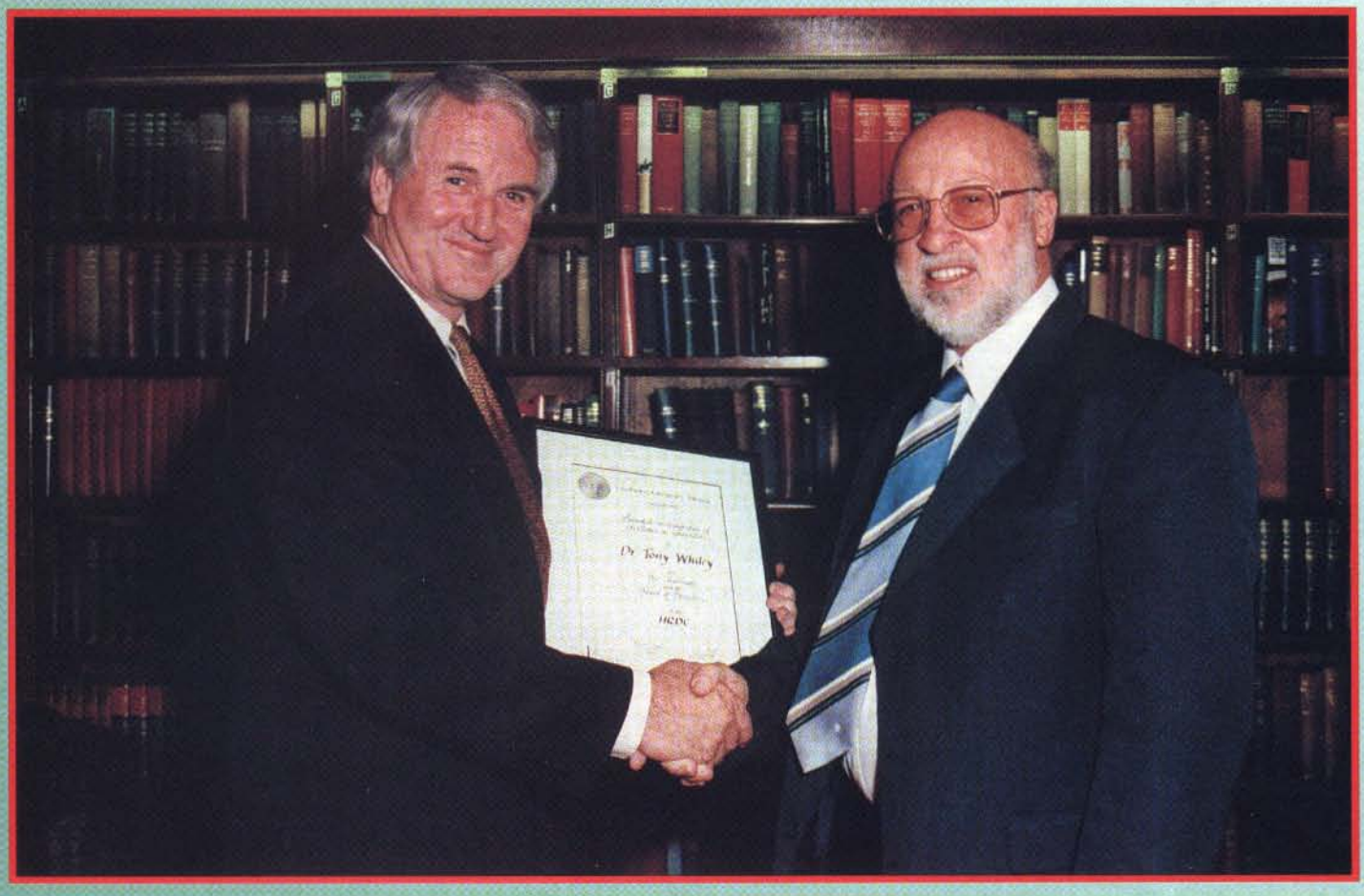
Talking Avocados

The Australian Newsline

Vol 7 Number 4 December 1996



Dr Tony Whiley (right) receiving the Graham Gregory Award from HRDC Chairman David Minnis

- Reports to Industry
- Reader survey
- Citrus Research - Helping Avocados

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Calendar of Events

December

11 **Atherton Tableland Avocado growers' Association** - Field Day on irrigation at QDPI commencing 9.30 a.m.

12 **NSW Avocado Association** - End-of-Year Dinner at Ballina Island Motor Inn, Ballina commencing 4.15 p.m. Contact Veronica Guy for bookings 066 843377.

February

3 **NSW Avocado Association** - Committee meeting TFRS Alstonville commencing 9.00 a.m.

4 **Avocado Growers Association of WA** - meeting Conference Room, Market City commencing 5.30 p.m.

19 **Bundaberg & District Orchardist's Association** - meeting Fruit & Vegetable Growers' Office, Barolin St. Bundaberg commencing 7.30 p.m.

March

17 **Australian Avocado Growers Federation** - Tentative scheduling of the Varieties Committee and R, D & E Subcommittee meetings, QFVG building at Brisbane Markets commencing 1.30 p.m.

18-19 **Australian Avocado Growers Federation** - Tentative scheduling of the Board Meeting, QFVG building at Brisbane Markets commencing 8.30 a.m.

19 **Bundaberg & District Orchardist's Association** - meeting Fruit & Vegetable Growers' Office, Barolin St. Bundaberg commencing 7.30 p.m.

25 **Avocado Growers Association of WA** - meeting Conference Room, Market City commencing 5.30 p.m.

Front Cover:

Dr Tony Whiley (right) receiving his Graham Gregory Medal at a presentation night in Sydney.

Back Cover: Top

At a training session in Bundaberg, Anthony Rehbein practises entering data into the recording module of AVOMAN.

Back Cover: Bottom

Glenys Goodman uses part of her training session to use the Internet to access weather information (see pages 12-13).

Editorial

Having read a report on a Study that measured the opinions and attitudes of AHC's participating industries, including avocados, one thing stands out above all else—a lack of knowledge by growers of industry matters outside the farm gate. There seems to be a lack of appreciation that a grower's profit is affected just as much by what happens beyond the farm gate as does how the produce is grown in the first place.

Is the grower growing what the consumer wants? Is the grower using the marketing system that ensures the greatest return? Is the wholesaler and retailer handling produce correctly? Is the consumer getting the message to buy the product? Is the consumer getting the message as to how to prepare the product? The answer to these questions and many others affects how much money a consignment will fetch.

Yet according to the Study very few growers knew the answers to these and other questions. Apparently many growers did not know the difference between marketing and promotion. If this is the case, growers must be losing thousands of dollars through lack of knowledge. According to the researchers, avocado growers were no better or no worse than other commodity groups.

This is not so much a fault of growers but one of the industries not ensuring the message is getting across in clear and concise terms. Talking Avocados must take some of the blame for this in that either the wrong type of information is being published, it is too complex to readily understand or it is too uninteresting.

In the case of avocados, the AAGF, AHC and to some extent the HRDC, are also to blame for the same reasons.

To some extent growers only have themselves to blame. If service organisations are not told what the grower wants it is difficult for them to supply the required information. Unfortunately, there are those growers, for one reason or another, who just don't want to know.

To maximise profit from growing avocados, it is beholden on every grower to let their local organisation know what they require. The best way to do that is by attending avocado meetings.

Field Days usually see growers appear in great numbers. However, the subjects covered at these Days nearly always refer to on-farm subjects. It is only Association type meetings where subjects dealing with events beyond the farm gate are discussed.

Growers are encourage to attend these meetings and discuss matters that occur beyond the farm gate. Some will consider such meetings boring, and may be they are, but remember one thing, it is your money that you are losing and only you can do something about it!

A questionnaire has been included in this magazine so that possible short comings in Talking Avocados can be addressed. The questionnaire covers other subjects besides Talking Avocados. Details of how to go about filling in the Survey Form are given on page 8. Use the survey to get your message across. Write on the back if necessary.

Orf Bartrop
Editor

From Your Federation

By Astrid Kennedy, Executive Officer

The R, D & E Subcommittee and the Varieties Committee met on Monday 16 September 1996 and your Federation held the Annual General Meeting and a General Meeting over 17 and 18 September 1996.

21st Annual General Meeting

Notification of your Federation's Office Bearers, Committee Members and Directors' portfolios is presented on the next page. These are your contacts for obtaining information on the activities of your Federation and for ensuring your views are heard at Federation level. The Annual Report is enclosed with this magazine.

Retiring Directors

Three Directors retired at the AGM. Two from NSW, Mr Tony Lawrence and Mr Lance Powell and one from Qld, Past-President Mr David Rankine. The AAGF President, Rod Dalton, thanked the retiring Directors for their support and effort and in particular he thanked Mr Rankine, who during his term as President started the industry magazine "Talking Avocados", now regarded as the flagship of the industry.

Mr Dalton advised that the Vice-President and immediate Past-President, Mr John Bolton, planned to retire from the Board in November 1996. Mr Dalton took the opportunity to thank Mr Bolton for the considerable effort he expended on behalf of the industry and in particular the significant impact Mr Bolton's leadership had on the operations of the Federation by raising its standing to the professional organisation that it is today—a credit to the industry.

General Meeting

AAGF/AHC Membership

The question of AHC membership was discussed in detail during the meeting and because of a number of factors it was resolved to rescind the previous resolution to withdraw from the AHC by 30 June 1997.

In the interests of clarity, a summary of six of the factors which led to this decision is presented below. It should be noted that Directors were requested to put emotion aside and consider only the hard cold facts. The Vice-President, Mr J Bolton, opened the discussion by outlining six pertinent issues:

1. AHC Co-operation

The AHC, through the Deputy Chairman, John Gibson, and the Industry Manager, Wayne Prowse, had demonstrated over the last 12 months a willingness to be responsive to AAGF's requirements. The Deputy Chairman in addressing the Federation's AGM on the 16 September had undertaken to provide visible "micro" financial reporting to the industry as against the "macro" generalist reporting required by the Federal Parliament.

2. AHC Statutory Charges

A letter received from the AHC on 16 September advised that provided other participating industries agreed there would be a more equitable funding arrangement, with the avocado industry's contribution to be reduced from $49,000 to $18,000 in the financial year 1997/98. The proposed new arrangements are based on a flag fall of $9,000 to which is added a sum calculated as a percentage of each industry GVP.

3. AHC/HRDC Merger

An amalgamation of the HRDC and AHC would have consequences for the AAGF. The amalgamation issue is unlikely to be resolved before December 1996 and the cut-off date for notification of withdrawal from the AHC by 30 June 1997 is 31 December 1996.

4. Levy Collection

There was a growing doubt as to the ability of AAGF members to collect levies by State legislation.

5. Prime Ministers Intervention

The recent intervention by the Prime

Merger Of Horticultural Boards Off The Agenda

Any consideration of a merger of the two major horticultural organisations—the Australian Horticultural Corporation (AHC) and the Horticultural Research & Development Corporation (HRDC)—has been dismissed following a meeting between the Chairmen of the two Corporations and the Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Industries and Energy Senator David Brownhill.

Speaking after a two hour meeting in Canberra, Senator Brownhill said it was evident from submissions received by the two Corporations and from correspondence he had received that the horticultural industry wanted the two separate structures to remain.

"On that basis any further merger discussion is now firmly off the agenda," he said.

"The two Corporations have however agreed on a number of initiatives that will see greater co-operation between the two including joint participation in industry workshops and conferences—with a goal of a higher profile for Australian horticulture overseas.

"Initiatives identified at this morning's meeting include working together in marketing opportunities in export markets, such as the sale of horticultural technology to Asia and in education programs for retailers in those countries."

Senator Brownhill said he believed the process of review initiated by the merger proposal had been of ultimate benefit to both organisations because it had forced them to examine how better they could service their clients.

He said he was encouraged by the positive ways in which the AHC was meeting the challenge of financing itself post 1997. Changes include a streamlined Board and administration structure and reduced operating costs.

"Most importantly, the AHC is developing a more affordable fee structure that will allow smaller industries to utilise AHC services. This will ensure a greater representation by the Corporation of the various horticultural commodities and increase marketing and promotion of a wider range of Australian horticulture on overseas markets.

"Similarly the HRDC had also examined how it could more effectively and affordably manage its programs."

