



MIKE WALKER Tasmania

School chips in with spuds

FOLLOWING the Sirolli approach to getting things moving, as reported previously, a milestone was reached in September when a major agribusiness agreed to enter into a formal partnership with Sprent Primary School to conduct commercially useful crop trials.

The partnership will be for five years in the first instance, to enable a best-practice crop rotation.

The preamble to the partnership document is significant:

"Farmers Marketing Network Pty Ltd manufacture a range of biological products for over 1000 clients in Australia, New Zealand and the US.

"The company is committed to maximise their effective use in low-input sustainable agriculture by conducting ongoing trials on a range of crops in a range of locations.

"The company shares the general concern that there is a lack of awareness of the reality of food production and a serious shortage of qualified personnel in the agricultural industries.

"The company considers that partnerships with schools in conducting these trials is one way of addressing this concern."

The managing director has visited the school and the first



Richard Colbeck



Sid Sidebottom

commercial trial, to quantify the best time to apply one product to Dutch Cream potatoes planted by the students on September 3.

The students will harvest the trial plot on December 10, and the best 200-word report will be printed in the January or February 2013 edition of this journal.

Farmers Marketing Network has agreed to include this in their website.

It was enjoyable working with the students and their teacher.

The students learned a lot about the anatomy of seed potatoes, asked some good questions, and understood that this was "real", and not just an exercise.

The trial area covers 25 square metres, comprising five replicates

of one square metre. This will enable us to compare the untreated control with four different times of application.

I'll do the statistical analysis (a big ask for year 5-6 students). It so happens that there are 25 students, so they'll each have one square metre to look after.

At that size, every school could have one, but Farmers Marketing Network couldn't possibly cope with the 201 in Tasmania, let alone the thousands around Australia.

The next step, realistically, is to get this repeated in four or five other schools.

The Primary Industries Education Foundation is very supportive of this approach.

The partnership agreement was circulated to key people, and drew a quick response from Sid Sidebottom, the Federal Member for Braddon, and also the parliamentary secretary for agriculture:

"Hello Mike! Many thanks for the information and for working so hard to get the project up and going. My very best wishes to everyone involved."

This was quickly followed by one from his Shadow, Senator Richard Colbeck:

"Congratulations on the project so far. It shows what can be done

Minister backs project

TASMANIAN Minister for Education and Skills, Nick McKim has given his support to schools working with agribusinesses.

A statement to *Good Fruit & Vegetables* listed the following points:

- The State Government welcomes the opportunity for Tasmanian government schools to work in partnership with community organisations, including industry partnerships with agribusinesses.
- The Department of Education

actively encourages partnerships between schools and industry and community organisations and has developed a partnership kit on their website at www.education.tas.gov.au/school/curriculum/vocation/partnerships

- This kit provides community, education and industry organisations with tools and a step-by-step guide to assist in sustaining productive partnerships.
- Partnerships provide a real-life opportunity to support student learning in a number of areas, including science.

It shows what can be done with some initiative, and the value that a small farm school can have.

with some initiative, and the value that a small farm school can have to the educational experience and its importance to the local community.

"Best wishes for the next stages, and please keep me up to date with progress."

So it's bipartisan at the federal level, which is very encouraging.

At the state level, the government's response is positive, and from the shadow minister for

education and skills, Michael Ferguson, more so:

"I'm glad to support the principle of what you are proposing. As a Liberal, I strongly believe in the power and the value of genuine partnerships between government and the local community.

"We need to be able to genuinely take advantage of what local people, businesses and community groups have to offer.

"This will definitely benefit our children and help them to gain real-world experiences in our undervalued agricultural industry."

The twist is that in this partnership (which in any, should be two way), the children are genuinely helping the Farmers Marketing Network.

● The Farmers Marketing Network partnership document can be obtained on request by emailing Dr Mike Walker at wipl@skymesh.com.au



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