

Brassica information kit

Reprint – information current in 2004



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This publication has been reprinted as a digital book without any changes to the content published in 2004. We advise readers to take particular note of the areas most likely to be out-of-date and so requiring further research:

- Chemical recommendations—check with an agronomist or Infopest www.infopest.qld.gov.au
- Financial information—costs and returns listed in this publication are out of date. Please contact an adviser or industry body to assist with identifying more current figures.
- Varieties—new varieties are likely to be available and some older varieties may no longer be recommended. Check with an agronomist, call the Business Information Centre on 13 25 23, visit our website www.deedi.qld.gov.au or contact the industry body.
- Contacts—many of the contact details may have changed and there could be several new contacts available. The industry organisation may be able to assist you to find the information or services you require.
- Organisation names—most government agencies referred to in this publication have had name changes. Contact the Business Information Centre on 13 25 23 or the industry organisation to find out the current name and contact details for these agencies.
- Additional information—many other sources of information are now available for each crop. Contact an agronomist, Business Information Centre on 13 25 23 or the industry organisation for other suggested reading.

Even with these limitations we believe this information kit provides important and valuable information for intending and existing growers.

This publication was last revised in 2004. The information is not current and the accuracy of the information cannot be guaranteed by the State of Queensland.

This information has been made available to assist users to identify issues involved in brassica production. This information is not to be used or relied upon by users for any purpose which may expose the user or any other person to loss or damage. Users should conduct their own inquiries and rely on their own independent professional advice.

While every care has been taken in preparing this publication, the State of Queensland accepts no responsibility for decisions or actions taken as a result of any data, information, statement or advice, expressed or implied, contained in this publication.





Before you **START**

Chapter

If you have never grown cabbage, cauliflower or broccoli before, then you will find this section very useful. It is a brief checklist of the essential things you need to know before you start. It will help you make the right decisions. The information here is brief and to the point. We provide more detail on important areas in other sections of the book. Symbols on the left of the page will help you make these links.

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A brief overview of the Queensland brassica industry

Official statistics suggest that the Queensland brassica industry is relatively static, although supply tends to fluctuate from year to year. In 2001–02, around 40 000 tonnes of cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli were produced from about 2 800 hectares. Table 1 shows the industry had a farm gate value of about \$21 million and a gross value of around \$32 million.

Table 1. The Queensland brassica industry

Crop	Area (ha)	Production (tonnes)	Farm gate value (\$ millions)	Gross value (\$ millions)
Cabbages	366	13,148	2.7	4.7
Cauliflower	693	15,058	4.1	8.2
Broccoli	1758	11,569	14.3	18.8
Totals	2817	39,775	21.1	31.7

Source: *Australian Bureau of Statistics* 2001–02 estimates

Most Queensland brassicas are grown in the south-eastern corner of the State in the Lockyer Valley, Eastern Darling Downs and the Granite Belt. Small growing areas exist in coastal areas and other horticultural production districts of the state.

The industry primarily supplies the domestic fresh market, either through the central market system or direct to supermarket chains which account for the majority of sales. There are small markets for semi-prepared or semi-processed product (coleslaw, salad and vegetable mixes).

Brassicas from Queensland are sold throughout Australia. Fresh cabbage, cauliflower or broccoli can be sourced from Queensland at any time of the year but the main supply period is from May to September when the Lockyer Valley and Eastern Darling Downs are in full production. During the warmer months, production is centred in the cooler highland areas of the Granite Belt and around Toowoomba.

Returns can vary greatly. Prices are often low during peak production in winter. Summer prices are often high. In regions with warm or hot summers such as the Lockyer Valley, low yields, reduced head quality and pest and disease problems are often not offset by these higher summer prices.

Some larger brassica growers have actively pursued export markets for a number of years with some success. The major overseas markets for Queensland brassicas are south-east Asia and Japan, with \$5.7 million of broccoli, \$1.8 million of cauliflower and smaller quantities of cabbage exported during 2002–03 (Source: *Australian Bureau of Statistics*).

Know what you are getting into

The average price for broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage varies between seasons, making profitability and cash flow inconsistent and hard to estimate. The market is often oversupplied, particularly during winter and early spring, when returns may be below costs of production.