Minister into why Australian primary industries are using the Commonwealth Taxation powers pursuant to Sections 51 and 54 of the Constitution to collect levies, was cause for concern and needed to be studied in detail prior to any withdrawal action being further progressed.

6. De-coupling

De-coupling is where the levy funds flow to the peak industry body rather than to a third party agency like the AHC. The only way for the Avocado Industry to have absolute control of its destiny was to have complete control of financial management. This would only be achieved through de-coupling.

In the present state of uncertainty Directors felt it would be irresponsible for the Federation to progress the withdrawal from the AHC at this time and resolved that the September 1995 resolution to withdraw from the AHC by 30 June 1997 be rescinded. A review of AHC membership is to be a standing agenda item for each AGM.

Since the September meeting the AAGF has received advice that there will be no merger of the HRDC and the AHC (see box previous page) and that the AHC plans to implement new cost cutting initiatives.

AHC Cost Savings Initiatives

The AHC has responded positively to calls from Industry that it reduce operating costs by announcing cost savings initiatives of $116,000 pa. In a letter to the AAGF President on 6 November the AHC Chairman advised of plans to reduce the AHC Board from nine to seven; restructure Board Members remuneration; remove the Vice-Chairman's differential payment and cease paying a Board fee for the government representative to the Board. These changes should take effect from 1 August 1997.

The proposed reduction in AHC costs advised to the AAGF on 16 September and 6 November relies on the success of two matters:

1. before the changes to AHC Board numbers and to Board remuneration can be implemented, the AHC Act must be amended, therefore Ministerial and Parliamentary assent is required; and
2. a reduction in statutory charges from $49,000 to $18,000 for the avocado industry relies on the agreement of all AHC participating industries.

Graham Gregory Medal

Dr Tony Whiley has won this years HRDC Graham Gregory Medal for Excellence in Horticultural Research. Dr Whiley, Senior Principal Horticulturist (research) with Queensland DPI, was nominated for the award by your Federation. Congratulations Tony.

Conference '97

It is official—Conference '97 will be held in New Zealand. Mr Dalton attended the NZAGA AGM in August and took advantage of the opportunity to discuss the possibility of a Joint Australian/New Zealand conference with NZAGA President Mr Ron Bailey. New Zealand was enthusiastic about the proposal and planning is now underway. The proposed dates are 20 to 26 September 1997—pencil them in your 1997 diary now.

Reader Survey

In this edition of TA your Federation is conducting a Reader Survey. You will find an explanation of each subject area on page 8. Please take the time to read the information and complete the questions on the enclosed Survey Form. The information you supply will help your Federation plan for future needs or revise current strategy. For your convenience a reply paid envelope is included—please use it to return the Survey to the Executive Officer before Christmas.

R, D & E Subcommittee

In 1995, the Subcommittee initiated a proactive approach to R & D. The success of this approach has prompted the Subcommittee to follow the same procedure this year. At their meeting on 16 September, the Subcommittee identified a number of areas that are complimentary to existing research projects. Project briefs have been compiled and expressions of interest are now being sought from the R & D community to present proposals for funding consideration in March 1997.

Exotic Pests and Diseases - preventative action

In response to a paper prepared by HRDC, the AAGF accepted the

☛ 6

AAGF Board of Directors

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Mr George Green	Mr Henry Kwaczynsk
Mr Charlie Eden	Mr Frank Moore
Mr Phil Connor	Mr Barry Daley
Mr Alan Hartley	Mr Ross Richards
Mr Ron Hansen	

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Vice-President	Mrs Mary Ravanello
Executive Officer	Ms Astrid Kennedy

Quality Project Management Committee

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Members	Mr Henry Kwaczynsk
	Mr Wayne Prowse (AHC)
	Mr Scott Ledger
Executive Officer	Ms Astrid Kennedy

R, D & E Subcommittee

Chairman	Mr George Green
Members	Mr Alan Hartley
	Mr John Dorrian
	Mr Phil Connor
	Mr Graeme Thomas
Executive Officer	Ms Astrid Kennedy

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AV 400 - Med Fly	Mr Ron Hansen
AV 502 - Dry Matter Maturity	Mr Graeme Thomas
AV503 - Boron Nutrition	Mr Graeme Thomas
AV 504 & 513 - Anthracnose	Mr Alan Hartley
AV 506 - AVOMAN	Mr John Dorrian
AV 307 - Salt Tolerant Rootstock	Mr Ross Richards
Fruit Spotting Bug	Mr Henry Kwaczynski

Varieties Committee

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Members	Mrs Mary Ravanello
	Mr Ross Richards
Nursery Advisers:	Mr Peter Young
	Mr Graham Anderson OAM
Technical Advisers:	Dr Tony Whiley
	Mr Ken Pegg
	Mr Alec Kidd OAM
Registrar:	Ms Astrid Kennedy

Conference '97 Organising Committee

Mrs Mary Ravanello	Mr George Green
Mr Phil Connor	Mr John Williams
Ms Astrid Kennedy	

Directors' Portfolios

Export (Watching brief only)	Mr Ross Richards
Statistics	Mr Barry Daley
Talking Avocados	Mr Phil Connor
Californian Avocado Society and World Council	Mr Ross Richards
Market Research	Mr Ross Richards
Product Handling	Mr Henry Kwaczynski
Farm Management Practices	Mr Frank Moore
Industry Advertising and Domestic Marketing	Mrs Mary Ravanello
Industry Data	Mr Barry Daley
Quality Assurance	Mr Ron Hansen

Subcommittee's recommendation that a consultant be retained to establish a database of exotic pest and diseases that could affect the avocado industry. Further, the consultant is to prepare an action plan to combat incursion that could be implemented if the need arises.

Your Federation has established an emergency fighting fund of $10,000 to help with the initial stages of implementing the action plan should an incursion occur. This matter is currently on hold because a National Incursion Management Task Force has been formed.

Commercialisation of AVOMAN

The AAGF accepted the recommendation for the commercialisation of AVOMAN. A management committee will be established to ensure the integrity of the intellectual property rights and to oversee the commercialisation project in general. Mr Green, Chairman of the R, D & E Sub-committee said that the commercialisation plan had produced a marketing formula for AVOMAN that would generate income to maintain the software beyond 1998.

FSB Project - back on track

Since the September meetings two meetings have been held on this topic. The first was a strategy meeting between the Australian Macadamia Society, the AAGF and the HRDC to ascertain the commitment level to finding a solution to the FSB problem and to formulate an action plan for consideration at the review meeting. The second meeting brought all the key players together to review the issue. Representatives from CSIRO, SCSFA, QFVG, AAGF, CRCTPM, AMS, NSWAG, RIRDC QDPI, Entomologists, Papaw, Mango and Custard Apple industries met on 29 October and agreed on FSB research priorities, funding/resource commitments, R & D projects and timetables.

Funding and Resources

Funds of approximately $100,000 have been committed by Avocado, Macadamia, Tropical-fruits and HRDC to year one of Projects 1 and 2 (see Table). Resources have been committed by CRCTPM.

RIRDC tentatively committed funds for 1998/99 and three other horticultural commodities pledged to allocate a high priority to FSB projects during their R & D funding deliberations.

Mr George Green, Chairman of the R, D & E Subcommittee, is well pleased with the outcome of the review meeting because the project is back on track and because the avocado industry's commitment of $22,500 will resulted in approximately $250,000 of research in the first instance.

FSB Survey

Linked with Projects 1 and 2 as shown in the Research Priorities Table is a third project that will be carried out by the R, D & E Subcommittee. The Subcommittee will conduct a survey, firstly to gather all growers' knowledge on the bug and secondly, to compile a summary of current practices in controlling the bug. In brief, the Subcommittee needs to know what growers know about FSB in their area. It is felt that if all the grower knowledge was gathered a pattern may emerge that would assist the researchers in finding a solution.

Anthracnose Plan Prepared

On behalf of the R, D & E Subcommittee, HRDC commissioned Dr Ian Muirhead to develop a situation statement on Anthracnose. This involved consultation with a wide range of researchers and growers, as well as a review of the current literature. A large number of options for progressing research in this area were identified, with guidance on the likely time frame and chances of success of each approach. The first draft of the report has been sent to all participants in the study for comment.

The key areas identified by the R, D & E Subcommittee for early attention included improved spray application (required also for improved fruit spotting bug control), combined with attention to spray scheduling. In addition, a brief is to be prepared for further basic research on fungal genetics and fruit-pathogen interactions, to develop more fundamental knowledge of the disease organism. Both these aspects of R & D will feed into the overall approach which may include aspects of canopy management, postharvest management and biological control.

It was felt that the area of biological control would be best addressed by a comparative trial of the various candidate formulations, due to the variability in results obtained to date. The risks and difficulties of delivering a biological product to the avocado industry remain enormous, but there are developments in other crops and overseas which may eventually provide spin-offs in this area. The R, D & E subcommittee will maintain an interest in this topic, without devoting further major resources at this time.

Fruit Spotting Bug Research Priorities

Project	Priority	Research Activities	
1	High	Basic Biology/Ecology - movement patterns - monitoring - canopy control - damage assessment/stage of crop/host plants	3 year Project
2	High	Chemical Trials - spray application methods - spray timing - alternatives to Endosulfan - application rates/volumes - registration problems/residue data	2 year Project
3	High	Economic Significance/impact of FSB	Current year
4	High	Extension - Communication strategy to convey information updated to growers	Current year
5	High	Survey Growers to obtain: - current patterns - spray application rate - fruit destruction levels - farmer knowledge	Current Year
6	Medium	Development of Best Practices	Long Term
7	Medium	Biological Control - parasitism	Long Term
8	Medium	Pheromones/Attractants	Long Term

Awards For Excellence Point To The Future

Recipients of this year's Graham Gregory Medals have provided the Australian horticultural industry with outstanding examples of the direction the industry needs to take to be successful in the future.

Speaking at the awards' presentation on the night of Friday, 8 November, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, Senator David Brownhill, congratulated medal winners Ms Lauren Thompson and Dr Tony Whiley for their contribution to the advancement of horticulture in this country.

"Two of the key issues facing Australian producers are the challenges of the export market and the adoption of advanced Quality Assurance systems," he said.

"Ms Thompson has been a key player in encouraging the tomato processing sector to focus on exports and to compete successfully with imports from Spain and Italy.

"Dr Whiley's development of a computer program for avocado production, titled AVOMAN, provides advice on optimum times for the full range of management issues facing growers.

"These achievements are excellent examples of the innovation, research and development that will be needed to carry Australian horticulture into the next century."

Senator Brownhill also congratulated the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation (HRDC) for its role in establishing the awards for excellence.

"It would seem particularly appropriate the awards are named after the inaugural chairman of the HRDC, Graham Gregory, who gave a lifetime of service to horticulture and public service.

"These medals are not only important to the individual recipients but also for the industry as a whole.

"They demonstrate to industry participants that excellence is encouraged, that excellence is needed and it will be recognised," Senator Brownhill said.

Dr Tony Whiley (left) and Ms Lauren Thompson receiving their Graham Gregory Medals from HRDC Chairman Mr David Minnis

ANVAS ACCREDITED NURSERIES

ANVAS accredited trees can be purchased from these nurseries:

Rainforest Nursery
Ron and Joan Knowlton
25 Reynolds Street
Mareeba Qld 070 921018

Birdwood Nursery
Peter and Sandra Young
Blackall Range Road
Woombye Qld 074 421611

Batson's Nursery
Merv and Pat Batson
Schulz Road
Woombye Qld 074 421657

Anderson's Nursery
Graham and Viviene Anderson
Duranbah Road
Duranbah NSW 066 777229

How Is Your Dog?

A farmer got up one morning to discover his trusty old dog had apparently died during the night. He was devastated and refused to bury him until he took him to the vet to be sure he was dead. The vet checked him and said he couldn't find a pulse but too be sure he brought out a cat. The cat jumped out of the cage and all over the ole dog. No response whatever. The vet said "well your dog is dead. That will be $300". "Wow isn't that a lot" the farmer complained. "Well...its $25 for my office visit and $275 for the cat scan!"

