

# Oil crops proving good as gold

Essential oils are gaining popularity and a Tasmanian farmer says the state is well-placed to benefit from the expansion. Karolin MacGregor reports



**A** push by consumers for more natural products is creating new opportunities for Essential Oils Tasmania.

Established in 1983, EOT works with growers across the state and is one of the largest producers of diversified essential oils in Australia.

The company's chief executive officer Simon Wells said Tasmania was the ideal location for producing premium quality essential oils the global market was seeking.

"Our long summer days and temperate maritime climate are

ideal for growing unique essential oils and plant extracts," he said.

"Tasmania has an unprecedented opportunity to leverage the strength of its brand and really start to grow what is already an exciting value-added industry for the state."

The global essential oils market is now worth around \$6.1 billion, but this is increasing rapidly.

EOT produces a number of different oils which are used in the flavour, fragrance and aromatherapy sectors.

Mr Wells said Tasmania had the

opportunity to focus on supplying the premium end of the market.

"As a local industry, it's imperative we continue to focus on our strengths of producing high-quality essential oils and extracts for customers who value our product's purity and traceability and not try to compete in commodity markets," he said.

"Consumers around the world are becoming increasingly concerned about ingredients in everyday products and they are seeking out natural alternatives.

"That's driving unprecedented

growth in the global market for essential oils and plant extracts."

Since 2016, EOT has secured new supply contracts with leading brands in the United States and Europe.

This has enabled the company to get more crops in the ground and increase its oil production by 35 per cent.

Among the state's long-time producers are Rob and Kathy Henry, who have been growing crops for essential oils on their property Woodrising near Cressy for about 40 years.

Mr Henry said they had expanded the area of essential-oil crops because they were a good fit for their overall operation. They now grow 90ha of peppermint, 35ha of parsley and 70ha of fennel each year.

Mr Henry said being perennial was one of the major benefits of the oil crops.

"Some of the peppermint crops we're producing off are 15 years old and if we look after them they'll just keep going," he said.

"We try to grow as organically as possible... all the waste plant



**GREAT FIT:** Rob and Kathy Henry of Woodrising Farm in their crop of fennel at Cressy. Inset, from top: Mr Henry during mint harvesting; the perennial peppermint crops produce heavy yields; a fennel flower; oils are extracted from the crops on the farm.

Pictures: CHRIS KIDD

material after the oil has been extracted, we compost that and it is spread back on to the paddocks."

Mr Henry said the crops were relatively straightforward to grow and while the returns were equal to a very good poppy or pea crop, the growing costs were much lower.

"Unfortunately there's been a bit of a chequered history with the oil crops, because years ago the harvesting side of things wasn't done like it is now, so the growers would get different bills coming in from everyone involved," he said. "That's all changed and it's

having a resurgence, so we need to get the message out there that it's here as a serious crop."

After harvest of the first cut off this season's peppermint crop at Woodrising was completed, the paddocks were irrigated ready for a second cut.

Mr Henry said their aim was to produce yields of about 100kg of oil per hectare, which is world standard. New varieties of fennel are also producing impressive yields.

The crops from the Henrys' farm and nearby growers are distilled at

an on site facility at Woodrising.

Portable vats are used to collect the crops, which are picked up by a forage harvesters after they have been windrowed. Steam is pumped into the bottom of the vats to start the oil-extraction process.

Another processing facility has recently been set up near Longford and there are distillation centres in the Fingal Valley and at Winnaleah.

EOT works with 15 growers in the Fingal Valley, Cressy and Longford as well as the Bridport and Winnaleah regions and the Bass Strait islands.

"EOT is really fortunate to be supported by a group of dedicated and experienced growers around Tasmania and Rob and Kathy run a world class operation at Woodrising," Mr Wells said.

"Using EOT's specialty genetics, Rob and Kathy produce some of the finest peppermint and fennel oils in the world."

The company's main processing facility is Brookfield Farm at Margate where it employs 10 to 12 people including chemists and specialised production staff.

The raw oils are extracted before

being taken to Brookfield for analysis and quality assurance.

EOT's range includes broadacre crops producing peppermint, rosemary, fennel, parsley and lavender as well as native oils including boronia, kunzea, rosalina and Tasmanian native pepper.

The company also works closely with the University of Tasmania on a range of projects including crop genetics.

Oil from EOT is supplied to speciality flavor, fragrance and aromatherapy companies around the world.