Consistent yields and quality can be difficult to achieve due to insect pests (for example, diamondback moth), disease problems (for example, head rots) and climatic factors. These include frosts, heat wave conditions or wet weather during harvest. Varieties also perform differently in various growing areas and under different growing conditions.

Growing brassicas is labour intensive, particularly at planting and harvest times, and there can be problems getting a good, reliable labour force.

Successful production requires cool to mild growing conditions, a well-drained soil and reliable irrigation. Capital costs can be high depending on arrangements for harvesting and packing of product. Access to rapid pre-cooling and cold storage facilities is essential for broccoli and highly desirable for cauliflower. Cabbage can be cooled and stored in a conventional cold room.

IMPORTANT
Do a marketing and business plan. This will give you a more accurate picture of what you are getting into.

Table 2 lists the some of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) affecting the brassica industry.

Table 2. Factors affecting the brassica industry of Queensland

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Staple, well known products	Not suited to warm weather production	Value adding and semi-processing	Overproduction
High nutritional value	Cabbage and cauliflower not fashionable	Health aspects of the product	Lack of irrigation water (drought)
Versatile product	Generic promotions	Targeted promotion	Substantial price fluctuations
Value for money	Competition from southern states in domestic markets	New varieties	Club root
Convenient	Strong competition in export markets	Niche markets, organics, eco-labelling	Insecticide resistance problems
Reliable crop to grow in season with good management	Highly perishable product (broccoli, cauliflower)	New export markets	Labour, packaging and freight costs

What can you expect to make?

Yields vary considerably, depending on climatic conditions, pests and diseases, variety, season and planting density. Prices vary greatly, depending on supply and quality.

Cabbages are usually supplied in bulk bins and sold on a per head basis. Sugarloaf cabbages are often sold in waxed fibreboard cartons. Cauliflowers are sold either on a per head basis or, more commonly, in 78L cartons that hold 10 or 12 heads. Broccoli is usually sold in icepacks holding 8 kg of heads or in waxed fibreboard cartons holding 10 kg of product.

Production and marketing costs for cabbages, cauliflower and broccoli vary, depending on yields achieved, the size and efficiency of the operation and the cost structure of the business. Each farm is different. The estimates given in the following sections are intended only to illustrate the level of costs involved for growing, harvesting and marketing the different brassica crops.

Of the three crops, cauliflower is by far the riskiest crop to grow as production costs are high and yields can vary substantially. Cauliflowers also require a fair amount of agronomic and management expertise to grow successfully. Cabbage and broccoli are easier to grow. However, since broccoli is the more perishable of the three products, timeliness of harvest and access to adequate cooling facilities complicate crop management.

IMPORTANT

Estimate costs for your situation. See *Economics of production* in Chapter 4, Key issues.

Cabbage yields and prices

Marketable yields commonly range from 14 000 to 18 000 heads per hectare.

Price can range from \$0.20 to \$4.00 or more per cabbage head, but is usually in the \$0.60 to \$2.00 range. Figures 1 to 3 show average prices for ballhead cabbages on the Brisbane and Sydney markets and throughput of all cabbages at the Brisbane market for 2001 to 2003. The bigger the variation above or below the average price, the greater the opportunity or risk involved.



Market prices
Chapter 6 page 282

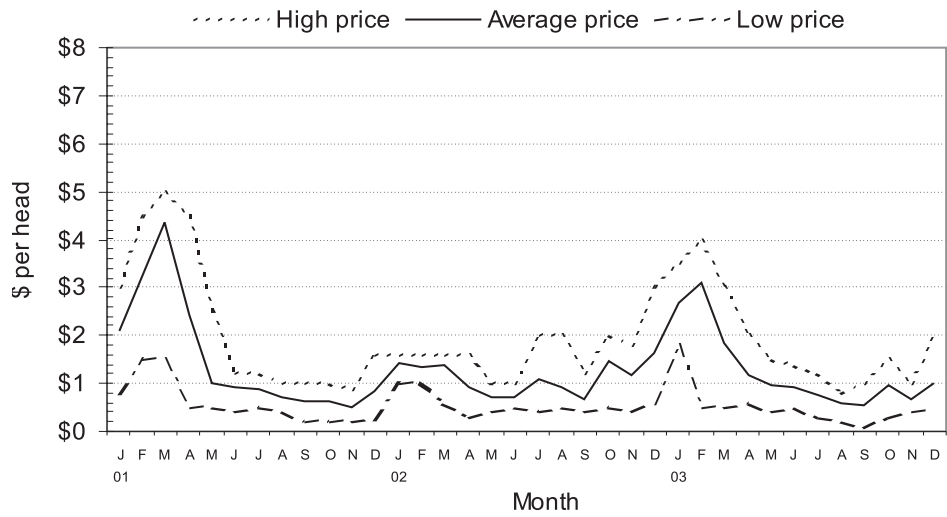


Figure 1. Average monthly price for ballhead cabbage on the Brisbane market 2001 to 2003