BATSON FAMILY
AVOCADO NURSERY

ANVAS accredited Avocado Trees

Varieties Include: Fuerte, Hass, Sharwil, Wurtz, Pinkerton and Reed

Merv and Pat Batson have been growing avocados on their farm on the Sunshine Coast for 25 years and have operated the avocado nursery on a commercial basis for 20 years. They have a wealth of experience and knowledge and are more than happy to spend the time needed with customers to pass on this knowledge.

Place your order now! Phone/Fax (074) 421657
P.O. Box 105, Woombye Qld 4559
Or call at the nursery at Schulz Road Woombye near the Big Pineapple

Reader Survey

Every now and again it is necessary to conduct a survey of readers to ascertain opinions and intentions. Without this knowledge the Australian Avocado Growers Federation can only guess as to what you are thinking.

This survey covers five separate topics. The information will be used to update the Avocado Industry's Strategic Plan.

A Survey Form and a Reply Paid envelope have been included in this magazine. Please read each topic carefully and, where indicated below, complete the relevant section(s) on the Survey Form.

Conference '97

In September 1997, the AAGF intends holding the avocado biennial Conference in New Zealand in conjunction with the New Zealand Avocado Growers Association. Planning is in the early stages and we need to know whether or not you are interested in attending.

The Conference will be held in Rotorua. It will have a "quality" theme and while the program is still being developed, it is planned to have both local and international speakers. A pre conference tour is being organised as well as visits to orchards and packing sheds. This will give delegates an opportunity to see how New Zealanders grow and handle avocados.

By having some idea of the size of the Australian contingent, the AAGF will be able to negotiate with travel agencies and hotels to get the best discounts possible. Your answers to the questions will not be regarded as a firm commitment and is intended only to give an idea of numbers. A Registration form and all Conference details will be in the March 1997 issue of this magazine.

Now please go to the Survey Form and complete the Conference 97 Section only. When you have finished, return here and read on.

Computers

In this modern day and age, technology is pointing the way to the future. The avocado industry can only capitalise on the technical revolution if it fully utilises the tools available. To do this, the AAGF needs to know what resources readers have. For instance, do you have a computer that can be used as a tool to help with avocado production?

In the past, this magazine has published a series on Office Management that suggested how a computer could be used to benefit growers by allowing them to use AVOMAN as a management tool; preparing letters and other documentation; calculating production and production costs; use the computer as a facsimile machine; and to run the farm's finances.

Do not fill in the Computer section of the Survey Form at this stage; first read the next two topics.

AVOMAN

By now you are well aware that version 2 of the AVOMAN prototype has been released. Over one hundred and fifty growers are trialing this computer program. In order to have a meaningful Strategic Plan, it is imperative that the AAGF knows how many growers are using or are likely to use AVOMAN at some future date.

Just to refresh your memory, AVOMAN is a computerised management information system combining a farm record keeping system with a series of management recommendation modules. Eventually, AVOMAN will have a comprehensive reporting facility capable of meeting QA reporting requirements, nutrition and canopy management recommendations, irrigation scheduling, pest and disease management strategies, post-harvest record keeping and post-harvest recommendations. In tandem with AVOMAN, a computer software package is being prepared that will be an Avocado Industry Research Database (AVOINFO). This package will contain, amongst other things, a comprehensive list of extracts of published papers dealing with avocados, and a series of detailed pictures showing various avocado diseases.

What the AAGF needs to know is the likelihood of you using AVOMAN.

Read on.

Internet

The Internet, or World Wide Web (WWW) as it is commonly known, is becoming more important as a means of distributing information. The AAGF is considering utilising the Internet as a means of communicating with people in the industry but needs to know how many readers would use such a system. The macadamia and banana industries are already using the Internet to distribute information to interested parties.

What the AAGF can do is make available information similar to that published in "Talking Avocados - Calendar of Events" but in more detail and more up-to-date; alert growers to problems affecting certain areas such as an outbreak of monolepta beetle at Alstonville; supply market prices for each major market; publicise hot news, especially if urgent action is required; provide information on the industry and who are the office bearers; create an Avocado News Group where questions can be asked and answers given; provide a forum to advertise property, equipment and jobs; allow access to E-mail; just to name a few. Are you interested in using the Internet as a farm management tool?

A good example of the power of the Internet was when the Californian Avocado Commission successfully used the Internet to stop the importation of Mexican avocado into the USA by alerting growers to the danger of disease and recommending what action they should take.

Currently access to the Internet requires a relatively modern computer with a modem. By next year, cheaper devices will be available that plug directly into a TV set.

Now go to the Survey Form and fill in the Computer, AVOMAN and Internet section, then return here for the last topic.

Talking Avocados

Talking Avocados tries to present a balance of information about the avocado industry and in particular, what the AAGF is doing on your behalf. Areas covered include what is happening and when, research and development, avocado nutrition and cultivation, world news, marketing and promotion, and other topics of interest.

Please fill in the last section of the Survey and give us your comments as to the quality of the magazine, layout, contents, or any other aspect. Let us know if you approve of the magazine and what subjects you like the most, even if you do not have any suggestions for improvement.

Now complete the last section of the Survey Form, put it in the envelope provided and mail it immediately before you forget. That way the AAGF Executive officer will be able to take action before Christmas. It is not necessary to put a stamp on the envelope.

IMPORTANT - Please fill in the survey Form and return it to the Federation's Executive Officer even if you answer NO to all questions. The more Survey Forms received the more meaningful the results. The information you provide will be treated in the strictest of confidence and not released to any other party.

TALKING AVOCADOS - HAVE YOUR SAY

Dear Sir,

I recently attended a meeting in Lismore to hear the results of trials for some new treatments of anthracnose in avocados.

The new treatments all gave better results than copper sprays (when the copper was used according to best practice). They were also friendly to soil organisms whereas the copper is causing problems to beneficial soil organisms. On top of this, the new sprays will probably be cheaper than current sprays and safer for the user.

The meeting was also attended by representatives of the macadamia, mango and nursery industries. All three industries have immediately included themselves in the trials. They have seen the obvious benefits of the new sprays and want to get the registration process moving as fast as possible.

All the work on these sprays is being done by Dr. Anna Williamson of the CSIRO on avocados but the avocado industry doesn't seem to want cheaper more effective and safer treatments for one of our most expensive problems.

If the avocado industry doesn't support Dr. Williamson she will be forced to shift the emphasis of her work to the four other industries who are willing to support her work.

Why aren't we supporting this work? I want my levies involved with this project and I would like to know why it hasn't been supported from the outset.

The moves towards quality assurance programs will call for best practices like the use of the most environmentally friendly pest and disease management possible. These alternative treatments trialled by Dr. Williamson are likely to meet this criteria. Internationally the premiums for clean green food are emphasised. When the new sprays are also more effective, what reason can we have for not supporting them?

We not only have to be seen to be using more friendly treatments, we also need to use more friendly treatments. This is a good news story that everyone is turning their back on. Why?

David Roby
Alstonville

Dear Sir

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to David Roby's letter.

Had Mr Roby been a regular reader of TA he should be aware than the AAGF has committed very substantial funding ($190,000) in the period 1992 to 1996, to ground breaking research into biological control of Anthracnose.

An independent study commissioned by HRDC for the R, D & E Subcommittee confirmed the major technical and commercial hurdles to turning this research into a practical, applied solution. The project was placed on hold until developments in larger-scale crops might improve the feasibility of the technology on avocados. In the meantime, a situation statement on anthracnose has been prepared to assist in planning a balanced approach to this complex problem, utilising the very limited R&D funds in the best possible way.

The implication that we are somehow lagging behind the Macadamia, Mango and Nursery Industries is totally false. None of these Industries have committed any funds to anthracnose research. The nursery industry did fund work on the biocontrol of damping off diseases of seedlings, but again the market has proven too small to enable commercial product release to date. Some valuable work on biocontrol of anthracnose in mangoes has been carried out, funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), not the mango industry.

Dr Williamson's very interesting line of research involves a different approach to biocontrol to that previously supported by AAGF. The initial work was carried out without any reference to the avocado industry because it was funded by a private company. We have never received any funding proposal from Dr Williamson, but it has been made clear any such proposal would have to address the hurdles to commercialisation and the consultants report on this has been made available to her.

I would also refer you to that part of the Executive Officer's reports [page 6] in this issue of TA titled "Anthracnose Plan Prepared". The "comparative trial" referred to in that text, specifically includes Dr Williamson's formulation. I would remind you that that there is as yet no published data comparing the candidate biological formulations with copper under a range of conditions. I would urge caution until this data is made available.

Like all avocado growers, the members of the R, D & E Subcommittee look forward to improved control of anthracnose and other postharvest rots in the future, preferably with zero pesticide use. I would like to assure you that the Subcommittee, with HRDC and the research community, are working hard to achieve this. I would like to encourage all growers with concerns or suggestions about the R&D program to share these with the Subcommittee.

George Green
Chairman, AAGF R,D&E Subcommittee

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Australian Round-up

Mount Tamborine

Avocado growers on Tamborine Mountain continue to suffer from the after-effects of the storm that deluged the mountain with 1,200 mm of rain at the beginning of May. Many growers lost up to 50% of their crop in the storm and many lost trees due to root drowning.

As the months have gone by, weakened trees have continued to die. As picking proceeds, growers are finding much of the remaining fruit damaged by earlier buffeting. Overall, remaining fruit size is generally smaller and is maturing earlier this season. Many growers have also picked earlier in order to give the trees a better chance of recovering and producing a good crop next season.

Blossoming and fruit set have been patchy. However, on the plus side, trees are producing a strong leaf flush. This will permit injecting against phytophthora to be done with confidence that the chemical will be transported to where it is needed—the roots.

The one bright spot in the calendar has been the arrival of the 1996 AVOMAN prototype. Some twenty growers received the disk and the team from DPI Nambour travelled to the mountain to hold training sessions on the use of the program. Two half-day sessions, a month apart, gave users time to become familiar with the broad applications, to digest them, and come back for more intense instruction. There is a consensus of opinion that the discipline enforced and information access provided by use of this program will result in better-managed, more productive orchards.

On the occasion of the first AVOMAN team visit, Dr. Tony Whiley was kind enough to accompany them and address growers on the subject of tree care, which was particularly helpful in the present climate of nursing sick trees back to health. Injecting methods came in for considerable discussion.

It may be of interest to other growers to know that the Tamborine Mountain LPA is strongly in favour of avocados for domestic consumption being sold by weight rather than per piece. The group which recently visited Chile, found that all domestic sales were by weight and that grading was into four sizes only. In Australia, it appears that the main chain stores, agents and packaging manufacturers, have yet to be convinced of the advantages of such a change.

Sunshine Coast

By now, growers will have reached the end of their 1996 season. Many will have experienced good quantity but poor quality mainly due to hail. Unfortunately, prices were sometimes disappointing. It was like the curate's egg—good in parts!

All Sunshine Coast Avocado Growers Association (SCAGA) members were invited to attend the November Quarterly Meeting held at the home of Henry and Jocelyn Kwaczynski at Woombye on 4 December. Wayne Prowse, AHC Industry Manager, was the guest speaker and many other industry faces were present. A fully catered B-B-Q and Xmas drinks followed the meeting.

AHC and the Avocado Industry

SCAGA was at one with the AAGF in deploring the unsatisfactory service delivery of AHC to the avocado industry. A considerable expenditure of growers' levy money achieved little tangible benefit to growers. SCAGA supported the AAGF's move to achieve separation from AHC and for growers to gain control of their destiny by decoupling promotion collection from the AHC.

As is well known, the AAGF decided to stick with the AHC. Therefore, SCAGA should get behind the AAGF/AHC alliance—with enthusiasm. To this end, contact has been established with Wayne Prowse. He is new and untainted by previous events and is bringing a fresh outlook to our problems.

The Association also opposed the proposal to merge the AHC and HRDC into a single body, foreseeing as the outcome a reduction in the quality of service given by HRDC.

The Queensland Horticultural Institute

Our President was privileged to be invited as an industry representative to a presentation by Dr Geoff Behncken (QDPI Director of Horticulture) on the formation of the new Horticultural Institute. This is a Queensland Government's initiative designed, amongst other things, to produce a marked improvement in services delivery to growers. Dr Geoff has been temporarily seconded to organise the new Institute which he hopes will be up and running by 1 July 1997. Our President had previously crossed swords with Dr Geoff but was most impressed, even excited, about what he had to say. The SCAGA is certainly fortunate that the new Institute will be established on the Sunshine Coast.

