

# Dried fruits looking better

## Supply-demand balance to lift prices

By Peter Lamb

DRIED vine fruit growers in Sunraysia could see better returns once they emerge from the water crisis.

Australian Dried Fruits Association chairman Peter Jones said yesterday international supply and demand for dried fruits was back in balance and the outlook was likely to be "brighter" than recent years when prices paid to growers were driven down by oversupply.

"We could also be moving to a lower international production phase," Mr Jones said.

"Most of the dried vine fruit producing nations are experiencing irrigation water issues, the same as our growers here.

"It will all depend on what crops the available water resources are used on in the future.

"If we get through the current crisis, there could be a decade of better fortunes worldwide for dried vine fruit."

An Australian contingent including Mr Jones has just returned from the International Conference of Dried Grape Producing Countries in Cologne, Germany.

Mr Jones, who was elected conference chairman, said world dried grape production from the sultana, Thompson seedless raisin varieties had decreased in 2007 mainly because of smaller crops in Turkey, Iran and Greece. Total availability of the varieties had decreased by 11.7 per cent as world stocks,



**BRIGHTER:** ADFA chairman Peter Jones

carried into the new season, dropped to a lower base.

"All countries, with the exception of the US, reported reduced production levels due to drought and heat-wave impacts during

ing nations around the world to market their product harder in the healthy snack sector to boost international consumption and sales.

"The need to promote the nutritional value of dried grapes

### 'It all depends on water allocations'

— ADFA chairman Peter Jones

the growing season," Mr Jones said. Australia was represented by Mr Jones, Allan Long and Phil Chidgzy from ADFA, Richard Findlay and Peter Johannsen from Sunbeam Foods and Ross Skinner from Horticulture Australia.

Despite the international market being in balance, Mr Jones urged all dried fruit produc-

ing nations around the world to market their product harder in the healthy snack sector to boost international consumption and sales.

"The need to promote the nutritional value of dried grapes

was a recurring message of the conference, with a number of participants advising of ongoing research to provide further supporting information."

Mr Jones said Sunraysia's dried vine fruit crop next year could be from 5000 to 10,000 tonnes.

"It all depends on water allocations," he said. "If we got 40 per cent, we'd have a chance, but at the moment we're looking at vine survival. Every grower will be looking at how much of their block they can keep alive, so we're not likely to get an idea of potential crop until early December."

Mr Skinner was the international conference convenor and elected conference secretary. Mr Chidgzy said attending were delegations from the US, Turkey, Iran, Greece, Argen-

tina, South Africa and Australia, together with trade organisations from the UK, Italy and Germany who exchanged information on world production and marketing. "Importantly, the conference concluded that the world position had tightened and had resulted in increased prices being paid for dried grape products," Mr Chidgzy said.

"The improving market was also reflected in the improved returns to growers being paid by processors worldwide."

Argentina participated for the first time and the Iranian delegation provided important insights into the world's third largest producer of dried grapes.

Mr Jones said other producing countries such as China, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan were emerging from a sole focus on their regional markets and were increasing their production.

"Turkey reported that it was ready to launch a domestic promotional program highlighting the health benefits of dried grapes to school children and had also developed a promotional program for the Russian market," Mr Jones said.

"The oversupply situation with currants has eased with a much-reduced Greek crop being produced from regions affected by severe heat stress and wild fires that had reduced this year's production by 15,000 tonnes compared to last year." The smaller producers of currants — the US, South Africa and Australia — reported steady or reduced levels of total production.

"The Greek industry reported a carryover of fruit into the new season of 10,000 tonnes," Mr Chidgzy said.

"It is expected the current level of carryover will decrease significantly during the coming marketing year, but there should be sufficient supply to meet requirements."