

Irrigation

Polystar shines in spud stakes

ON THE upper side of Swan Hill at Boundary Bend, Ken Westmore takes a long look over his 1200-hectares of mainly potatoes in their various stages.

The sun is shining and there is the noise of a loader and the sweet smell of lucerne in a paddock nearby.

He also admires a new addition to the property – a Polystar poly-lined centre pivot irrigator made by Austrian company Bauer and bought from Swan Hill Irrigation – which is being used for the first time in the country.

The Polystar is a low-pressure system pivot, which is now corrosion resistant because it employs an inner lining of polyethylene.

Bauer has combined the extruded poly liner by inserting it into a standard hot-dipped galvanised span pipe.

The sealing at the flange guarantees the integrity of the union between the two materials.

These systems could also be used in other industries, such as wastewater irrigation in the sugar industry or processing wastewater in the food industry.

"I am happy to be the first to utilise this pivot, with its additional design of the stainless steel connector for the span pipe outlet – the more stainless, the better I like it, because that means there is no rust," Mr Westmore said.

"The irrigator also has a simple control

panel, so there is no need to program the thing. It has a good switching arrangement and useful things like off-the-shelf circuit breaker and freely available parts."

The new centre pivot aims to obviate the need to replace rusted parts, an inhibitor of water flow.

It is one of nine centre pivots on the property, where up to 7000 tonnes of potatoes are grown annually.

And while the low undulating fields are perfect for potato growing at Mr Westmore's property, water has to be pumped from the Murray River, which can be up to eight kilometres away.

This is why he believes poly liner should be used in all pivots.

"With the dirty water from the Murray, these poly lined pipes offer an immediate solution to ensure a free flow of water to my plants," he said.

"Growing 7000t of spuds and other crops on top of that, you have to have an efficient means to irrigate continually as I do."

Bauer also have a corner system that converts a circular irrigation surface into an almost square irrigation pattern, ensuring optimal irrigation of the area available. It retrofits these to existing pivot systems.

As a farmer for the past 40 years, Mr Westmore also grows wheat, barley, corn, and lucerne, irrigated with the pivots during crop rotation, but says potatoes are his passion.



■ Bauer sales manager Chris Orr with Swan Hill potato farmer Ken Westmore and his new Polystar pivot.

"I've caught the potato disease and it's now in my blood," he said.

The spuds are sold to the chip and crisp market to buyers such as Smiths, Snack Brands, and Marvel frozen chips for outlets throughout Australia.

The Westmores plant three or four varieties in February and August, dependent upon what works best for the buyers and their customers' cooking needs.

The soil has a slight sandy component which helps in the harvesting process because the particles drop more easily through the harvester's shaking device, than does the heavier loam.

During cultivation, the spuds are de-hilled, hilled and then sprayed, with hilling shovels to cover them and prevent them turning green.

The land is continually irrigated with four to five pivots operating at the one time.

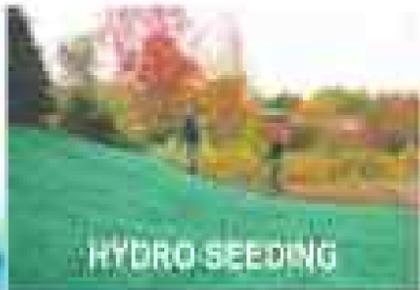
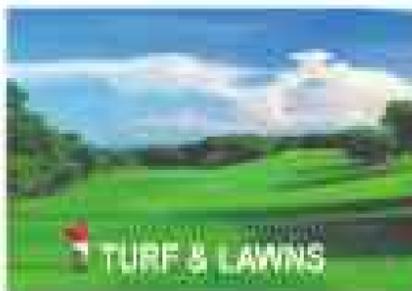
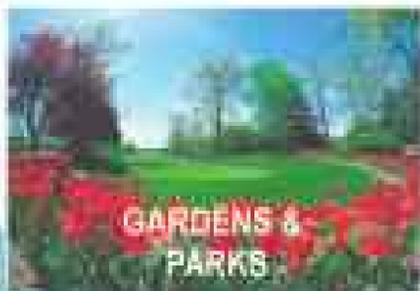
The Westmores harvest potatoes from December to February and from June until October, trucking them to Melbourne at one load a day.

The potato harvesters clean 90 per cent of the spuds, the rest are dry-cleaned in sheds.

Mr Westmore says he barely gets time to himself but he and his wife Bev, and sons, Trevor and Colin are in it for the long run.

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