The Institute will be run on commercial lines and will be semi-autonomous. That is to say, it will have very limited responsibility to QDPI at 80 Ann St, Brisbane. Government money is involved so there has to be a Government Board member to ensure financial responsibility. But otherwise, the Board should be composed entirely of members of industry, which means they will be a much more responsive body working to meet growers' requirements. That can only be good.

The performance of the Institute will be heavily dependent on the calibre of the people recruited as Director and Board members. The latter will be suitably rewarded to ensure they commit sufficient personal effort to the task. Performance will also depend on the attitude of working level personnel who will need to modify the usual "Public Service" attitude to something rather more commercial and with a broader outlook. With good management and training this modification should be achievable.

MHRS staff attending the presentation asked most of the questions afterwards. It was apparent that their major concern is their conditions of service in the new Institute. This concern is only natural but it does mean that QDPI senior levels have a task to convince their people that the Institute will lead to an improvement in conditions in the medium term. The morale of these people will be just as important as the quality of the Board.

Growers should not expect instant change on 1 July next. Indeed plenty of the old faces will be seen in the old places—at least to start with. It should take a couple of years to complete the reorganisation and to iron out all the bugs. But with goodwill and hard work, a fine Institute should result capable of delivering a marked improvement in services.

West Morton

The West Moreton Avocado growers group recently held a well attended meeting at Brian and Gary Lubachs' Hampton property.

Simon Newett introduced the second prototype of AVOMAN. There was significantly more grower interest in this version than in the first one, obviously due to the fact that the package now offers a range of modules.

Training sessions are to be held in December or January after harvest is completed.

Dr. Tony Whiley was also in attendance and lead a wide ranging discussion on a range of topics including canopy management, nutrition, anthracnose control options and the use of Cultar. The latter topic was of particular interest to a number of the growers present as their orchards were only showing a light flowering and they were looking to maximise fruit set.

A number of the growers have subsequently applied Cultar to at least a portion of their orchards. It will be interesting to follow up later in the season, probably at another field day, the effectiveness, cost/benefit and problems associated with Cultar application.

Fruit set in the area is highly variable, ranging from good to very poor, with a lot of cocktails in some orchards. Obviously the final crop size will depend on the weather in the next 4-5 months.

NSW Avocado Association

From May to October when the bulk of the NSW crop was on the market, returns were poor to mediocre. This is hard to understand as crop volume was down considerably on previous seasons. Many orchards and packing sheds shipped only 50% of previous seasons volume.

To make matters worse, fruit set for '97 season appears to be poor in many areas. This will give many growers two bad seasons in a row.

Answers are being sort as to why. Is it due to:

1. showery weather during pollination?
2. excess vegetative growth at the expense of fruit set, caused by high soil moisture levels?
3. the presence of minute flower eating caterpillars? or
4. cold conditions at the time of fruit set?

Growers wishing to find the possible answers to these questions, and indeed the answers to other cultural queries on avocados, should attend the End-of-Year Dinner on Thursday 12 December as per the notice sent to every known grower in NSW.

Dr Tony Whiley will be there as will the President of the AAGF. Together they will proffer solutions and explain the AAGF's current association with the AHC.

NSW Farmers Association have suggested that Shire Councils follow a similar avenue that Kyogle Shire has in pushing The Right-To-Farm issue. People contemplating housing construction within, or bordering on, orchards are advised to make themselves aware of neighbouring orchard activities so they know what to expect. They can then determine whether they can tolerate those activities without complaint before committing themselves to living in close proximity to an orchard.

South Australia Avocado Growers Association

Royal Adelaide Show

It was a busy 9 days "Give Away" with a record crowd of 651,000 (compared to Brisbane Ecca 632,000 10 days).

Chiquita supplied 340 trays of Hass and 2 demonstrators throughout the Show. They were working or learning. Growers and their friends provided the other 6 "workers" who managed to give away about 1 tonne of avocados as cut pieces and 6 different dips. The other tonne was sold in the form of "Avocado Boats" (halves filled with dip, decorated with CC's Corn Chips). Thanks go to Smiths Crisps and to the avocado growers Messrs. Clark and Germon for their great quality Hass.

Takings for the entire Show amounted to $16,000, which exceeded the costs of $15,000.

The profit raised will pay for this year's costs of the Salt Tolerant Rootstock Trial that is funded by the South Australian Avocado Growers Association. The Association also spent $7,500 of grower's money on in-store demonstrations by Chiquita (88 in the last 15 months).

AVOMAN

Greg Ireland and Irene Kernot visited Loxton TAFE College on 11 November to train 19 avocado growers from Sunraysia and the Riverland districts. The TAFE is well suited to this type of training as they have a bank of computers capable of running the AVOMAN software.

Gwen Avocado Society

The Gwen Society, now comprising growers from Sunraysia and the Riverland has been formed and should start to operate from 1 January next year.

A special 6 kg tray is under construction, fruit stickers are being produced and an exclusive wholesaler found that has point-of-sale material. The objectives of the Society are educating retailers, quality of product and one brand marketing. Additionally, information on how best to grow Gwen avocados will be distributed to growers.

If you grow Gwen, please take action immediately as indicated in the box below.

Gwen Avocado Growers

Growers who have planted Gwen avocado trees are asked to get in touch with **Colin Fechner, Box 5322 RAMCO SA. Phone/Fax 085 412819**.

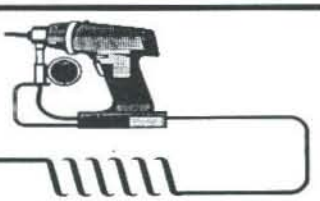
It is **very important** that all Gwen growers contact the Society as they need to knows how many trees are under cultivation and where they are planted.

In order to maximise the price obtained for Gwen, they should be sold in special boxes, so order yours now!

There are tremendous benefits to being a member of the Society, not only to you but to all other Gwen growers—so do the right thing and join the Society.

Colin is the man to assist you with cartons, membership or information on any other Gwen related subject.

PUT THE SCREWS ON PHYTOPHTHORA



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AVOMAN96 Training in Bundaberg

By Garry Fullelove - Extension Horticulturist, Bundaberg

Following a very successful AVOMAN96 launch at the Bundaberg Research Station on the 8 August 1996, a series of training/tutorial sessions on the use of the software was planned for the Childers and Bundaberg Regional Productivity Groups.

The PC laboratory at the Bundaberg Campus of the Central Queensland University was commandeered by local avocado growers over four Thursday nights spanning from the end of September into November. Some growers came well versed in computer etiquette, knowing not to grab the mouse by the tail, while others came with their newly purchased computer still not unpacked.

What followed over the four sessions was a very fruitful exploration of the ways to make AVOMAN96 work for orchard managers as well as some great feedback to the project team. Another session is planned for February 1997 before next season's harvest gets underway to review participants' experiences with the latest prototype.

The pictorial account on the next page and Back Cover record the highlights of the four AVOMAN96 training sessions held so far.

Shane Mulo's AVOMAN Tips

More than one copy of AVOMAN

Ever entered data into AVOMAN only to later discover it has gone missing?

Chances are you've opened more than one copy of the program at the one time. After you have loaded the program (either by double clicking the AVOMAN icon in windows 3.1 or selecting it from the start menu in Windows 95), the program will remain open until you close it yourself, so you must be careful not to load it again while it is open.

AVOMAN may disappear if you start working with another program, so if you lose AVOMAN from your screen while working, a quick way to get it back is to:

❶ Hold down the **ALT** key on your keyboard and press **Tab**.

❷ A menu will appear with all of the programs you currently have open.

❸ Keep pressing the **Tab** key until AVOMAN is the one highlighted.

❹ Let go of the **Alt** key.

❺ AVOMAN should appear on your screen once again.

Users who have wrestled with multiple copies of this year's prototype will be glad to hear that the AVOMAN 1997 prototype will not allow more than one copy to be loaded at a time.

Help Features

AVOMAN has two prominent help features—the hint window and pop-up (or balloon) hints (see diagram below).

If you find the pop-up hints annoying (as some people do), from the main AVOMAN tool bar:

❶ Select **Options**, then **Preferences**.

❷ Click your mouse on the **Show Pop up Hints** option so that it's box is not ticked or crossed.

❸ Click the **OK** button.

❹ The pop-up hints will no longer appear, but the hint window will remain.

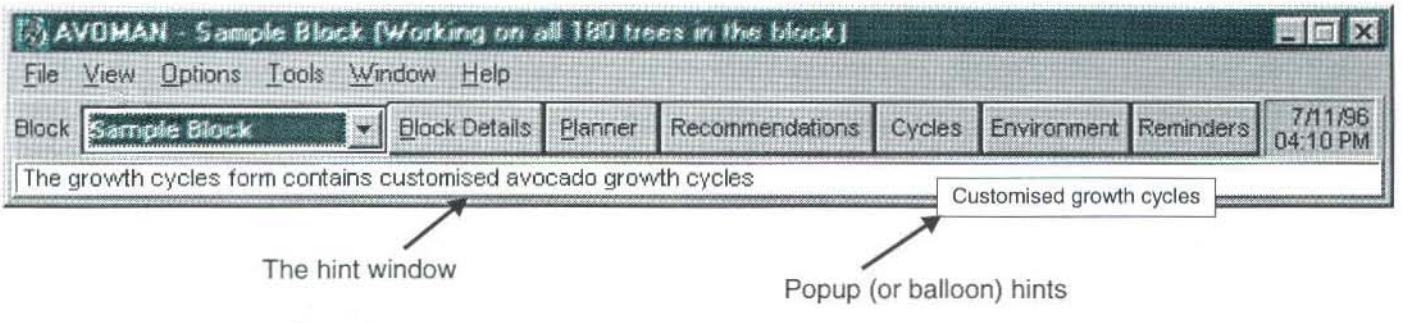
❺ To restore pop-up hints, simply repeat this procedure but this time ensure the **Show Pop up Hints** is ticked or crossed.

How Much History is Necessary?

Many growers believe they need several years worth of records to get a useful recommendation out of AVOMAN—**Not so!**

To get a recommendation, AVOMAN needs only basic information about each of your blocks. If you have them, leaf and soil analysis records will improve the confidence rating of most nutrition recommendations.

AVOMAN will only use the latest leaf and soil analysis results—it doesn't use historical analysis results. Both leaf and soil analysis results must be less than 12 months old and leaf analyses must be taken between April and May (when leaf nutrient levels are most stable).



Owners, orchard staff and consultants all participated in the AVOMAN96 training sessions.

George Green of South Kolan discusses the finer points of an invalid date entry with Hank Langeveld from Childers. Glenys Goodman in the foreground is keeping the system honest.

John Goodman of Wallaville and Derek Foley of Electra Farmlands found social networking just as rewarding as AVOMAN96 lessons.

David MacDonald of Electra Farmlands and Katie Lee of Back Electra compare notes. Katie found the difference between her Windows 95 and the PC labs Windows 3.11 easy to handle.

John Goodman prefers the colourful sea surface temperature maps used to calculate the Southern Oscillation Index. He hopes to use it to predict the timing of his next anthracnose spray.

The "diva" of AVOMAN96 in Bundaberg, Katie Lee admits a little help from neighbours and the odd late night phone call to Garry Fullelove is all part of the learning experience.

Take Care With Workers' Compensation Insurance

By QBE's Rural Workers' Compensation Manager Paul Mcintyre

Although this article relates to NSW, the same principles apply in other States. If you employ workers, make sure that you are adequately covered against claims for compensation.

It is important that employers have at least a general understanding of the Workers Compensation Act. In particular you should ask the following questions.

Do I Need Workers' Compensation Insurance?

Workers' compensation is compulsory. If you employ people you must take out and keep an up-to-date policy covering all of your workers.

In NSW it is administered by the WorkCover Authority, but managed by insurers.

If you do not have a policy in place and you should, you are liable:

- To a penalty of up to $20,000;
- To WorkCover Authority action to recover twice the premiums payable for the period, and
- For any compensation payable to an injured worker.

As you can see, if you employ people and you do not have a policy in place, it can be very costly. If you are unsure as to whether or not you require a Workers' Compensation Policy then you should contact your local insurance office.

