

Australian Truffles: Growing, Harvesting and Value Adding



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Executive Summary

A truffle is the powerfully aromatic edible fruiting body of an ectomycorrhizal fungus species.

The Australian Truffle Industry is still in its infancy. The first trees were planted in 1993 and the first truffle produced in 1999 at Mole Creek, Tasmania. The industry's steady growth path has accelerated significantly over the past five years as more truffieries have reached production maturity. This trend has coincided with an increase in public awareness of this intriguing new industry.

As the Australian industry moves forward however, it is obvious to all involved that there is still much to learn about the successful, sustainable and profitable cultivation of truffles. In the past three years alone (since the Fellow's involvement began in the industry) the range of advice and methodologies proffered by long-term participants has changed dramatically. There remains worldwide a steep learning curve about reliable truffle cultivation.

There are many areas of uncertainty surrounding cultural practices, management and maintenance of plantations, correct irrigation techniques and the life cycle of the truffle itself. There are also opportunities to develop beneficial seasonal metropolitan and regional events based around the industry and the manufacture of distinctly Australian 'value added' truffle products.

The purpose of this Fellowship was to gain new knowledge and insights from European experts in truffle research and relate this specifically to the issues identified in the skills deficiencies section of this report.

The truffle industry is unique. Even though the truffle itself, together with the technique(s) involved in truffle cultivation have been studied by scientists and field researchers for decades, there still remain a number of 'unknowns'. The Fellowship visits resulted in questions outnumbering the answers.

The findings of this report relate mainly to benchmarking the Australian industry against the European industry. In particular, the report identified the need to overcome existing shortcomings in relation to the production and appropriate certification of well mycorrhized trees. Implementing a robust set of regulations and industry protocols to protect the Australian industry against the importation of unwanted species is crucial to the industry's ongoing development.