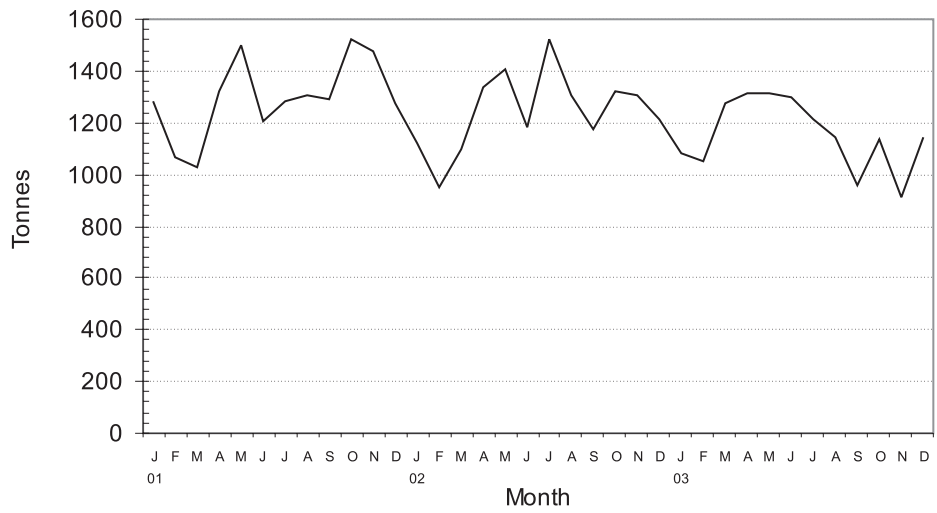


Figure 2. Throughput of cabbage on the Brisbane market 2001 to 2003

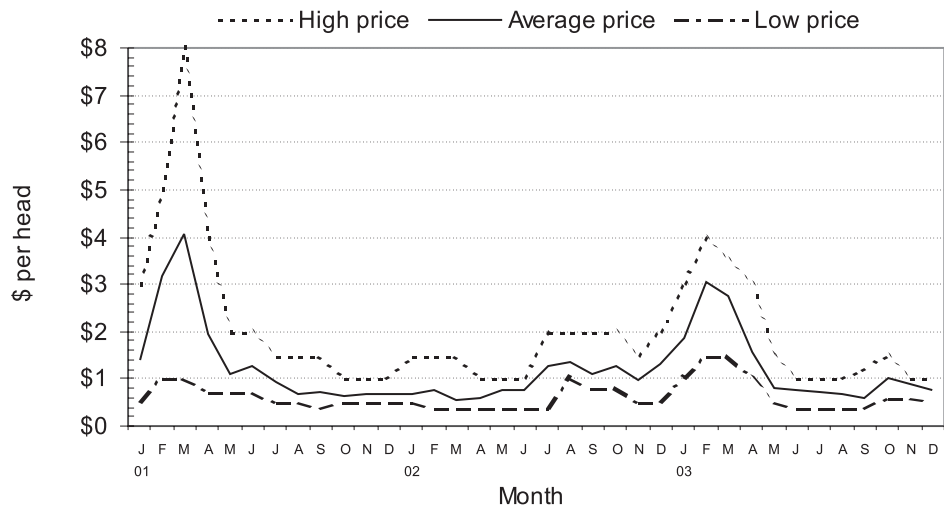


Figure 3. Average monthly price for ballhead cabbage on the Sydney market 2001 to 2003

Production costs for cabbage

Production and marketing costs in southern Queensland are at least \$0.70 per head. Variable growing, harvesting and marketing costs range from \$10 000 to \$16 000 or more per hectare.

Table 3 shows the estimated average costs of a southern Queensland crop yielding 16 000 heads per hectare sold in fibreboard bulk bins at \$1.00 per head on the Brisbane market.