Who Is A Deemed Worker?

This can be one of the more confusing aspects of understanding workers' compensation.

A worker, for the purposes of workers' compensation, is any person who has entered into, or works full or part time under a contract of service or apprenticeship.

The NSW Workers' Compensation Act also recognises people who contract for certain kinds of rural work including, clearing land and felling timber, constructing or demolishing fences or yards, as deemed workers.

Determining whether contractors are deemed workers can be difficult and you may find yourself in the following situations:

- A contractor does not carry workers' compensation insurance cover. You will then need to ensure that the contract value of work done on your farm is declared under your policy.
- If you are unsure as to whether they need to be declared under your policy, you should contact your local insurance agent.

If you are a partner in a business, or a sole trader, you would not be regarded as a deemed worker. But if you do bring on employees you will need a policy for them.

How Is My Premium Determined?

The premium formula is a complex equation and is set out in the legislation.

The cost of premiums is based on your payroll, industry rate and claims history.

A brief summary of how wages are defined follows:

- Salary, overtime, shift and other allowances, over award payments, bonuses, commissions, payments to working directors, payments for public and annual leave (including loading), payments for sick leave (Workers' Compensation paid excluded), value of board and lodging provided by the employer and any other consideration in money or monies given to workers under contract or apprenticeship.
- Sub-contractor wages are assessable and should be declared.

A range of industry classifications set by the WorkCover Authority carries with it rates used for calculating your premium.

If your premium is less than $2000, the number of claims, or the cost of meeting those claims to your policy, will have no impact on your future premiums. If your premium is greater than $2000 the cost of your claims will directly impact on your future premiums.

Therefore it is important to provide rehabilitation to your injured workers, not only to assist them, but to minimise the cost of the claim and your premium.

What Obligations Do I Have?

Some of the obligations to Workers' Compensation of employers are to:

- Provide a safe and healthy working environment;
- Display a summary of the Workers' Compensation Act in the workplace and make information concerning the Occupational Health and Safety Act available;
- Establish a rehabilitation program if you employ more than 20 employees. Furthermore, you will need to display a copy of your rehabilitation policy and procedures in the workplace. If you only employ 20 or more casuals for a few weeks during the year and normally have approximately three to four permanent staff only, you would not fall into this category;
- Record wages and keep the record for seven years;
- Send completed claim forms to Workers' Compensation within seven days of the worker notifying you of the injury; and
- Maintain a register of injuries book, in which workers should details any incidents.

When Is A Claim A Claim?

Any injury or disease occurring in the course of employment, or even an unrelated, pre-existing condition in some way aggravated by it can be claimable.

Where an employee reports an injury to you, and requires medical treatment or time off, you must complete claim forms.

Two claim forms need to be completed, an employer and an employee claim form. These should be sent to your insurer with any medical accounts and receipts and WorkCover medical certificates.

The decision about liability of a claim will be made by the insurer. As an employer, you should not admit or deny liability on a claim without approval from your insurer.

If, as an employer, you believe that a particular claim is not work related, you are still required to submit the claim to your insurer, if the worker wants to put in a claim. The insurer will then make the decision based on factual and medical evidence as to whether or not liability is to be accepted.

What Benefits Are Available?

Once liability has been accepted the main benefits that are payable relate to:

- Weekly payments at a basic award rate for the first 26 weeks of compensation, where the person is totally incapacitated. After 26 weeks of incapacity, if the injured worker is still totally incapacitated for work, the rate of compensation will change to a statutory amount indexed quarterly, but no greater amount than the basic award rate. If a worker is partially incapacitated, then makeup pay is applicable for the difference between his earnings, or ability to earn, and his pre-injury earnings.
- Medical/hospital treatment.
- Transport to and from treatment.
- A lump sum for permanent loss (%) of bodily function.

Investigation and legal expenses also make up the cost of the claim.

References Come Back To Haunt

By Stephen Long, Financial Review June 28, 1996

The following article appeared in The Financial Review and should be of interest to all growers who have employees working for them, be they permanent staff or casual. The ramifications for not doing the right thing could be quite expensive. Now read on:

The phone rings. It's a manager at another company, thinking about hiring that troublesome ex-employee of yours.

You let fly, telling them in damning terms just what you think of the applicant's competence and attitude.

Stop right there.

Lawyers are warning employers to be very careful when giving references, written or oral, for employees and ex-employees, following a landmark court ruling.

The judgment by the House of Lords, Britain's highest court, established that employers have a duty of care to prepare accurate references, and that they may face huge damages payouts if they negligently fail to do so.

Experts at major Australian law firms believe Australian courts are likely to adopt the same principle.

Lawyers warn that companies may face damages claims not only from former employees, but from companies that suffer economic loss after recruiting an employee on the basis of a falsely glowing reference.

The threat of civil liability may force Australian managers to stop the practice, common in unfair dismissal settlements, of agreeing to give a dismissed worker a good reference in return for their agreement to stop unfair termination proceedings.

Mr John Lunny, who specialises in human resources management law with solicitors Clayton Utz, said that it was a matter of "grave concern" that industrial tribunals routinely encouraged employers to give employees favourable references to settle unfair dismissal claims.

He said that these references may leave employers open to a damages claim from a subsequent employer "on the ordinary principles governing misleading or deceptive representations".

"Employers agree to give references that completely compromise their true feelings", Mr Lunny said. "At best, they are economical with the truth; at worst, a form of agreed deception".

Mr Gary Rothville, a partner with law firm Phillips Fox, said: "We are advising our clients against giving a reference which strays from the truth in overstating an employee's abilities or giving a false indication of their character.

"While it has been found that an employer owes a duty of care to a former employee when preparing a reference, it may not stop there.

"An employer could face civil liability from a company which suffered economic loss as a result of hiring an employee on the basis of a false reference.

"We sometimes get calls from ex-employees of our clients, raising concerns that their former manager has been making statements running them down.

"We strongly advise our clients in these circumstances not to go the other way and talk up a former employee. The best policy is to decline to comment, saying that the circumstances of the employment relationship are confidential".

The concern about references arose after the landmark judgment last year in Spring v Guardian Assurance plc, where a four-to-one majority in Britain's House of Lords decided that an employer owes a duty of care to employees in relation to giving a reference, and in obtaining the information upon which the reference is based. This allows employees to sue for economic loss resulting from the reference, providing a wider potential remedy than a claim in defamation. Mr Spring, an insurance salesman, successfully sued for economic loss after Guardian Assurance supplied another firm, Scottish Amicable, with a reference which said that Spring was "a man of little or no integrity who could not be regarded as honest".

Guardian Assurance said Spring would give bad advice, deliberately or ignorantly, in an attempt to gain maximum commissions from insurance sales. Mr Spring was unemployable in the insurance industry when word spread. The same principle has been raised in less extreme cases, leading to a series of out-of-court settlements.

Some lawyers are not convinced that Australian courts will follow England in extending the duty of care in negligence to cover references, arguing that to do so would intrude on the domain of defamation law and conflict with High Court decisions emphasising the right to free speech.

But an article in a recent Australian Law Journal argued that it was highly likely that the High Court would find a duty of care when giving references.

"Employers are likely to continue giving references, and those who provide full and frank references will need to exercise more care", Mr Tom Thawley of the Australian National University wrote in the Law Journal.

"It is easy to imagine the High Court finding a duty of care if it were presented with the facts in Spring".

Traditionally, Australian courts have taken a more expansive view of tort law than English courts, he said. This made it more than likely the High Court, faced with a claim for economic loss as the result of a negligent reference, would find a duty of care.

Indeed, labour lawyers such as Professor Greg McCarry of the University of Sydney argue that, in the new deregulated industrial relations environment, the High Court may follow the English courts in finding that employers have a general common law duty to treat their employees fairly and reasonably.

This would give employees and unions a new avenue for challenging employment contracts. Already, a prominent Federal Court judge, Justice Peter Gray, has advocated this approach in the landmark case of Byrne v Australian Airlines.

Anderson Welcomes Telstra's Better Deal For Rural Phone Users

Federal Primary Industries Minister and Deputy National Party Leader, John Anderson, said the Federal Government's dramatic increase in the availability of improved phone services for rural Australia would be a major boost for farmers and rural businesses.

Mr Anderson said the announcement from Communications Minister Senator Richard Alston that there would be a rapid speed-up in the availability of services such as call waiting, call diversion and e-mail via digital exchanges, together with high speed access to the Internet and other high speed data services was further proof of the Coalition's strong commitment to rural and regional Australia.

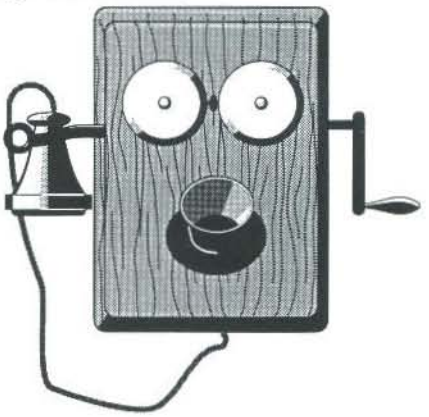
"Rural and regional subscribers can now look forward to 85% of exchanges—the same proportion as in metropolitan areas—being converted to digital by December, 1997 and effective completion of the digitisation program by December, 1998," Mr Anderson said. The breakthrough will mean that rural business and domestic users will have access to a wide range of enhanced services such as:

a. multiple phones and faxes on the one line;
b. much faster faxes;
c. fast EFTPOS links and purchasing services for business;
d. fast access to the Internet for educational, cultural and information services;
e. small screen video conferencing for business and home use;
f. shared screen, so users at different locations can work on documents and diagrams together; and
g. virtual production groups, allowing people in different locations to collaborate and produce high fidelity sound, fast text and graphics.

"Improved methods of communication are essential for the rural sector to be better able to operate on domestic and international markets.

"The improvement in the availability of high tech services to rural areas is a credit to Telstra, which has also advised the Government that from 1 July 1997, 93.4% of customers will be able to obtain an ISDN service within 90 days of request. The balance of customers comprise 3.6% situated more than 5 km from a local exchange plus a further 3% of customers in remote areas.

"Telstra is examining options to help these customers quickly obtain these new high tech services," Mr Anderson said.



Weather Information And The Man On The Land

Two weather related subjects of interest to farmers are the availability of meteorological information on the Internet and an Agricultural Meteorological Conference recently held in Brisbane.

Met Data And The Internet

A full weather service is available to all those growers who have access to the Internet. The Bureau of Meteorology has developed a World Wide Web (WWW) service that offers a broad range of meteorological information on the Internet.

Some of the services available free to growers include current public weather forecasts and warnings, daily observations of temperature, rainfall and river height throughout Australia, a selection of satellite pictures and weather maps, climate information, including weekly and monthly rainfall charts, seasonal summaries and outlooks and a comprehensive set of average temperatures and rainfall for Australian locations.

Other products include educational material for students of meteorology, for example, explanations of the weather charts and illustrated on-line brochures on topics such as "Surviving Cyclones" and "Severe Storms". General information about the Bureau of Meteorology is also available.

The Bureau's WWW service complements other means of disseminating meteorological and hydrological products such as radio, television, press, telephone voice services and Weather by Fax service. Any of these facilities can be checked for important messages such as tropical cyclone warnings.

Weather information can be accessed at - http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/ - and then select the district of interest.

Agricultural Meteorological Conference

A Conference "Agricultural Meteorology - The impact of weather and climate on agriculture" was held on 1-4 October at the University of Queensland - St Lucia, Brisbane. The Conference featured a series of stimulating keynote and specialist presentations on topics of interest to researchers and providers of services to the agricultural community.

The major objective of the Conference was to provide a contemporary perspective on the relationships between weather, climate and agriculture, including the data required to monitor these relationships, the services available to assist primary producers, and research currently being undertaken. Australia experiences a high level of climate variability in both space and time and the Conference addressed such key issues as the relationship between climate and agriculture, the potential benefits of seasonal forecasting and the adaption of agriculture to climate change.

Early Warning Of Insect Pests Enhanced

The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) has initiated two national early warning surveillance programs to enhance Australia's ability to detect exotic pest incursions and provide another line of defence. AQIS has allocated $1.3 million over the next two years to develop and implement surveillance programs—in conjunction with existing State and Commonwealth pest programs—to form a co-ordinated national pest surveillance strategy.

