THE TOMATO PROCESSING INDUSTRY IN AUSTRALIA

PLANTING	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC

HARVESTING	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC

Production	2013	2014	2015
Volume of tomatoes processed (in metric tonnes)	193 000	217 000	287 000
Surface planted (in hectares)	1 999	2 329	2 698
Average field yield (in t/ha)	96.6	91.0	106.1
Av tomato price (field gate in €/t)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Number of growers	12	13	16
Number of processors	2	2	2
Trade balance			
Tomato paste (HS 200290 in metric tonnes)	-35 157	-26 569	-26 641
Canned tomatoes (HS 200210 in metric tonnes)	-59 906	-62 282	-65 936
Tomato sauces (HS 2103 in metric tonnes)	-16 797	-19 314	-19 638

The industry is located in northern Victoria and southern New South Wales in the southeast corner of the country. In 2015, 16 specialised processing tomato growers provided 97.5 % of the crop from 2,698 hectares, although only 2,635 ha were actually harvested due to crop failure and harvest delay. The average field yield was approximately 106.1 t/ha from harvested area.

Three factories process the crop. One of these factories focus on tomato paste and derivative products and two specialise in peeled tomato products.

Per-capita consumption of processed tomato in Australia is around 24 kg and the industry is mainly oriented to the domestic market. Australia is not currently self-sufficient in tomato products and over 50 % of the processed tomato requirements are imported. The Australian industry is not subsidised by the government beyond the matching of industry research funds. The import tariff on most tomato products is 5 %, while sauces and ketchup enter duty free. There is no government regulation of tomato prices, grade standards or production volumes. Growers have not previously been permitted to collectively bargain for contract price, although an approval was granted in December 2011 for five years to enable Australian processing tomato growers to collectively bargain to determine the terms and conditions of contracts to supply tomato processors.

During the 2014/15 season 68% of the crop area was transplanted. Irrigation is predominately via sub-surface drip, with 99.9 % of the total production area irrigated via this method. The industry is highly mechanised and 100 % of the crop is machine harvested, with the entire crop harvested into 12 tonnes tubs. Each year the harvest commences near the end of January, early February and is completed by the end of April. Compared with California, seasonal conditions are more variable, with a higher rain risk, lower mean temperatures, and heavier and less consistent soils. However, Australian growers are very skilled at dealing with these conditions. While the industry has experience a number of difficult years, with drought followed by heavy rain and floods the industry is now looking towards the future. Over the coming years the main processing tomato factory, located in Echuca, Northern Victoria is looking at doubling its production. The aim is to not only replace imports on the domestic market, but to also look at the international market

WPTC member: APTRC

Most growers are members of the Australian processing Tomato Growers Associations (APTG). Processors and growers contribute funds to the Australian Processing Tomato Research Council (APTRC), which manages the industry research program and is a member of the WPTC. APTRC organises an industry conference each year to disseminate research findings and publishes "The Australian Tomato Grower". Current research activity focuses on sustainable farming, improving production per hectare and cultivar improvement.

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