Table 3. Example costs of producing and marketing a cabbage crop grown in southern Queensland

Costs	\$ per head	\$ per hectare
Growing	0.22	3 520
Harvesting (pick, pack & bin)	0.37	5 920
Marketing (freight and commission)	0.25	4 000
Total variable costs	0.84	13 440

Gross margin

At an average yield of 16 000 heads per hectare and an average price of \$1.00 per head, the gross return would be \$16 000/ha. The gross margin (income after deducting growing, harvesting and marketing costs) for the yield, price and cost averages used here would be \$2560/ha. To determine your net income, deduct fixed and capital costs such as rates, vehicle registration, insurance, electricity, administration, interest and living expenses.



a key issue

Cabbage gross margin
Chapter 4 page 87

Cauliflower yields and prices

Marketable yields commonly range from 1 500 to 2 000 cartons per hectare. Yields can be substantially lower during unfavourable growing conditions.

Price can range from \$2.00 to \$50.00 per carton, but is usually in the \$8.00 to \$18.00 range. Figures 4 to 6 show average prices and throughput at the Brisbane market and prices at the Sydney market for 2001 to 2003. The bigger the variation above or below the average price, the greater the opportunity or risk involved.



more info

Market prices
Chapter 6 page 282

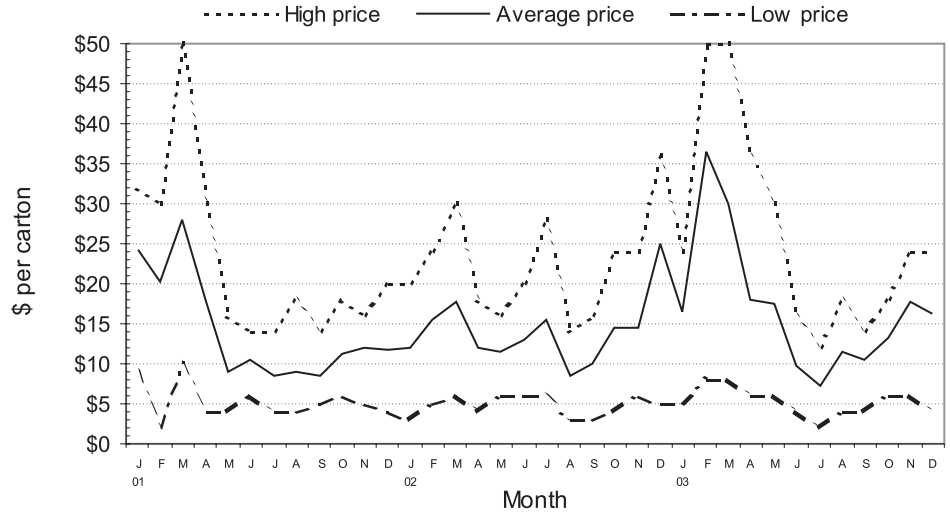


Figure 4. Average monthly price for cauliflower on the Brisbane market 2001 to 2003