The first programs will concentrate on two exotic pests that have a wide host range and that involve a range of stakeholders:

1. exotic fruit flies (specifically, species in the genera Bactrocera and Ceratitis) that are established in countries in proximity to Australia, and
2. Asian Gypsy Moth.

Traps baited with lures that will attract most fruit flies of immediate concern to Australia are being set out in port areas that have been recognised as being at higher risk of coming into contact with exotic fruit flies, and of allowing their subsequent breeding.

The program will link existing fruit fly surveillance programs being conducted by State governments and the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy Program and fill potential gaps, to form a co-ordinated national exotic fruit fly surveillance network. It will have at least 2300 traps covering 39 first-port-of-call areas around Australia, and will support research to develop new diagnostic techniques that could be used in surveillance programs.

Asian Gypsy Moth is a potentially serious pest of up to 600 species of trees, and in countries where it is established has already demonstrated its ability to cause significant damage.

The main pathway by which this pest could enter Australia is as eggs on containers and ships, so traps are being placed in 22 port areas in Australia (tropical regions are not included, because Asian Gypsy Moth has not established itself in these areas elsewhere in the world). The surveillance program has been developed in conjunction with State Forestry Departments, pest preparedness staff and in consultation with overseas agencies, and will be carried out by AQIS and State governments as part of their forest pest surveillance strategies.

The exotic fruit fly and Asian Gypsy Moth surveillance programs will increase Australia's ability to detect incursions of these pests at low populations; earlier detection will also trigger management actions more quickly and allow for more efficient, cost-effective eradication and containment strategies.

Developing surveillance programs for these two pests, will foster a greater awareness, need and co-ordination of exotic pest surveillance programs for the future development of more effective national surveillance programs for other targeted pests in the future.

Minister Receives Quarantine Review Report

The Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, John Anderson, has received the report of the independent Australian Quarantine Review Committee headed by Professor Malcolm Nairn.

Mr Anderson said the comprehensive report covered all aspects of Australia's quarantine system and was the culmination of an exhaustive investigation conducted over a 10-month period.

The Minister said Professor Nairn and his committee—Andrew Inglis, Carolyn Tanner and Peter Allen—had consulted extensively with industry groups and other interested parties during the review and were to be sincerely thanked for their contributions.

"Australia's freedom from many of the world's most serious pests and diseases of plants and animals is a tremendous competitive advantage we cannot afford to give away," Mr Anderson said.

"The maintenance of a conservative quarantine policy is one of the fundamental planks on which Australia is building on its reputation as a supplier of clean green produce to international markets.

"Australia is obliged to meet its international trade commitments and cannot use quarantine as a non-tariff trade barrier, but equally, we are entitled to apply a conservative quarantine policy."

Mr Anderson said he would release the report in December ahead of any decisions by the Government.

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Sunraysia Nurseries, Gol Gol NSW Ph (050) 248502

Industry Manager's Say ...

By Wayne Prowse

In this issue of TA we are pleased to publish part of an AHC survey conducted earlier this year [see page 22] into customer perceptions of the AHC. I have referred to this previously as it has helped me to understand your needs. The entire report would fill this magazine, therefore, only a summary of the participating industry section is printed.

The survey also covered AHC's relationship with government departments, retailers and non participating industries. Needless to say the survey has been taken very seriously by the AHC and has helped shape our directions for providing a service to industry unavailable elsewhere.

During this quarter I have had the pleasure to present the 1995/96 annual report to the AAGF. I will be keen to discuss the report at local meetings as the opportunities arise as I believe it does provide a good insight into the marketing activities conducted for the Avocado Industry. A printed report is enclosed with this issue of TA.

New Avocado Leaflet - avocados really make a meal

The new leaflet included in the last issue has been well accepted by the retail trade and is being distributed by in-store demonstrators and merchandisers. If you would like a supply for your local supermarket please write to me and I will arrange to send you some. The wider these are distributed the more people will read about the benefits of avocados.

Marketing and Promotion - there is a difference

One issue coming from the AHC survey was that many growers did not understand the term "marketing". Some knew that the AHC performed a marketing role that was important though not understood, whilst others saw marketing as sending produce to market. Again others saw the AHC role as promotion only.

Successful marketing is the ability of a company or industry to influence consumers to buy their products at profit and involves an integrated mix of; PRODUCT (your avocados); PROMOTION (advertising, in-store demonstrations; PR (consumer leaflets and even product stickers); PLACE (distribution to places where consumers can buy); and PRICE. The wrong mix can mean a big cost in lost opportunity, dissatisfied customers, over supply and lower returns.

At the AHC we are concerned to assist industry with the entire marketing mix and not just the promotion part. Sure, promotion is a key result area for us, however, to blindly promote without addressing issues in other areas would be to let industry down. I am just as interested in Pricing, Distribution and Product Quality issues as I am in Promotion so that it all works together.

Public Relations - a closer look at what goes on

Public Relations (PR) is a major part of the promotion mix where some 15% of total levies are spent. This month TA takes you behind the scenes for a look at how PR works for you.

When the annual promotion budget is agreed with the AAGF an allowance is made for PR, in store demonstrations and other "promotion" activities. The avocado marketing forum is responsible for recommending the split and once agreed with industry (AAGF), Industry Manager Wayne Prowse briefs a promotion agency with the recommended strategy. For avocados the agency is QFVG, although the AHC does provide the same service through a separate division for other industries.

For 1996-97 the agreed strategy was a focus on health benefits of avocados and this was carried through in PR, Point-of-Sale, and in-store demonstrations. Separate companies provide specialist services for these areas in the same way a builder contracts an electrician, plumber and plasterer to work on a building. QFVG subcontract the PR work to a specialist PR company—The Corporate Advantage.

The Corporate Advantage (TCA) staff undertake to prepare a program of press releases and other activities within the budget and agreed to by the AHC through QFVG on behalf of industry. They seek out available research on avocados and may contact key growers and others for information to prepare timely press releases that include relevant stories about avocados following the agreed health strategy.

The release copy is then checked and approved by the AHC Industry Manager who works closely with the avocado industry and understands the issues involved. When approved, the release is issued to a wide range of consumer publications to reach the "target audience" which is usually dozens of local newspapers and national magazines, radio and TV.

The professional style of writing and the material content is vitally important as unlike advertising, there is no commitment for a publication to print the article. As a rule they like "news" articles and it does become increasingly difficult to prepare "news breaking" stories that will be picked up promptly by all media. For example, we have pushed the cholesterol issue so much that it is no longer news, however recent developments in "folate"[1] issues of which avocados are an excellent source, allows a new angle to promote avocados. This does not mean we drop the no cholesterol line but simply we no longer lead with it.

A particularly important release has recently been prepared and is being issued to all health related magazines including those published by Health Funds. The release is titled "Avocados - a prescription for life" and covers why avocados are good for healthy living and can help prevent birth defects, heart disease, high blood pressure and cancers. It is factual and informative for all people interested in good health.

Finally another important element of PR is the relationship with food writers. Including avocados in magazine recipes is valuable to the industry and we need to constantly remind these people of how versatile avocados are and any new developments their readers should know about. A media lunch that may sound like a "wank" to some can be a valuable way to bring media and industry people together that

[1] **Folate is a vitamin (B12) that assists in the growth and repair of body tissue. A deficiency of Folate during pregnancy may lead to birth defects. Folate has also been shown to reduce the likelihood of cancer of the large bowel. Folate is mainly found in green vegetables but is quickly destroyed by cooking. Avocados are a good source of Folate.**

leads to stories being published worth far more than the cost of the lunch. To that end, a media lunch is planned as part of the PR program in March 1997 to launch the 1997 season.

So next time you see a story about avocados in a newspaper, its more likely to be part of a well planned, strategically targeted PR campaign than a "lucky break".

Marketing Forum Review

The AHC is conducting a review of the marketing forum process to ensure that it is meeting the needs of industries. The review is particularly looking at the structure, communications, term of appointments, scope and any other working issue that forum members and peak bodies wish to raise.

Marketing forums were established by the AHC for each industry using people nominated by each industry. The forums consist of a range of expertise to develop marketing program recommendations that meet needs of the wider industry for endorsement by the peak bodies and implementation by the AHC.

The Avocado Marketing Forum includes growers, retailers and wholesalers, the executive officer and AHC Industry Services. Being a committee of the AHC it is co-ordinated and chaired by the AHC although the AAGF is represented on the forum. All recommendations are presented to the AAGF for endorsement prior to implementation.

A stronger working relationship between the AHC and AAGF is contributing to more effective marketing forum outcomes and communications to industry at large.

Marketing Forum Meets in Brisbane

The Avocado Marketing Forum met in Brisbane on 15 November to review the current promotion program and to recommend strategies for the next year. Highlights of the meeting were agreements to:

- Continue in-store demonstrations as the prime method for introducing avocados to first time users. Currently more than 70% of Australians do not eat avocados regularly and therefore the potential for new users is large. The meeting endorsed the implementation of a more systematic approach to scheduling and measuring effectiveness.
- Advertise in the Bounty Baby Book that is distributed to 95% of new mothers via hospitals. This works out to be a more cost effective method to reach new mothers with the avocado benefits message for mothers and babies than relying on the baby leaflets that have worked hard for us over several years.
- Pursue a trials of per kg pricing in 6

☛ 20

TALKING AVOCADOS ADVERTISING - MARKET PLACE PAGE

The AHC, responsible for managing the advertising for Talking Avocados, is proposing to include a special "Market Place" page for suppliers to the Avocado Industry to advertise their products and services. Each advertiser would have the opportunity to purchase a 55 mm x 55 mm space. Special rates would apply to long term commitments as well as have the opportunity to provide editorial copy on occasions.

Readers of TA are encouraged to seek out advertisers.

For more information or to supply contact details, please write or fax Mr Wayne Prowse, Australian Horticultural Corporation, Level 14, 100 William Street SYDNEY NSW 2011 Fax 02 9356 3661.

Your Levy At Work

In store Demonstrations

Forty-two demonstrations were conducted in October and 15 were planned for November. These will be the last until the last week in February 1997 when a March - May program will start.

Public Relations

November 1996 - **Avocados - A Prescription for Life**
To be issued in November and targeted at quarterly health magazines and newsletters for early 1997 publishing.

November 1996 - **Australian Avocados - A recipe thought for all meals**
Target Woman's Magazines needing 3 month lead times for February issues.

March 1997 - **Media Luncheon** - 1997 season launch, Sydney

Point of Sale

Avocados Really Make a Meal - Posters and Leaflets - ongoing distribution to retailers.
Avocados - Baby's first food - leaflets - ongoing distribution to baby health centres.

Other

TV Advertorial - National Heart Foundation feature - September

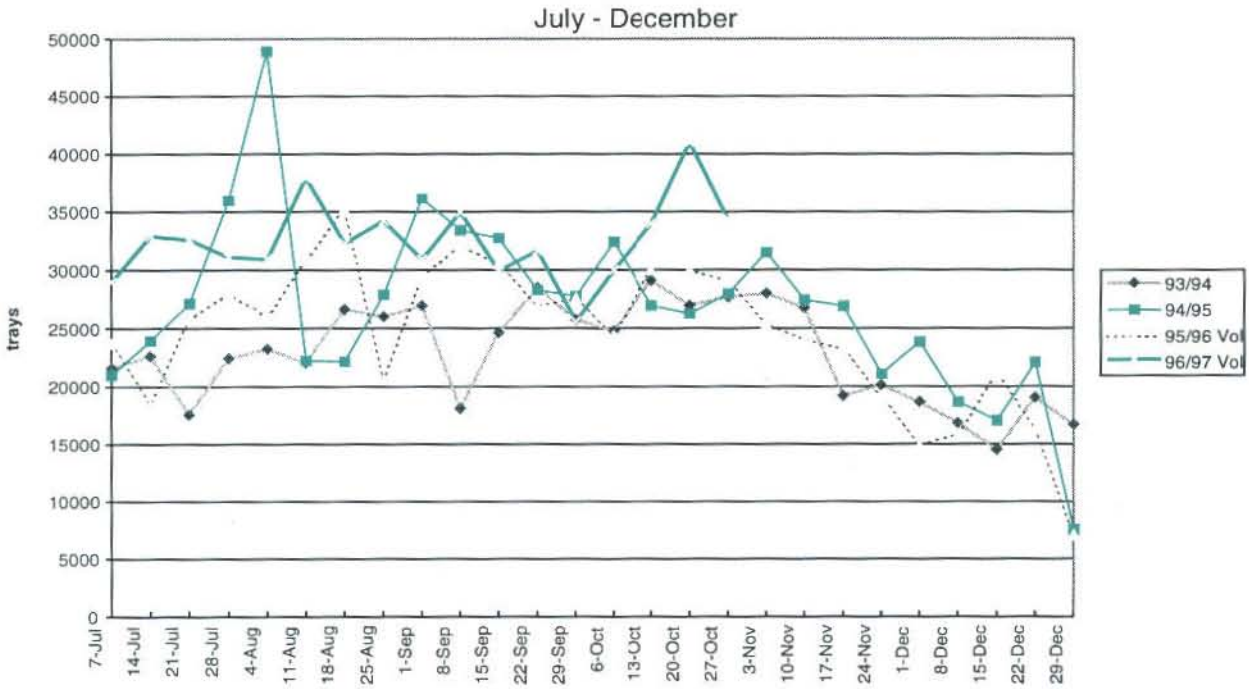
stores of each of the major retailers who have agreed to run the program. This should provide conclusive data to retailers for evaluation of this method of pricing.

