

## 1999-2000: a mixed season

The new millennium has dealt Botanical Resources Australia a mixed season with yields not achieving their predicted levels but with a number of milestones being achieved.

Field Operations Manager, Matthew Greenhill, said that it was disappointing that yields had only reached 80% of the four year rolling average.

"To find out why, we've examined all our records and procedures. Because the reduction was so uniform, we've ruled out paddock management as a cause," Matthew said.

"We think that the most probable cause was disease. The disease is probably always there at an insignificant level but was triggered by last year's wet harvest period followed by an unusually mild and dry winter."

Despite the yield reductions, Matthew said that there had been several positive aspects to the season.



"We had an excellent retention rate of about 98% allowing us to achieve 838 ha of established crop," Matthew said.

"We also gained about 50 new growers bringing our total grower number to 188."

Over three years BRA has increased the area planted to pyrethrum in Tasmania three fold, from 750 ha in 1997 to 2000 ha in 2000.

## Increased field staff..

The rapid expansion in paddocks planted to pyrethrum has meant that more field staff have been needed to support growers and co-ordinate planting and harvesting.

This time last year, BRA had four full-time field officers – Matthew Greenhill, John Chilcott, Liz Mann and Ian Charleston. During the year Liz left to take up an appointment as an Industry Development Officer for the tomato industry based in Victoria.

Several new permanent appointments over the last eight months have seen Ben Wilson, Fenella Robertson, Ashley Van Essen, Stuart Coles, Sally Murfet, Mark Raspin and, most recently, Denis Phipps, join the team.

## Efficient harvest...

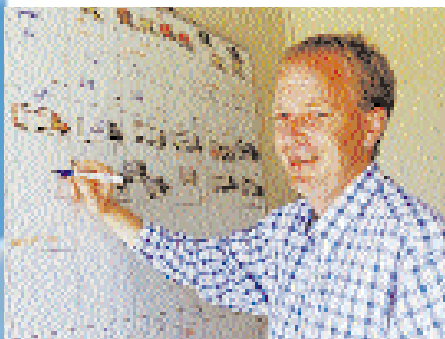
The harvest operation was the most efficient ever. Beginning on the 23 December, the harvest was completed on the 2 February, about 14 days earlier than expected.

Bill Casey, Planning & Logistics Manager, said this was partly due to the excellent dry weather allowing harvest to proceed without rain breaks.

"But it was also due to the sheer size of the contractor fleet with their state of the art harvesters", Bill said.

The other important factors were the installation of the new crop storage shed at Industrial Drive which enables the crop to be brought in faster from the field and hence reducing the risk of exposure to the weather; the new workshop area and the permanent appointment of Glenn Molendyk to the harvesting team.

In another first for the company, the contractors trialed some new technology in the form of a satellite based yield mapping system which enabled BRA to automatically and continuously record the yield from different parts of the paddock.



Bill Casey managing logistics of the harvest operation.

## Expansion targets were met...

BRA achieved its expansion target for 1999/2000, with 850 new hectares planted to pyrethrum between July and September.

## Col's contribution recognised

Col Daking's long and committed contribution to the development of the pyrethrum industry in Tasmania has been recognised with the presentation of a plaque at an industry function last year.

In presenting the award, BRA's

Managing Director, Ian Folder, said that Col had always been very supportive of the industry right from the very first days.

"He stuck his neck out and had the strength to take the risks, knowing there would always be ups and downs in such a new venture."

"Col always wants to be involved, participating on committees and at field days, whatever events we have. And on top of that, he is a delightful man to work with," Ian said.



Col Daking with grandson Robert Wade at the presentation ceremony.

## BRA offers Uni scholarships

In December 1999 BRA offered scholarships to two university students who had successfully completed their first year of university studies.

Each scholarship offered the students \$3000 towards university costs plus the opportunity of vacation work experience with the company.

BRA Managing Director, Ian Folder said that by offering the scholarships BRA aimed to give talented young people the opportunity to gain industry experience before they graduate.