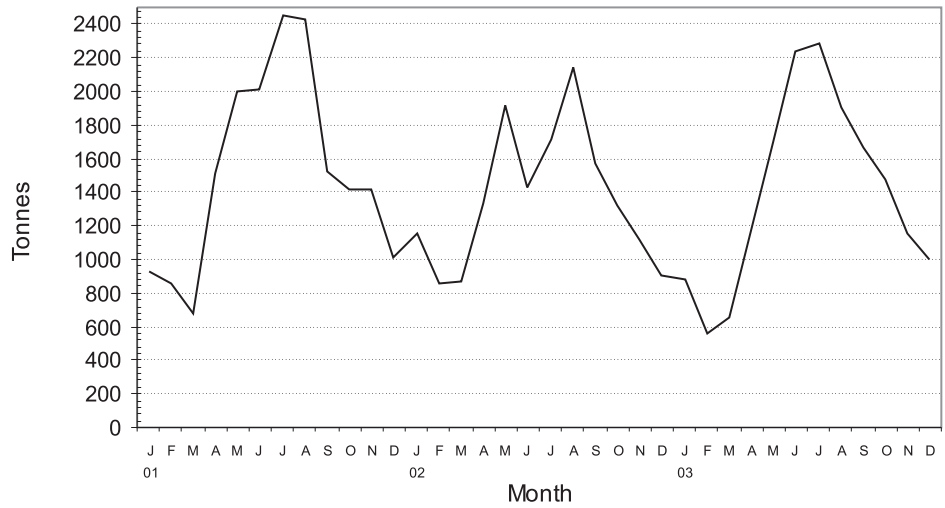


Figure 5. Throughput of cauliflower on the Brisbane market 2001 to 2003

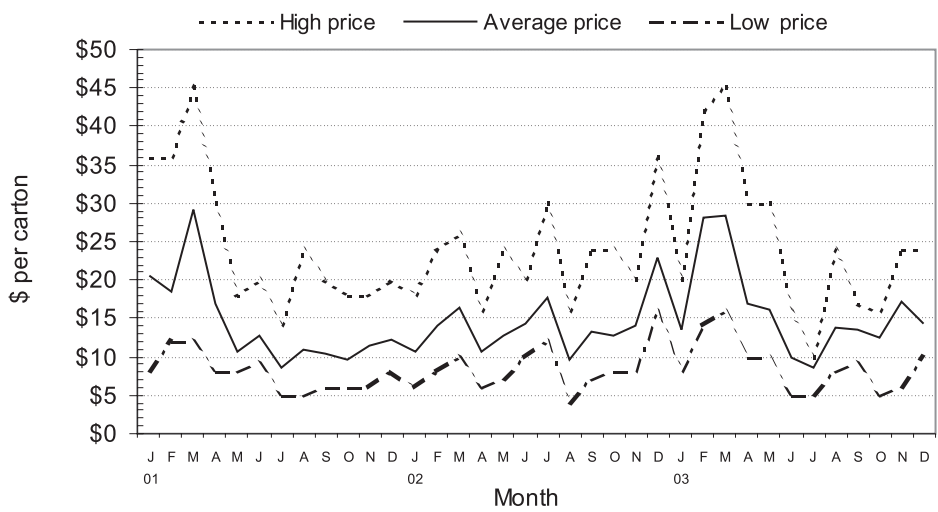


Figure 6. Average monthly price for cauliflower on the Sydney market 2001 to 2003

Production costs

Production and marketing costs in southern Queensland are at least \$9.50 per carton. Variable growing, harvesting and marketing costs are at least \$14 000/ha, but can be \$20 000 or more per hectare. The evenness of crop maturity will have a significant impact on harvesting costs.

Table 4 shows the estimated average costs of a southern Queensland crop yielding 1 700 cartons per hectare sold at \$12 per carton on the Brisbane market.

Table 4. Example costs of producing and marketing a cauliflower crop grown in southern Queensland

Costs	\$ per carton	\$ per hectare
Growing	2.77	4 709
Harvesting (pick, pack & carton)	5.61	9 537
Marketing (freight and commission)	2.35	3 995
Total	10.73	18 241

Gross margin

At an average yield of 1 700 cartons per hectare and an average price of \$12 per carton, the gross return would be \$20 400/ha. The gross margin (income after deducting growing, harvesting and marketing costs) for the yield, price and cost averages used here would be \$2159/ha. To determine your net income, deduct fixed and capital costs such as rates, vehicle registration, insurance, electricity, administration, interest and living expenses.



a key issue

Cauliflower gross margin
Chapter 4 page 90

Broccoli yields and prices

Marketable yields commonly range from 700 to 1000 icepacks per hectare.

Price can range from \$3.00 to \$40.00 per icepack, but is usually in the \$12.00 to \$22.00 range. Figures 7 to 9 show average prices and throughput at the Brisbane market and prices at the Sydney market for 2001 to 2003. The bigger the variation above or below the average price, the greater the opportunity or risk involved.