The Forum discussed a range of other topics including ways to work more effectively with Avocado Marketing Groups; communications to agents, wholesalers and retailers; and operations of the Marketing Forum itself.

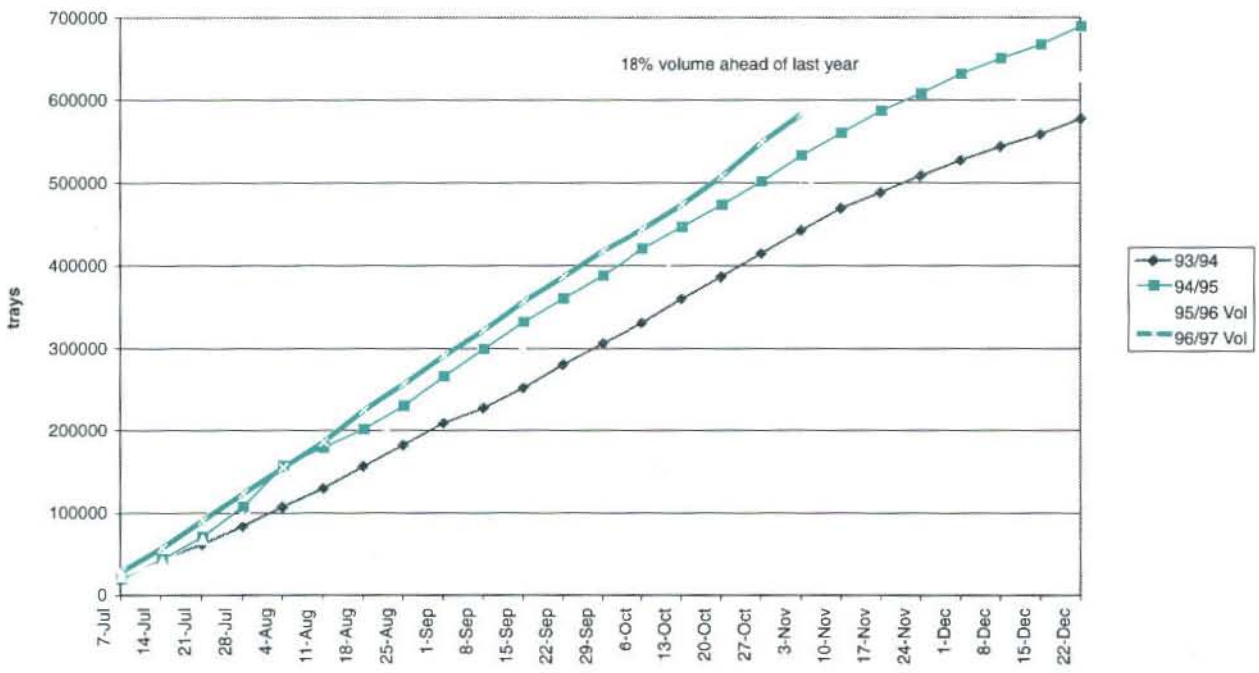
Industry Manager Wayne Prowse presented a range of market research and statistical data that tracked the avocado market through Flemington Markets. In the July to November period this year the avocado volumes have been 18% higher than for the same time last year (see graphs).

Consumer research presented showed that the key reasons for purchasing avocados was the luxury image of a rich creamy texture not found in any other fruit. They also recognised the benefits of mono-unsaturated "good" fats in avocados and did NOT see this as dangerous to their health. This supports the premium price and is a good sign that the promotion strategies are working although the industry is reminded that consistently high quality has to be delivered to maintain the image and price.

AVOCADO - WEEKLY RECEIVALS - FLEMINGTON MARKETS



AVOCADOS - CUMULATIVE VOLUME - FLEMINGTON MARKETS



AUSTRALIAN HORTICULTURAL CORPORATION

Horticultural Market Access Top Priority Of Government

The Australian horticultural industry stood to gain significantly from the 'Supermarket to Asia' strategy launched by the Prime Minister, according to Senator David Brownhill, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minster for Trade and the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy.

Senator Brownhill, who is also chairman of Horticulture 2000 and the Food Market Access Committee (PFMAC), welcomed the announcement that the Government will be placing increased emphasis upon pursuing access to Asian markets for Australian horticultural produce.

"It is anticipated the Asian food market will be worth about $US16 billion by the year 2000. Furthermore, it is the intention of the Australian horticultural industry to capture $2 billion worth of exports to this region by the year 2000," he said.

"While it is of paramount importance for our producers and processors to be dedicated to excellence and quality, an underlying impediment facing Australia's food industry is actual access to these markets."

Senator Brownhill said the Government would be allocating an additional $6 million over three years for pursing market access issues.

"As the Chairman of the Processed Foods Market Access Committee, I will be responsible for producing reports to the Supermarket to Asia Council outlining areas in which Australian producers and processors are facing market access problems."

"While the Australian Government will be striving to get access to the huge and growing markets of Asia, producers in this country also need to get their acts together to ensure they are in a position to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

"This means a total commitment to quality assurance from the paddock to the plate, eliminating problems that exist in some areas with respect to the cool chain and meeting the specifications in target markets."

Major Breakthrough - Taiwan Opens Up Market To Australian Horticultural Produce

The Australian horticultural industry stands to boost its exports to Asia by an estimated $4.5 million per year following the announcement that trade negotiations have resulted in greater access to the lucrative Taiwan market.

Chairman of the Horticulture 2000 group, the Citrus Market Development Group (CMDG) and the Pear Industry Steering Group, Senator David Brownhill, applauded the announcement and described it as a genuine win for Australian fruit growers in particular.

"Horticultural exports to Taiwan were $6.3 million in 1994/95, so this represents a substantial increase in trade," he said.

"Producers in this country have been seeking increased access to the Taiwan market for many years and this result is a reward for that sustained effort.

"Effective from early next year, the quota for Australian apples will be doubled to 2400 tonnes per annum.

"Access has also been granted for citrus products, for the first time, with an interim quota of 600 tonnes per year for oranges, lemons and grapefruit.

"Similarly, 1000 tonnes per annum of plums and/or peaches are to be allowed into the market."

Senator Brownhill said significant tariff reductions of 10% (effective from next year) had also been achieved for oranges, lemons, limes, grapefruit and mandarins.

"This is a forerunner to the types of arrangements the Government will be pursuing via the Supermarket to Asia strategy and shows the gains that are possible from a proactive approach to trade in the region."

He said that while these measures will deliver major benefits to Australian growers, these quota restrictions will eventually be removed upon Taiwan's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

"It is important for exporters in this country to exploit this improved access to establish themselves in the Taiwan market so they are in a position to take advantage of the greater access that will occur in the future."

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AUSTRALIAN HORTICULTURAL CORPORATION

The AHC Research Report

By Richard de Vos and Karen Richards, Richard Strategic Services, Sydney

A study to investigate and measure the opinions and attitudes of the AHC's four 'Key Customer' groups

The Australian Horticultural Corporation (AHC) is a Federal statutory body. Its primary responsibility is to provide "world-class marketing programs, both domestic and international", for Australian horticultural industries.

In the context of the broad responsibility, the Corporation is currently reviewing its customers, markets and activities; and setting direction and priorities for the future.

The Study

The overall project was designed to provide essential information that will guide the Corporation in determining and delivering its products and services to each Key Customer group.

This study measures customer satisfaction with Corporation's current product and service delivery and sets benchmarks against which further studies can be compared.

Objectives

The objectives of the total project were:

- To identify, describe and prioritise the range and services the commercialised AHC should offer to its Key Customer groups.
- To set product and service benchmarks against which the Corporation's performance (i.e. customer satisfaction) can be measured now, and tracked on a regular basis in the future.
- To identify the communication strategies that will enhance the AHC's communication with, and quality of service to, its Key Customers.

Research Procedure

In-depth personal interviews were conducted with various respondents from the *Retail (Domestic); Service Providers; Strategic Business* and *Government Key Customer* Groups. Respondents were selected in accordance with a set procedure and at the completion of each interview, the respondent was taken through a structured questionnaire for this 'benchmarking' study.

For the *Participating Industries*, 'Focus Group' discussions with growers were held. At the completion of each group discussion, questionnaires for study were distributed for self completion.

Report Summary

The remainder of this article is a summary of outcomes of interviews with 96 growers and representatives of the AHC's participating industries.

The research findings have been reduced into these two pages which adequately summarises a very diverse research task. Throughout the study there were industry-by-industry differences, and particular issues which may not be drawn out, or highlighted in this summary. It is therefore recommended that if possible, readers review the full report which is available from the AHC.

Their Business Now - and compared to 5 years ago

All those involved in the groups (with the exception of those in the Avocado Industry, and one of the Nursery Industry groups), spoke passionately about how tough their business is these days. They identified improvements in quality, varieties and a number of other areas—but overall feel that these changes are not reflected in improved prices. Some talked of declines in real returns over the past 5 years.

Increasingly, to survive and grow they are taking a strong 'business' approach to their enterprise (described as "being businessmen first and growers second"), and some of the more traditional growers find this a real challenge.

In almost every aspect of growing, there have been marked changes in the last 5 years, and growers recognise the need (but some find it difficult) to keep up with the latest developments. Many feel they are being swamped with information, paperwork, surveys, government forms etc.

Introduction of new varieties is seen as an essential marketing strategy by some, and a necessary evil by others. Either way, many growers are unsure if the varieties being promoted to them are those with greatest consumer appeal.

Exports are considered important for the future, but only those currently involved in this area were able to discuss it in any detail. The rest knew little other than that it is important to their industry's prosperity.

Quality has improved over the last 5 years, but in the related areas of packaging and presentation the feeling is that little has been done. No group was able to discuss issues of quality, as they may relate to the end consumer.

On the matter of retailing of their produce (with the exception of Nursery), very little is known. Indeed there did not seem to be an appreciation of the importance of the retail sector and the increasing influence it may have.

Their Business - the next 10 years

The dominant change forecast for the next 10 years will be continued rationalisation, with the larger farms getting bigger (and grower group organisations developing); and the smaller farms reducing markedly in numbers. The smaller farms remaining, will tend to be specialising in particular produce/varieties, or niche markets. This rationalisation is seen by around half the group members as sad, but inevitable.

For three of the industries surveyed the spectre of overproduction looms large. Related to this is the lack of solid, comprehensive data (crop size, production forecasts etc.) upon which they, and their industries can make decisions. This is seen as a serious shortcoming.

If there is any threat of increased imported product, it was certainly not recognised in these groups. It was mentioned, and not with a great deal of importance, by some members of only one group.

On health, safety and environmental issues, only the issue of careful use of sprays and their impact on the surrounding environment, seemed important. Environmental sustainability was not mentioned generally as a factor important in the next 10 years.

Support Services - General

Overall, the groups had some difficulty at the start in considering and discussing the various kinds of Support Services their industry may need. One service mentioned by all groups however, and considered

critical, is the provision of comprehensive crop forecasting and other industry statistics.

