
150 years of potato production in Australia

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Data produced by the Bureau of Statistics provide agricultural production for the period 1861 - 2011 (reference document 71240DO001_201011 Historical Selected Agricultural Commodities, by State (1861 to Present), 2011). The data available are the tonnes produced and the area under cultivation for crops while the number of stock are given for animals.

One staple of agricultural output is the humble potato. Figure 1 shows the annual yield (tonnes per hectare) for Australia as a whole, together with a smoothed fit. While there was a slight decline between the 1890's and 1930's the yield was relatively stable up to the 1940's. Since 1950 there has been a continual increase in trend to give yields that are approaching 4 times those achieved previously.

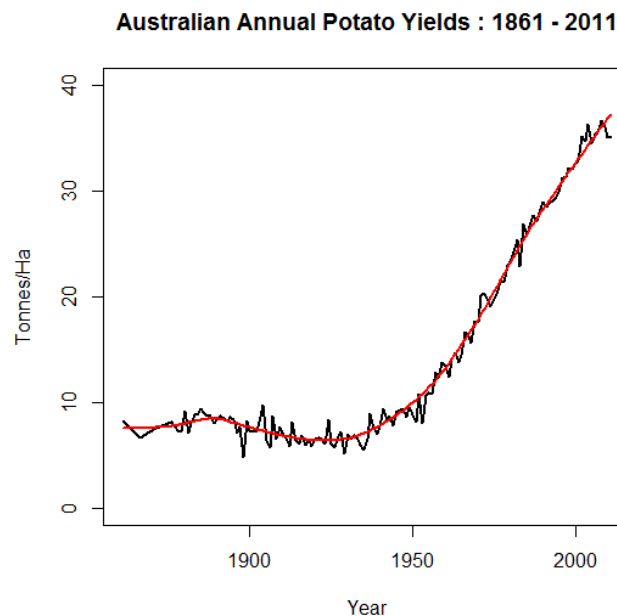


Figure 1

The experience of the individual States, as shown in Figure 2, shows a divergence in yields. While all achieved similar results up to the 1930's both South and Western Australia have produced significantly higher yields than average, although the former has tended toward the average in the latter years. Tasmania has been the outstanding performer since the mid 1960's.

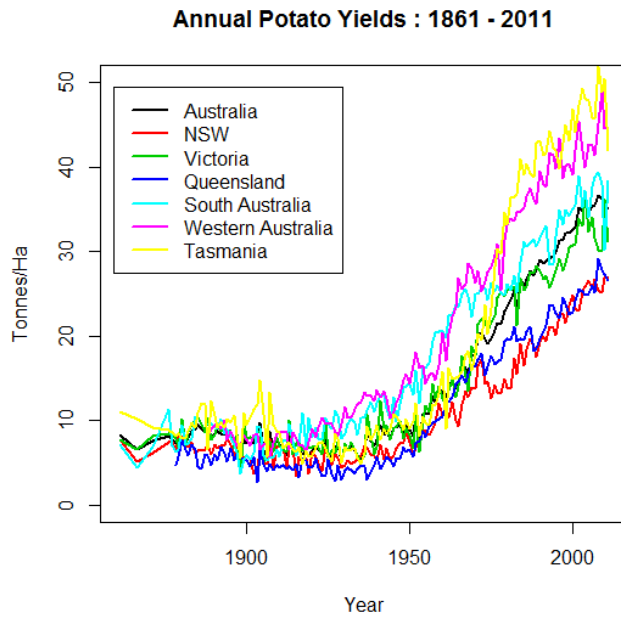


Figure 2

While the above presents an encouraging picture we need to relate output to population. Between 1950 and 2011 there has been an approximate three-fold increase in Australia's population hence while the potato yield has increased markedly through improved farming practices, the output per head of population has not shown the same trend. Figure 3 shows tonnes of potatoes produced per head and we see there was a continuing decline up to the 1940's followed by a relatively stable output of 60kg per person for the last 70 years.

The population statistics were obtained from 3105.0.65.001 Australian Historical Population Statistics, 2014.

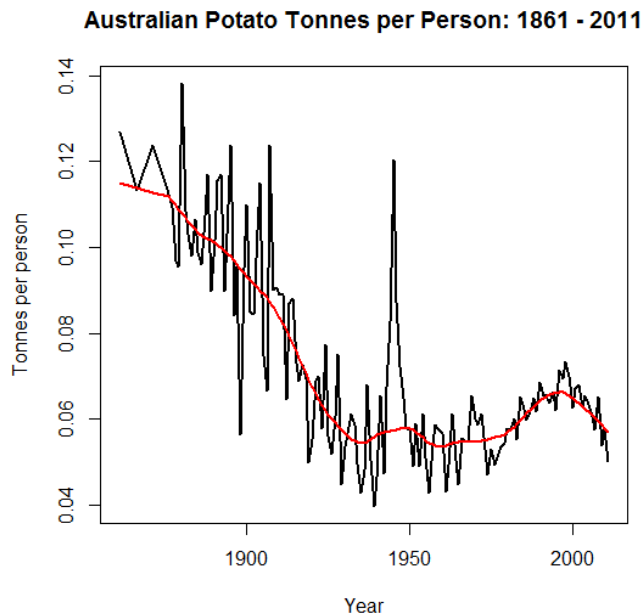


Figure 3

Note these data relate to *production* not *consumption* of potatoes.