more info

Market prices
Chapter 6 page 282

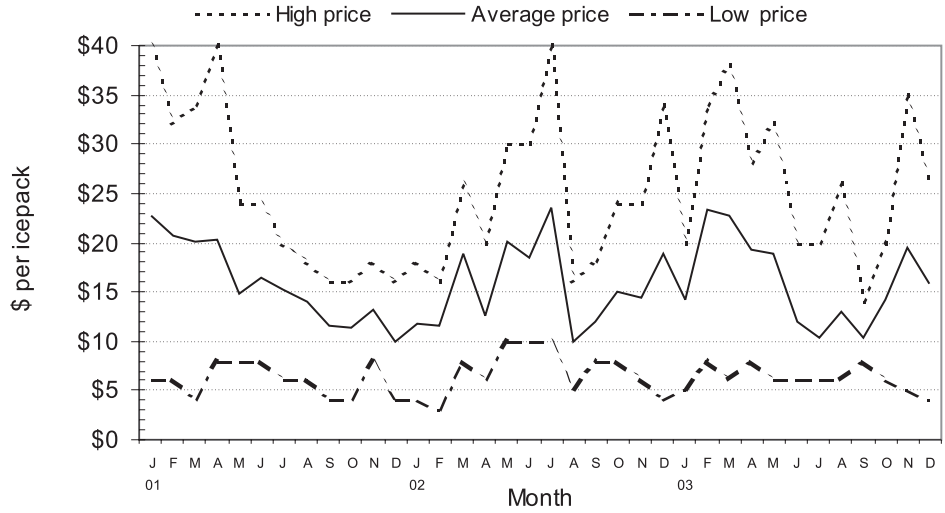


Figure 7. Average monthly price for broccoli on the Brisbane market 2001 to 2003

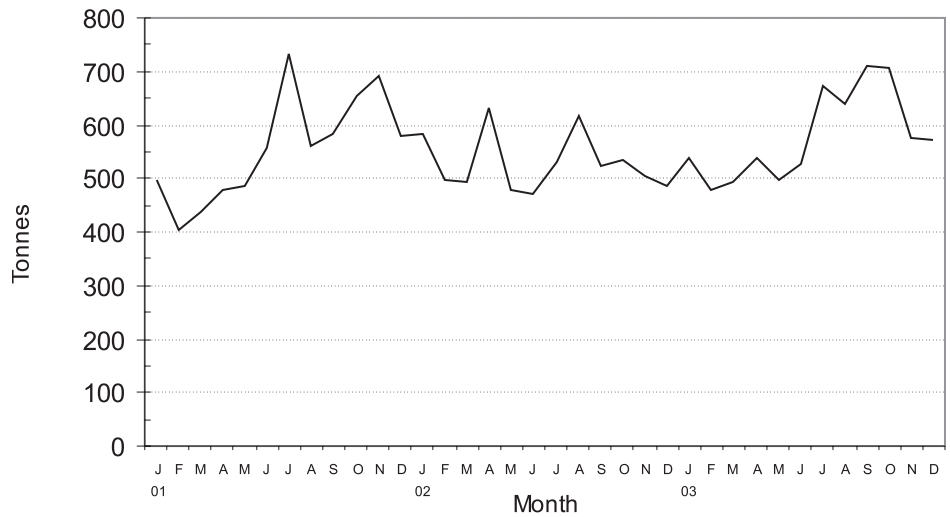


Figure 8. Throughput of broccoli on the Brisbane market 2001 to 2003

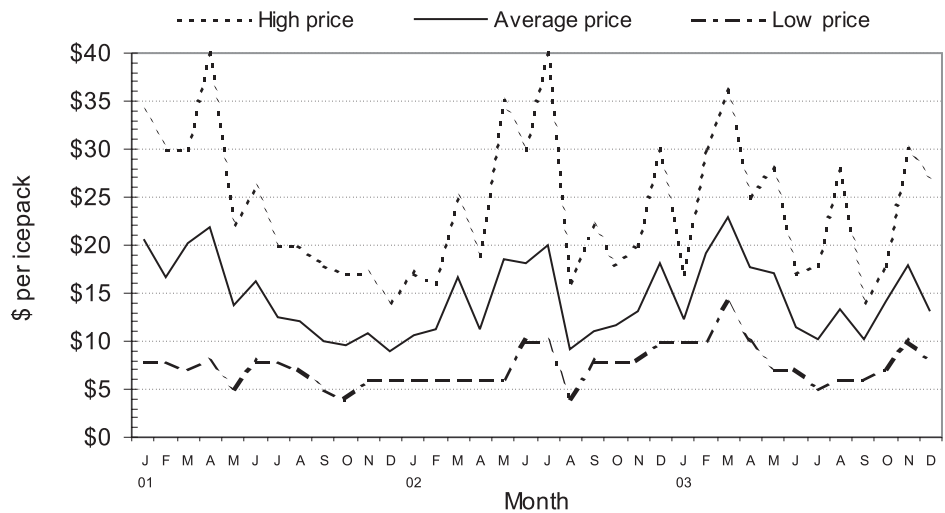


Figure 9. Average monthly price for broccoli on the Sydney market 2001 to 2003

Production costs

Production and marketing costs in southern Queensland are at least \$13.00 per icepack. Variable growing, harvesting and marketing costs range from \$11 000 to \$15 000 or more per hectare.

