end of October. Growers still have another three tonnes of corms in cool storage and this is expected to be sold by Christmas. For the first time, weekly prices were quoted in "The Land" (NSW publication) fruit & vegetable section.



*Typical Chinese waterchestnut*

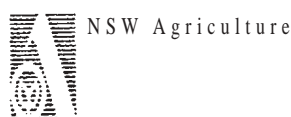
Over the past ten years a small yet dedicated band of Australian growers has persevered with the commercialisation of the Chinese waterchestnut industry. Growers are learning to streamline their production systems to commercial advantage. The recent publication "A Grower's Guide To Cultivating Chinese Waterchestnut In Australia" by Volker Kleinhenz, Geoff Lodge and David Midmore, published by RIRDC, has contributed to an improvement in the collective state of knowledge for both existing and new growers.

This season saw reasonable crop yields at 3 to 4 kg of corms per square metre, although only approximately 50 to 60% were large enough for the fresh market. Further refinements in fertiliser management are expected to see an increase in the marketable yield. Consistently high corm quality and a three-month storage life have been achieved due to improved handling protocols which reduce the incidence of bruising and maintain the cool chain at 4°C. However, one agent didn't store corms in cool storage and experienced rapid deterioration of product which resulted in heavily discounted prices and reduced sales for sprouted material.



*Chinese waterchestnut paddies at Murchison North, Victoria.*

In the field, predation by ducks was sporadic, although this was a significant problem for some growers. Netting entire crops, use of guard dogs or gas-fired scare guns were effective measures to scare off waterfowl. Mechanised harvesting systems still require further refinements to reduce the incidence of physical corm damage and improve extraction efficiencies. A significant component of manual input is still required on most systems, thus creating an impediment for rapid expansion of area under cultivation.



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Market agents have indicated that the 2003 season will see a further expansion in the relatively undeveloped fresh market. As fresh Chinese waterchestnuts appear in more retail outlets, increased consumer awareness will continue to generate increased sales.

For further information contact Geoff Lodge  
on (03) 5826 2750 or [lodgeg@mcmmedia.com.au](mailto:lodgeg@mcmmedia.com.au)

The Grower's Guide is available for \$20.00 from David  
Midmore, Plant Sciences Group, Central Queensland  
University, Rockhampton QLD 4702.

## BI\$LINK

Growers from Italian, Greek, Maltese, Lebanese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Punjabi, Turkish and many other backgrounds contribute to our horticultural industry. This is being recognised in a two-year project funded by Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry – Australia (AFFA). *Bi\$Link*, the result of a partnership between The Virginia Horticulture Centre and Regency Institute of TAFE in South Australia, aims to improve access and participation in farm business management training for horticulturists, especially those for whom English is a second language. It does this through three main activities: networking, pooling resources and pilot training.

### Networking

*Bi\$Link* is identifying different grower communities across the nation and locating individuals and organisations that provide training in horticulture, small business management and English language and literacy. Linking all interested parties into a network facilitates sharing of experiences and resources within and between states. *Bi\$Link* began with a meeting in Sydney in August this year with participants discussing a range of experiences including the successes and issues arising out of projects involving growers from a range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds in the Sydney Basin, the Adelaide plains, northern Victoria and areas just south of Darwin.

### Listing Resources

Over the years a number of projects in different states have developed resources for providing information and training to growers with limited literacy skills and from a variety of different language backgrounds. In South Australia, there is a large Vietnamese community and funds have been made available to translate some resources into Vietnamese. Similarly, in Victoria funds have been obtained for translations into Vietnamese and Chinese on a range of topics and for the nationally available Access to Asian Vegetables / Foods newsletter. In New South Wales, funds have been found for translations into Chinese and Khmer. *Bi\$Link* facilitates the sharing of these and other resources across Australia. In addition, it is setting up a national database and looking at ways of adapting resources for wider access and use.



*Mui Khuynh and Kim Bui with a crop of water apples*

### Pilot Training and Resources

Horticultural training raises questions: How do busy growers manage to continuously learn and keep up with changes in the industry and demands of the market place? How do they maintain and improve their profits when the national and international environments are continuously changing? Which are the most accessible and effective aids to learning? Can the development of language, literacy and numeracy skills be integrated into horticultural and small farm business management training?

Basing activities on a Participatory Action Learning Approach, 5 to 7 different pilot learning groups, covering three different languages in communities based in NSW, Qld, NT, Vic and SA, will reflect on and record their learning experiences. From this *Bi\$Link* aims to develop some guidelines for training providers and encourage greater participation in improving knowledge and skills in horticulture and small farm business management.

*Further information:*

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