



The extent of damage to farm lands around Crookwell and Goulburn has led this to be declared a natural disaster zone,

- NSW Department of Primary Industries



DEVASTATION: Crookwell Potato Growers Association president Matthew Gay inspects a sample of his farm's obliterated potato crop. Photo: Emma Mastronardi.

\$3 mil spud crop smashed

By **EMMA MASTRONARDI**

CROOKWELL'S \$3 million a year potato industry has been devastated by last week's flood rains, following weeks of humid drizzly weather.

The Potato Capital of NSW now faces a dire future.

Shocked farmers who've been in the industry all their lives say it will take five years to restore certified seed potato production.

Meanwhile, North Queensland and South Australia, which have been the NSW industry's traditional markets for generations, will turn to other regions for supplies.

Contractors in these regions will now look to alternative seed potato sources. This will endanger Crookwell's future as a supplier.

The knock-on effect on the Crookwell-Goulburn economy will be quickly felt, and long-lasting.

It follows the cancellation of the outdoor events of last weekend's potato festival.

But even if coming seasons are more like the years that have made Crookwell vital to the potato industry, this current disaster may have put half the area's long-established growers out of business.

The NSW Primary Industry

Department has offered financial help to growers, but for many, such tide-over cash may not be enough to keep them going.

Crookwell Potato Growers Association president Matthew Gay said yesterday: "We're looking at a minimum 90 per cent damage to our farms, but realistically it's 100 per cent."

"I'm too frightened to contact other growers in the area who've had time to scope the extent of the destruction."

"Frankly, though, I don't know how or what they'll do; there's just nowhere for them to go from here."

Senior regional DPI Inspector Paul Anderson said there were currently six certified potato growers in the area, but it was expected at least half of these would not continue.

"This is beyond devastating," Mr Anderson said.

"The extent of damage to farm lands around Crookwell and Goulburn has led this to be declared a natural disaster zone."

"There is no way the potato crop will survive."

"Even a few days after the rain has stopped, the fields are boggy and disease-ridden. There's no light at the end of this tunnel."

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