

# Demand for pistachios is going nuts giving growers good reason to smile

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*Despite expanding their orchard Martin and James Simpfendorfer cannot keep up with demand. Photo courtesy ABC Rural: Jessica Schremmer*

A cold winter and hot summer has given pistachio growers good reason to celebrate, with many farmers harvesting great volumes despite being in the "off-year" crop cycle — and demand for the green nut is rising rapidly.

## **Key points:**

- Australian pistachio growers cannot keep up with the rising demand for the healthy nut
- The demand is being attributed to an increasing awareness of the nut's low-oil content
- Growers are predominantly along the Murray River and many are expanding their orchards to keep up with demand

The majority of the nation's pistachio crop is grown along the Murray River by about 20 growers.

Robinvale pistachio grower and director of Australian Pioneer Pistachio Company, Chris Joyce, said looking at the two-year average the industry was doing well and growers were confident.

"Pistachios are an alternate-bearing crop, so one year they have a big crop and the next year they have a much lesser crop," he said.

"In 2018 we had a record crop and in 2019 we had the inevitable off-crop, significantly less than the previous crop.

***"This year the total Australian crop will be about 1,800 tonnes and that will be largely consumed in the domestic market."***



*Pistachio trees are suited to Australia's hot, dry summer conditions and cold winters. Photo supplied: James Simpfendorfer*

Farmer Martin Simpfendorfer is one of the longest standing pistachio growers in South Australia's Riverland region.

"We've grown up with change all the time, from not knowing how to grow pistachios in the first place," Mr Simpfendorfer said.

"With the help of the Loxton Research Centre the manager there helped us to get the right variety and got the orchard going.

"We are only a small family run business ... we 've got about 1,500 trees all together."

His son James Simpfendorfer said they saw a reasonable crop come off their trees this year and weather conditions were great.

"Pistachios are a very desert-suited plant, so they don't mind the heat at all — in fact if it is hot and dry in summer it's ideal because any rain during spring and summer can cause diseases, and they like a good cold winter," he said.

## **Struggling to meet demand**

Despite expanding their orchard over the past years, the Simpfendorfers have not been able to keep up with rapidly rising demand for pistachios.

***"We never met local demand ... about half of the nuts sold in Australia are imported," James Simpfendorfer said.***

He believed awareness of pistachios' health benefits has led the increasing demand.

"Pistachios are one of the least oily nuts that you can get but they've got a good range of vitamins and minerals."



*Martin and James Simpfendorfer saw a reasonable crop come off their trees this year. Photo courtesy ABC Rural: Jessica Schremmer.*

Jay Ruediger has been growing pistachios at his orchard in Renmark, SA and said he was developing another 100 acres of his farm to meet the demand.

"People know more about pistachio nuts now through cooking shows and advertisement; they are using a lot more pistachios in recipes and cooking so everyone is aware of it."

Mr Joyce asserted the growing awareness in Western markets about pistachios' health benefits but also rising middle class in China and India lead to the nut's popularity.

***"There is a giant body of science that has accumulated over the last 20 years which describes nuts as a true superfood," he said.***

"Pistachios come with a natural open split which makes it really easy for consumers to eat because you don't need a nut cracker — you just need your fingers."

## **Growers' challenges**

As the pistachio nut has gained popularity many growers have started to expand their orchards and some new growers entered the industry, but growing nut-bearing trees does come with challenges.

Mr Joyce said pistachio farmers had to be very patient.

***"Pistachios take the longest of all of the nuts to come into production," he said.***



*Pistachios are renowned for their small oil content. Photo courtesy ABC Rural: Jessica Schremmer*

"You will not see any crop until year six and then you might break even that year, so you won't see a return on your investment until year seven.

"So people need have deep pockets and they need another source of income for the seven years it takes to establish the trees."