

## Double win for Queensland company

A family-owned, Queensland company was honoured this week with the Woolworth's Limited "Supplier of the Year" Award at a major suppliers' dinner hosted by Woolworth's supermarkets in Sydney (December 2002).

Mulgowie Farming Company, based in Mulgowie in Southeast Queensland, faced strong competition from multinational corporations, Mars Confectionery and British American Tobacco for the prestigious Award.

Mulgowie Marketing Manager, Leisa Carniel said the family is thrilled to have received both the Supplier of the Year and the Produce Supplier of the Year. "Our family and team are immensely proud of our products and of the service we give to Woolworth's. To win these awards is just phenomenal. Given the competition from larger companies like Mars, we are honoured to achieve this award for excellence."

Chief General Manager Supermarket Buying and Marketing, Bernie Brookes, congratulated Mulgowie on the strong relationship they have developed with Woolworth's Supermarkets. "The success of Mulgowie Farming Company in winning the Woolworth's Supermarkets Supplier of the Year Award for 2002 demonstrates Woolworth's' ability to work with suppliers of all sizes to achieve mutual growth for our businesses and serve our customers."

Started in the early 1980s by father and son team, John and Rodney Emerick, the family-owned vegetable business evolved into the Mulgowie Farming Company in 1989. Mulgowie Farming Company has supplied Woolworth's Supermarkets with high quality green beans and sweet corn since 1997. Having expanded its operations from Mulgowie to Bowen, in North Queensland in 1998, the company employs almost three hundred staff and a network of fifty contract growers.

Woolworth's' Supermarkets' Supplier of the Year Awards are designed to recognise the contribution of suppliers from various categories to the success of Woolworth's' Supermarket business.

Winners in each category are selected based on data gathered from various Woolworth's departments including Buying and Marketing, Warehousing, Accounts and Store Operations. Award criteria include the quality of stock received, ability to forecast market trends and vendor communication.

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**Comment** - The success of Mulgowie is the result of hard work and endeavor on the part of those involved in the enterprise and validation of advice given to the produce sector over the last decade about adapting changes in fresh produce retailing. The standard industry response over the last decade to the growth of large retail chains has been to rail against them, rather than adapting to and working with the changes. The operators of Mulgowie have decided to work with retailers and have captured value both as producers and logistics coordinators – the latter bypassing the role previously played by central markets. This not only increases efficiency (less transport and handling) but paves the way for better communication between producer and retailer by removing any information filtering that may have existed – leaving the production sector potentially better informed and better able to meet changed in retail trends.

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## Vapour--Not Liquid Water--Spurs Seeds' Sprouting

A new finding by Agricultural Research Service soil scientist Stewart B. Wuest has stunned many plant scientists. Until recently, it was generally believed that seeds must be in direct contact with soil to obtain liquid water needed for germination. Then Wuest discovered the importance of water vapor.

From his research on wheat seeds at ARS' Columbia Plateau Conservation Research Center in Pendleton, Ore., as well as from studying previously published data, Wuest concluded that water vapor in the soil is actually what makes seeds germinate. With a relative humidity of close to 99 percent in soil, the seeds didn't need to be tightly compacted in the soil to grow. In fact, seeds that were separated from the soil by crop residue still germinated, because the vapor was able to reach them.

Wuest also found that, thanks to water vapor, seeds separated from soil by a layer of fiberglass cloth germinated just as well as those touching the soil. He was even able to germinate seeds suspended in air above water, using just the vapor rising from it. In fact, liquid water is not nearly as important as previously thought and may only account for 15 percent of water taken up by germinating seeds, seeds are able to absorb their needed water from vapor in the soil.

In light of this discovery, approaches to water absorption models and measurement techniques may need to be changed. The design of some seeding equipment may also change, since actual seed-soil contact is not as important as earlier believed. Emphasis is likely to shift to tactics for retaining water vapor near the seed.

Findings from Wuest's research were published in a recent issue of the Soil Science Society of America Journal. *ARS News Service, Agricultural Research Service, USDA, January 7, 2003*

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