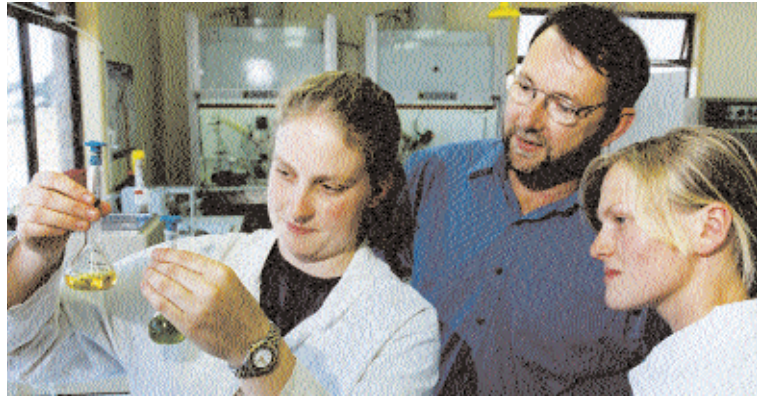
The scholarships were offered in two very different aspects of the BRA operation. One was in field operations and was awarded to Petra Novak who is studying Agricultural Science at the University of Tasmania in Hobart.

Petra said that she applied for the scholarship to find out the type of work she might be doing after she finishes her course.

"It was really good and everyone was so good to me. I got to experience lots of different aspects of the industry and see how they link together," Petra said.

"For instance, Matthew found me placement on farms with John Bonney and Athol Gillham for a few days so that I could get an appreciation of the farming side of production. I also spent a lot of time traveling with the field officers to see what they do, some time with the seed crew and even a day in the lab. I was also involved in helping to set up a nematode trial at David Morris' property at Kindred."

The other scholarship winner was Bonnie Atkinson who is studying chemistry at the University of Tasmania.



Ian Folder with inaugural BRA scholarship holders Bonnie Atkinson and Petra Novak

Bonnie's aim in applying for the scholarship was also to gain an insight into the work that she will be doing when she graduates.

Bonnie's time at BRA was largely spent in preparing solutions to test samples for pyrethrin and in general lab maintenance.

"I thought it was great. I was allowed to do more than I expected as I used techniques that I don't cover in my course for another year or two," Bonnie said.

"Its given me much more confidence in the lab back at Uni and also given me incentive and encouragement to keep going in my course this year. The scholarship has also helped a lot financially," Bonnie said.

Ian Folder said that BRA hoped to offer further scholarships in other areas of its operations in the coming years.

"BRA recognises it will have an increasing need for graduates and we hope this program will give local young people the skills they will need to quickly adapt to the industry workplace once they graduate".

## Nematode trial

Scholarship holder, Petra Novak, was instrumental in setting up this nematode trial on David Morris' property at Kindred. The trial looks at a number of crops including beans, peas, millet, oats and broccoli plus a fallow to determine which crops are best suited to include in rotation with pyrethrum to keep nematode numbers down. Nematode numbers were measured prior to planting and will be measured again after each crop is harvested.



Tanya Haigh, Chris McKenna, Trevor McKenna, Brian Chung and Kelly Charleston at the award night.

## E-commerce project great success

Last year 150 people representing over 75 pyrethrum farming businesses participated in an innovative electronic commerce project instigated by BRA.

The company sourced a grant of \$108,000 from the Tasmanian Electronic Commerce Centre to help its growers adopt e-commerce as part of their business operations. The grant allowed

BRA to provide TAFE based training to all growers and their partners, who wanted to participate.

According to Research and Development Manager, Brian Chung, the aim of the project was to assist pyrethrum growers take advantage of the opportunities for improved business management efficiencies now available through electronic commerce.

At an award night held at Devonport at the completion of the training program grower Heather Skirving said that she now felt very confident with computers.

"Computers and the internet are an important part of our future and I thank Brian very much for the effort he has put into developing this program for us," she said.

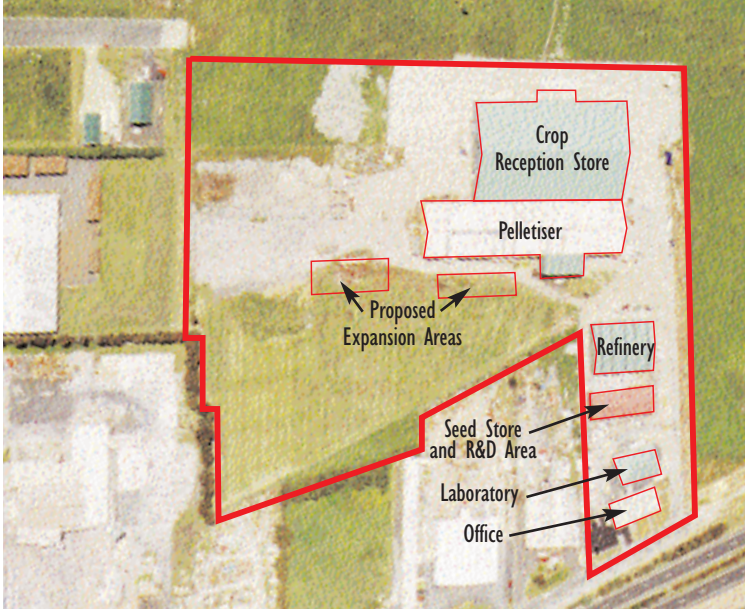
Northdown grower, Owen Thomas, also felt that he had gained a lot from the course.