Table 5 shows the estimated average costs of a southern Queensland crop yielding 900 icepacks per hectare sold at \$16.00 per icepack on the Brisbane market.

Table 5. Example costs of producing and marketing a broccoli crop grown in southern Queensland

Costs	\$ per icepack	\$ per hectare
Growing	4.75	4 275
Harvesting (pick, pack & icepack)	6.66	5 994
Marketing (freight and commission)	2.50	2 250
Total	13.91	12 519

Gross margin

At an average yield of 900 icepacks per hectare and an average price of \$16 per icepack, the gross return would be \$14 400/ha. The gross margin (income after deducting growing, harvesting and marketing costs) for the yield, price and cost averages used here would be \$1881/ha. To determine your net income, deduct fixed and capital costs such as rates, vehicle registration, insurance, electricity, administration, interest and living expenses.



Broccoli gross margin
Chapter 4 page 93

Capital required

Assuming that you own or have access to suitable land, it would cost around \$250 000 to \$300 000 to buy the minimum amount of new machinery, plant and equipment needed to set up a 20 to 30 hectare brassica enterprise. This will depend on which crop you grow and what harvesting and packing arrangements you use. Cabbage would generally be less capital intensive than broccoli or cauliflower.

To reduce capital outlays, you could lease or borrow equipment and contract harvesting and packing operations. Second-hand equipment prices are normally about half that of new equipment, depending on condition and age.

You will also need to finance production and marketing of the crop. Brassicas are usually planted on a weekly schedule over a number of months. You may be looking at investing \$100 000 to \$200 000 in variable growing, harvesting and marketing costs before receiving a gross return from the first harvest.



Getting the crop started
Chapter 3 page 34

The farm you need

Soil

Brassicas will grow on most soil types but the crop needs at least 300mm of friable, well-drained topsoil. Poorly drained soils or heavy clay soils become waterlogged after rain or irrigation, making crop management more difficult. Brassicas prefer a slightly acid soil (pH 6.0 to 6.5) but will tolerate a slightly alkaline soil, up to pH 7.5.

Climate

Brassicas grow best under cooler temperatures. Mild, sunny days with temperatures between 15° and 25°C and cool nights with temperatures between 10° and 15°C are considered ideal. Heavy winter frost (below –4°C) can damage heads and will kill young seedlings. Some varieties will tolerate hot conditions but high temperatures will reduce both head quality and yields. Cauliflower is particularly sensitive to temperature extremes.

During extended rainy weather, plants are more likely to become infected with diseases such as black rot and bacterial head rots. These are difficult to manage once the disease is established in the field. Rainfall will also restrict machinery operations, particularly on heavy soils.

Brassica crops are attacked by a range of butterfly and moth larvae (caterpillars). These can be difficult to control, particularly in the warmer months.

Slope

Ideally slopes should be no more than 3%. A slight slope will provide better drainage while still allowing for efficient irrigation and use of machinery. Steep slopes will be more difficult and expensive to work. Uniform slopes are desirable but not essential. Soil erosion can be a problem on steep slopes while depressions can result in waterlogging.

Slopes above 5% require recognised soil conservation practices. Slopes above 8% make machinery operations hazardous and it can be difficult to maintain uniform irrigation.

Water

An adequate water supply is essential to ensure economic yields of high quality product. Each crop will require 2.5 to 4 megalitres (ML) of water per hectare, depending on season, soil type and crop type. This is equivalent to 250 to 400 mm of total rain and/or irrigation over one hectare of land.



Prepare the land
Chapter 3 page 41

When surface water, for example dams, is your main source of irrigation water, a storage capacity of 6 to 8 ML will be required for each hectare of crop grown. This will ensure that you have adequate water supplies to meet peak irrigation demands even in unseasonably dry conditions.

Brassicas are usually watered with overhead irrigation systems although some growers are switching to drip (trickle) irrigation.

