

Phil Watters Award Winner

Loxton almond grower wins Phil Watters Award

The inaugural 'Australian Almond Industry Phil Watters Award' was awarded to Loxton almond grower Craig Spilsbury at this year's Australian Almond Conference held on Thursday, 29 October in the Barossa Valley, SA.

The Phil Watters Award recognises service to the Australian almond industry, in particular a dedication to research, development and the improvement of almond production, adoption of best practice and promotion of horticulture to the community.

The award will be presented every two years with the beneficiary receiving \$10,000 and the ability to undertake a study tour domestically or abroad. This may take the form of a technical conference, short course, grower exchange or many other exciting and informative options. The results of which will be communicated back to the Australian almond industry.

Craig Spilsbury has long been associated with the Australian almond industry with his family being one of the earlier almond producers in Willunga, south of Adelaide. Craig's grandfather Reg grew almonds before WWII. Craig's father Gill and Uncle Phil eventually took over from Reg, before Gill eventually followed some of the other Willunga families to the Riverland in the 1980s. As with many of the other Willunga families, Craig's family moved to the Riverland following the opportunity to sell their orchard to the expanding vineyard industry and move to an area with warmer temperatures, lower disease pressure, and better access to suitable soil types and more consistent water supplies. The later hasn't worked so well in recent times but that's another story.

Having worked on his family's orchards, Craig first got his start as an almond grower with his own orchard in 1991 at Loxton. Craig has been a valuable contributor to the almond industry, in particular, over the last eight years where he was one of the original growers to adopt and refine some of the research and best practice coming out of the industry's watershed

R&D project, typically known as the "CT Trial".

The CT Trial brought expertise from Israel via Professor Raphael Assaf and with it came a new management program for irrigating and fertilising almonds. Craig was in close contact with the research project and quickly recognised the benefits and results it was producing. When many people were hesitant to adopt some of the practices due to some of the significant differences to "normal"



best practice, Craig saw the trial for what it was, and with his frequent discussions with Phil and Chris, quickly adopted the trial as much as he was practically able to. Craig with his existing orchard infrastructure couldn't conduct the whole conversion but could see what needed to be done and improvised with what he had. Within a season or two Craig was soon replicating some of the higher yields achieved at the CT Trial and still out performs the current industry's benchmark yield.

Through his success, Craig has only been too happy to help other almond growers who have also tried to adopt these advances in best practice to the point he made his property available

for a demonstration and adoption field day as part of the national conference going back four or five years ago. Yields, fertiliser quantities, water quantities and nutritional sprays were all published in pamphlets for all to see and he spoke to everyone about his experiences of what to do and things he had not adopted.

In the spirit of the selection criteria:

- Excellence / Innovation;
- Adoption of best practice / Dedication to the improvement of almond production;
- Positive influence on colleagues; and
- Community involvement in promoting horticulture to the wider community;

Craig Spilsbury was awarded the inaugural 2009 Australian Almond Industry Phil Watters Award.

Craig feels privileged to be the 2009 recipient of this prestigious industry Award.

"It is a great honour to receive an Award dedicated in the memory of a man who contributed so much to the Australian almond industry," said Craig.

"My family began farming almonds in 1935, so almond farming is well and truly in my blood. I've grown up working on the family orchards and always loved what I do. The Australian almond industry is such an interesting and dynamic industry to be a part of."

The Australian Almond industry's Phil Watters Award is dedicated to the memory of Phil Watters (1974 – 2007), a widely respected individual and dedicated technical officer in the almond industry who became a role model for young and upcoming horticultural students.

To make donations to the Phil Watters Award or for more information about the Award, please contact the ABA office on 08 8582 2055 or visit the industry section of www.australionalmonds.com.au to download the forms.