"This project has been a giant leap forward for all of us. Farming is all about keeping costs tight and I couldn't see the justification for spending a lot on computers. But now I understand what the various software packages can do and I'm using email more and more," Owen said.

"I can see that improved record keeping offered by various packages will give an advantage in quality assurance and GST issues. And I want to get into farm mapping."

One of the issues raised by this project is that whilst many of the BRA growers are now online and increasing their use of electronic commerce applications, many of their suppliers do not have e-commerce capabilities. However this is expected to rapidly improve with time.





## BRA committed to Tasmanian pyrethrum

Despite a disappointing season in the field, BRA has strengthened its commitment to pyrethrum production in Tasmania.

Managing Director, Ian Folder, said that the lower than anticipated yields had re-focused the company on strengthening its relationships with both its customers and its growers.

"We need good relationships with both these links in the supply chain in order to grow our industry," Ian said.

"As soon as we recognised that yields were going to be low this season, we went straight to our customers and growers and communicated the situation."

Ian said that whilst disappointed, the customers were pleased that the information had been conveyed as quickly as possible, allowing them to better manage the change in supply conditions.

"This situation has demonstrated the need for better yield prediction systems and so we have commissioned further research into the physiology of the pyrethrum plant. This will help us better understand the factors that impact on yield and ultimately enable the development of a yield prediction model," Ian said.

"This will let us give our customers reliable information as early as possible in the season and give our customers additional confidence in our ability to fulfill orders."

BRA also recognised that the lower than average yields would hurt its growers, especially the new growers waiting on their first returns. Although having no immediate answers, BRA went to its growers to stimulate discussion and share all available information on how to manage the situation.

BRA also took the step of immediately increasing the price to growers and negotiated a new payment scheme based on the model used in some other industries in Tasmania.

In a further show of its belief in the future of the industry in Tasmania, BRA has brought forward its decision to increase the expansion in its processing capacity at Ulverstone, particularly in the extraction area. This will allow further value adding of product in Tasmania.

Ian Folder said that despite the difficult year, he had been extremely encouraged by the support shown by the growers, customers, contractors and company staff.

"We really do have confidence in the industry. We have the customers, we have the orders and we have highly skilled growers. We just need more product to fulfill demand," Ian said.

To expedite this expansion, BRA is negotiating with the Tasmanian government about ways in which financial support could be provided to growers in order to accelerate new plantings.

*Managing Director, Ian Folder, says that BRA has great confidence in the future of pyrethrum in Tasmania*



## Ulverstone site takes shape

The Ulverstone site has undergone a multi million dollar transformation over the last 12 months. Developments include:

- crop reception store
- commercialisation of the carbon dioxide refinery, following several years of intensive research and development
- pelletiser upgrade
- dedicated controlled atmosphere seed store



## Setting the direction for R&D

In line with its science based approach to developing the pyrethrum industry, BRA has appointed Tim Groom to the position of Research and Development Co-ordinator, Pyrethrum.

Tim brings a great depth of horticultural industry experience to this position having previously been General Manager at Field Fresh Tasmania. He has also previously been involved with the pyrethrum industry,

working with Julian Shaw on crop agronomy and trial work between 1986 and 1990.

Tim's role at BRA is to co-ordinate the existing research being done by a range of researchers from the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research, the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, Serve-Ag Research, Agronico and other organisations, each offering world class expertise in their area of speciality. Tim will also instigate new research, particularly focusing on those factors influencing yield.

Tim is currently drawing up a research and development plan in conjunction with the R&D committee, which will set the strategic direction for pyrethrum research for future years.



## 1999 top crop winner

Gavin Clark of Deloraine receiving the perpetual trophy for growing the 1999 top pyrethrum crop. The Chairman of BRA, Mr Robin Gray, presented the trophy at the 1999 post harvest grower meeting at Ulverstone. This was a great achievement by Gavin as it was the first pyrethrum crop he has grown.

## 1999 R&D Grower Field Day



About 200 people attended a field day and presentation evening on research and development projects in October 1999.



## Engineer enjoys the challenge

Graduate chemical engineer, Joseph Coleiro, joined BRA in August 1999 because he wanted to be involved in production engineering. He hoped that in a small but rapidly expanding company such as BRA there would be lots of opportunities to do many different things.