The crop is moderately sensitive to poor quality water. Electrical conductivity is a measure of water salinity. Table 6 shows the water conductivity threshold for different soil types at which yield reductions may occur.



Irrigation management
Chapter 4 page 168

Table 6. Water conductivity threshold for different soil types

	Sandy	Loam	Clay
Cabbage	3.5 dS/m	2.0 dS/m	1.2 dS/m
Cauliflower	3.2 dS/m	1.8 dS/m	1.1 dS/m
Broccoli	4.9 dS/m	2.8 dS/m	1.6 dS/m

Source: *NRM Facts, water series W55*

Until recently water conductivity was reported in microSiemens per centimetre ($\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$), however it is now reported as deciSiemens per metre (dS/m).

To convert from $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ to dS/m use the following formula.
microSiemens per centimetre ($\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$) divided by 1000 =
deciSiemens per metre (dS/m)

Example: 1200 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ divided by 1000 = 1.2 dS/m

To convert from deciSiemens per metre to microSiemens per centimetre multiply by 1000.

Example: 1.2 dS/m x 1000 = 1200 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$

The machinery and equipment you need

The machinery and equipment required will depend on the size of the enterprise and crop grown. Table 7 lists the machinery and equipment considered essential for brassica production on a small scale (20 to 30 hectare). Machinery, plant and equipment listed as desirable would make management easier by increasing flexibility and would be considered essential in a larger enterprise.

The prices listed in the table are estimates only. Rather than buying new machinery you could lease, borrow or buy second-hand equipment to reduce capital outlays. Harvesting, cooling and packing can be contracted out in most major vegetable production districts.

Table 7. Estimated cost of new machinery and equipment

Equipment	New price \$
ESSENTIAL	
Tractor (26 kW) for planting, cultivation, spraying, harvest	30 000
Tractor (45 to 60 kW) for discs, ripper, rotary hoe	60 000
Truck or tractor and trailer	10 000–40 000
Cultivation equipment	20 000–25 000
Bed-former	2 000
Transplanter	4 000
Fertiliser spreader	10 000
Spray equipment for crop	10 000
Irrigation equipment	80 000
Tractor mounted forklift	10 000
Pallet jack	700
DESIRABLE	
Power harrows (1.5m width with bed-former)	17 000
Spray equipment for herbicides	4 000
Harvest aid	26 000
Shed forklift	30 000
Slasher/pulveriser	3 000–6 000
Sorting/packing tables and equipment	10 000
20 pallet coldroom	35 000
Forced air cooling facilities (8 pallet room)	50 000

The labour you need

One person could grow 10 to 15 hectares of crop over a six-month period with additional labour to help with transplanting, harvesting and packing. Cabbage production is less labour-intensive than cauliflower and broccoli growing.

Three people plus a driver are required for planting. This team could plant out around 5000 to 7000 transplants per hour.

A team of four can cut around three half-tonne bins of cabbage per hour. Six to eight people are needed to operate a harvest aid efficiently. Using a harvest aid, a team of eight could pick and pack between 40 to 50 icepacks of broccoli per hour or 60 to 80 cartons of cauliflower per hour. Cutting and packing rates would slow considerably when more than two or three passes are needed to harvest the crop.

Transplanting, harvesting, cooling and packing operations can be contracted out for all three crops; this reduces problems associated with managing a large number of staff.

Other considerations

Growing brassica crops involves hard, physical work. This includes land preparation, planting, spraying for weed, pest and disease control, fertilising, irrigating, harvesting and packing. There is a high labour requirement for transplanting, picking and packing, particularly for product sold in cartons or icepacks.

Management skills or access to consultants with these skills are required for managing finances, administration, staff and the crop. Good communication skills, or staff with these skills, are essential for successfully managing labour and organising markets. Skills in machinery operation and maintenance, the ability to read and understand chemical labels, and skill in observing and fixing problems in their early stages, are essential. Careful attention to detail is necessary to be a successful brassica grower.

Quality of the end product is most important in successful cabbage, cauliflower or broccoli growing. This starts with good land preparation, careful selection of varieties to suit the district and season and continues through the growing of the crop, harvesting, cooling, packing and marketing.

Brassica crops may be grown organically. However, it can be difficult to achieve adequate weed, pest and disease control.



Organic production
Chapter 4 page 260
