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# National Centre of Excellence for almonds - officially opens today

*Department of Primary Industries and Regions, South Australia*

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The Centre of Excellence for the Australian Almond Industry - the nation's most valuable single horticultural crop - will be officially opened in the Riverland today.

Speaking at the world-class facility in Loxton, Agriculture Minister Leon Bignell said almonds were the largest and fastest growing horticultural sector in Australia.

The Centre, home to the Almond Board of Australia, is located in the redeveloped Loxton Research Centre.

"This year, the almond industry became Australia's most valuable single horticultural crop with a record industry gross production value of \$960 million," Mr Bignell said.

"Almond exports account for nearly 75 per cent of sales with major markets in Europe, India, the Middle East, New Zealand and Asia.

“The South Australian Government fought hard to have the National Centre here in this State.

“Research undertaken by the Almond Board of Australia and South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI), at the Centre will ensure we continue to capitalise on this growth and make the industry even more globally competitive.

“As part of this research, the State Government has committed \$4 million over four years to look into new almond rootstocks, varieties, tree architecture and crop management and harvesting techniques.

“We are also establishing a new experimental orchard site to enable semi-commercial scale evaluation of new almond varieties and new growing systems developed by the University of Adelaide”.

“Right now the Riverland is booming with almond developments thanks to a massive funding boost from the \$240 million South Australian River Murray Sustainability Irrigation Industry Improvement Program (SARMS-3IP).

“Initiatives such as the national almond centre underpin the State Government’s commitment to develop industries and create further export opportunities through our economic priority of premium food and wine produced in our clean environment and exported to the world.”

Regional Development Minister Geoff Brock said growth in the industry equalled jobs in regional communities.

“Locating the Centre of Excellence in the heart of South Australia’s almond growing region here in the Riverland means innovation can flourish at the Loxton Research Centre,” he said.

“This research and innovation will support industry growth, creating jobs and all the flow-on benefits to local towns and their communities.”

Almond Board of Australia’s Chief Executive Officer Ross Skinner said today’s opening was an important step towards providing a world class facility for the almond industry.

“The ABA and State Government have worked closely together to facilitate further growth for the almond industry,” Mr Skinner said.

“The support of the government has been crucial to establishing the Almond Centre in Loxton, and the growth of the industry’s research capacity.

“The ABA is pleased to be part of the refurbished and rejuvenated Loxton Research Centre, which from now on will be the home for the Australian almond industry and the major experimental orchard facility for our research and innovation.”