Much to his delight this is exactly how it turned out. While his main role is supervising the pelletising operations, he is involved in many projects such as investigating design issues, modifying the pelletiser plant and looking after safety issues around the site.

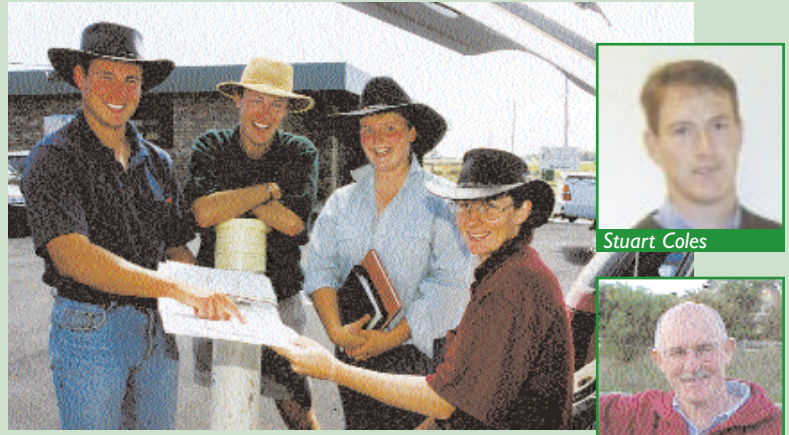
Joseph says he really enjoys the freedom John Boevink (Director of Manufacturing) gives him to follow ideas through. "It's so challenging and varied. Every day is different," he said.



## Marsh harrier nest in pyrethrum paddock

During the harvest an observant windrower operator spotted a marsh harrier nesting site in Alan Duff's pyrethrum paddock at Wesley Vale. Once spotted, actions were taken to preserve and protect the birds.

A nest in such a cropping situation is unusual as irrigation makes it difficult to maintain egg temperature for hatching. Normally marsh harriers prefer marshland, grain and fodder vegetation types. The chicks from this nest will be tagged and monitored to provide more information on the habits of these birds.



Ben, Ashley, Sally and Fenella.

Stuart Coles

Denis Phipps

## New faces in the field team

The rapidly increasing area of pyrethrum plantings has required a larger field operations team to co-ordinate production and to provide agronomic advice to growers. Over the last year or so a number of new faces have joined the team.

**Ben Wilson** started work with BRA as a casual in July 1998, becoming permanent in March last year. Ben says that he knew a bit about pyrethrum before starting with BRA because his family had grown pyrethrum and he had also driven a header for a contractor.

Ben said that he likes the variety the job offers, seeing the farmers and the challenge of getting everything organised for planting and harvest.

"I particularly enjoy the harvest period because that is when you see what has been accomplished," Ben said.

**Ashley Van Essen** started as a field officer in December 1999, after five harvest seasons as a cutter and bin attendant and sampling product from the harvester.

Ashley has a degree in Agricultural Science from the University of Tasmania and has spent the summer getting to know the growers and checking on the first year crops with Ian Charleston.

**Sally Murfett** started with BRA in July last year as an interim replacement when Liz Mann moved to Victoria. Initially Sally was offered an eight-week position but this was extended to almost eight months. Sally has now commenced work with the Tasmanian Institute for Agricultural Research at Burnie as a technical assistant. In this role she will be working on diseases in pyrethrum.

After starting with BRA in July 1999, **Fenella Robertson** has found that she really enjoys working with the company.

"I love talking to people, the growers are great and the people at BRA are really helpful," she said. "The crop is a bit different and the industry is new and expanding which makes it exciting, but there are still a lot of challenges to be met."

Fenella said she spends 3½ – 4 days a week out and about. She tries to visit all the first year sites once a week and the established crops at least every three weeks.

"The new crops need some tender loving care to start with," Fenella said. "And I try to see farmers every week or so."

**Stuart Coles** started with BRA at the beginning of January 2000. Although new to pyrethrum, Stuart has a lot of experience in cropping having previously been an agronomist with Roberts Vegetables and with Roberts Merchandise.

Stuart said that he joined BRA because it is an innovative company with good opportunities and he felt that it was a good time to get on board the industry.

"There is a lot of diversity in the field officer role, people are good to work with and there are lots of challenges with the crop," Stuart said.

The most recent addition to the field team is **Denis Phipps**. Formerly with Field Fresh Tasmania, Denis brings a great depth of horticultural cropping knowledge with 12 years experience as a field officer following on from 10 years in production areas of the company.

**PYLINES**  
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