Domestic market intelligence was mentioned by only one group as being a necessary service, and then by only a few in that group. Consumer research on the other hand was more enthusiastically discussed. But in both areas, it is clear the group members did not really appreciate how such information might be used by them, or their industries, to advance their business.

Those group members (only a minority) who are involved in, or associated with export, were strong supporters of the need for overseas market intelligence and competitor benchmarking.

Support Services - Research and Development and the HRDC

Each group nominated Research and Development as an important service needed by their industry. However, virtually no-one was able to talk about their industry's current R & D plan and priorities. The need for increased R & D work, beyond the farm gate, was noted by about one third of the groups.

Awareness of the HRDC and it's activities is very limited, and among these groups there was quite a deal of confusion about the difference between the roles and activities of the AHC and the HRDC.

Marketing and Promotion

While all groups were clear and strong in the view that marketing and promotion have an important part to play, it is quite clear that most group members did not fully understand the range and scope of activities involved. We would go so far as to say that they think marketing is important, but really don't know what it is. Therefore, it is not surprising that they might be critical of, or confused about the AHC's activities in this area. The notable exceptions here were the two Nursery industry groups.

There is no consistent opinion about who is responsible for marketing and promotion. The fact that a levy is paid to the AHC leads some to think that it is the Corporation's responsibility. No one saw that the responsibility for effective marketing could be shared by various players, from grower to retailer.

The AHC

Knowledge of the Corporation, and it's activities, can only be described as very poor. Many have no idea what the organisation is in place to do, for whom, or how.

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There is little evidence that the Corporation's new customer focus and relationship with its Participating Industries is an improvement on the past. But there remains among most (who have had direct association with the Corporation), a very real antipathy and even distrust. This must be addressed as a priority, otherwise the negative attitudes will prevail, even if improvements are being made at the industry leadership level.

All groups felt that the Corporation should be "responsible to" the levy payers, but clearly did not think this was the case at present. There is a feeling among some that the AHC has used the 'responsible to the Minister' line to thwart their industry's desires for the expenditure of levy funds.

Communication, both ways, is seen as an area needing urgent attention. Most group members say they receive virtually no information about the Corporation and it's activities. The groups were able to provide much input and suggestions on how such communication should be managed. Of primary importance is the need for face-to-face communication at the grass roots level.

The AHC Board members are virtually anonymous and the groups have a feeling that the Board may not be truly representing the interests of levy payers. They would like to see Board members out and about in the participating industries more often at local industry gatherings etc.

Regarding AHC staff, the groups were keen to suggest the qualities and characteristics they felt were important in AHC staff. Overall they see AHC people should be good planners, co-ordinators and facilitators, as well as excellent communicators (in the right style and at the appropriate level).

One of the most important issues to levy payers in the Participating Industries is the control and expenditure responsibility for their levy funds. Every person in the groups was unequivocal in the view that the levies were "their" money (even if only morally), and that their industry should have control over how the funds are utilised. This is another of the fundamental issues that must be addressed if the Corporation is to gain, or win back levy payer support.

In looking at products and services which might be provided by the Corporation to the industries, the groups were not able to be very specific. There is however a recognition among some that advertising and promotion may not be the whole picture, and that there are other specific strategic needs the industries have which might be filled by the AHC.

In each group, to varying degrees, there was a genuine desire to see their industry working closely, and more productively with the Corporation. It is recognised that the Corporation can bring specific skills, resources and experience to the relationship—thus enhancing the prospects of the industry as a whole, and the industry participants individually. But the groups want to see this relationship as a partnership, one based on recognising, and valuing, the skills and input of both sides.

Citrus Research - Is it helpful To Avocado Growers?

Normally, avocado growers benefit from research carried out specifically for the avocado industry. However, the question arises: Is there research carried out for other tree crops that is applicable to the avocado industry?

The answer must be: Probably, but how do we know?

Well there is no way of telling for sure but some aspects of research should be applicable. For instance, take the case of research into handling oranges. Although a different fruit requiring different handling procedures, there are some similarities and perhaps some of what applies to oranges applies to avocados.

Two areas spring to mind, the use of picking bags, what type of field bins should be used.

The following two articles on oranges cover these subjects but just because the results apply to oranges does not necessarily mean that they apply to avocados.

What you as a grower can do is to assess your practises and decide if any aspect should be further evaluated.

Why not raise it at your next district avocado meeting. Find out what other avocado growers think and perhaps request specific research on one or more subjects.

Future issues of Talking Avocados will bring more articles on research carried out for "other crops". Hopefully, out of this series on post handling of oranges, some ideas will emerge that are applicable to handling avocados.

Ways To Improve Orange Picking Bags

By Dr. Ghassan Al Soboh, Research Fellow and Dr. Graham Moore, Senior Lecturer, University of Melbourne

Are you using the right orange picking bags? Are you interested in knowing how picking bags can be improved? If so, the Agricultural Engineering Research Group at the University of Melbourne has conducted a research study, funded by the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation, on orange picking bags in Australia and ways to improve them.

Survey results in 1995–96 indicated that most citrus growers in Australia are still harvesting oranges manually using canvas or plastic coated citrus bags, aluminium bow ladders, knitted gloves and arm guards. It has been estimated that about 3500 picking bags are used annually for citrus harvesting and about 1200 bags are needed by Australian Citrus Growers each year to replace worn bags at a cost of approximately $60,000.

There are five main local manufacturers of picking bags producing various types and sizes. These are Joy Fruit Picking Bags, Smith Canvas & Vinyl, Woodchuck Equipment, Paul's Shoe & Saddle, and Upholstery & Canvas Centre.

There are currently two main sizes of picking bags in Australia; 1 and 1.5 bushel (35 and 52 litre) with a capacity of 20 and 30 kg.

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health in the USA has set 17 kg as the maximum weight for repetitive lifting in ideal conditions. Research results on back injury in the USA in 1995 indicated that the current citrus bags should be reduced in capacity to less than 16 kg or eliminated. This will decrease stress and fatigue, thereby creating a less hazardous working environment. The Code of Practice of Manual Handling issued by Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985 in Victoria indicated that the risk of back injury increases significantly where objects above the range 16–20 kg are being handled.

A survey of citrus growers indicated that 95% of Australian growers are satisfied with the size of bags. However, many pickers prefer to use apple picking bags as they are smaller and easier to carry than orange picking bags. At this stage, it is highly recommended to use small orange picking bags of 15 kg capacity to reduce picker fatigue, risk of back injury and thereby improve overall picker productivity.

Most picking bags in Australia are made of canvas, however, some manufacturers produce plastic coated bags. Growers have reported that canvas bags need periodic washing and tend to wear at the corners. However, because plastic coated bags are water proof, pickers tend to lean with their bags against ladders during picking causing fruit damage.

Absorption of juice in canvas bags can be used as an indicator of fruit damage when training pickers. Survey results indicated that most citrus growers are satisfied with canvas bags. Moreover, canvas bags have been found to be more popular among pickers as they are more comfortable to wear and more suitable to use for other crops than plastic coated bags.

The harness is the most important element in a bag's design. There are two types of straps being used in picking bags. Wide straps about 50 mm, and narrow straps about 20 mm. Wide straps are usually made of fabric or canvas and used mainly for the shoulder straps. Narrow straps are made of leather or plastic and used to secure the bag around the waist and for the bag's latches.

Field observations on picking bags showed that shoulder straps are either too narrow or tend to fold during field work causing excessive pressure on the picker's shoulders and back.

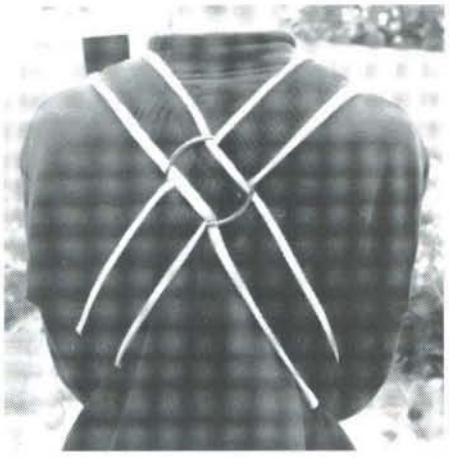
The current bag designs increases the

Shoulder straps are too narrow or tend to fold during field work.

pressure on the picker's lower back and may cause the crossing point of the back straps to slide upward resulting in excessive pressure near the neck.

Attempts have been made to increase the comfort of straps. A local manufacturer (Smith's Canvas & Vinyl) has designed a picking bag with two cushion pads on the shoulders attached to the bag's straps. The cushion pad is 50 mm wider than the bag's straps and more comfortable to wear than standard straps. However, the design has to be modified to prevent the crossing point of the back straps sliding up.

Another manufacturer (Joy Fruit Picking Bags) has introduced padded straps similar to straps used in backpacker bags. The padded strap is about 50 mm wide and more comfortable to wear than standard straps.



Padded straps similar to straps used in backpacker bags.

A manufacturer in New Zealand (Harvest Wear) has designed a picking bag with two cushion pads sewn to the straps on the shoulder. Each pad is about 600 mm long and 60 mm width. The pads are very well secured to the straps and comfortable to wear.

Full back support made of woven mesh to allow for air circulation.

Although the pads improve strap comfort the pressure on the picker's shoulders and back did not decrease significantly.

Field observations on picking bags by Dr. Al Soboh in addition to growers' and pickers' comments were translated and taken to Smith Canvas & Vinyl company in Renmark, SA. A new picking bag was designed to distribute the bag's weight on a larger area on the back and shoulder. The new bag has wider shoulder straps and full back support made of woven mesh to allow for air circulation. Growers who have seen the design liked the bag and some suggestions were made to improve it further.

Keeping the picking bag open during fruit harvesting is a critical issue. Survey results indicated that there are several types of hoops being used in picking bags.

Some picking bags have rigid steel hoops while others have either metal or plastic flexible hoops. Rigid hoops are excellent at keeping the bag open during picking, however, it encourages the picker to lean on the bag against the ladder. This action may cause damage to fruit inside the bag. Flexible hoops are able to maintain the bag open and are more comfortable to work with compared to rigid hoops.

A steel hoop is used to keep the bag open during fruit harvest.

The emptying method usually involves unclipping a latch from a metal ring. Picking bags are provided with either one or two clips.

Field observations have shown that the leather or plastic strap which held the latch in the picking bag tends to break more frequently in single clipped than in double clipped bags causing fruit to empty onto the ground.

Summary

In summary, small canvas orange picking bags of less than 20 kg are recommended to reduce picker's fatigue, risk of back injury and improve the overall picker's productivity.

The picking bag with full back support distributes the bag's weight over a larger area compared to standard bags. It also reduces pressure on the picker shoulders and back, and allows for air circulation during orange harvesting.

Fabric adjustable shoulder straps, with a width of 50 mm or more last longer and are more comfortable to wear compared to harnesses with smaller back strap widths.

The sewn fabric shoulder and back straps are better than clipped straps as they may tear the bag when it is fully loaded.

Full padded shoulder and back straps similar to backpacker bag's straps are also more comfortable to wear than double shoulder cushion pads.

Picking bags with a flexible hoop (metal or plastic) to keep the bag open during harvesting are much better than bags with a rigid hoop. A flexible hoop discourage pickers from leaning with their bag against the ladder.

Double clipped bags are better than single clipped bags, because single clipped bags spill fruit on the ground if the strap fails.

Five Manufacturers of Picking Bags

- Joy Fruit Picking Bags
  9 Edward St., Shepperton, VIC 3630
  Tel (058) 21 2688
  Fax (058) 22 2782
- Paul's Shoe & Saddle Repairs
  Upstairs, 29 Kingsway
  Launceston, TAS 7250
  Tel (003) 34 6550
- Smith's Canvas & Vinyl
  Airport Rd.
  Renmark, SA 5341
  Tel (085) 951 793
  Fax (085) 951 299
- Upholstery & Canvas Centre
  450 Tea-Tree Ave.
  Leeton, NSW 2705
  Tel (069) 53 4381
  Fax (058) 53 4381
- WOODCHUCK Equipment
  17 Gumbowie Ave.
  Edwardstown, SA 5039
  Tel (08) 277 6677

Ways To Improve Orange Field Bins

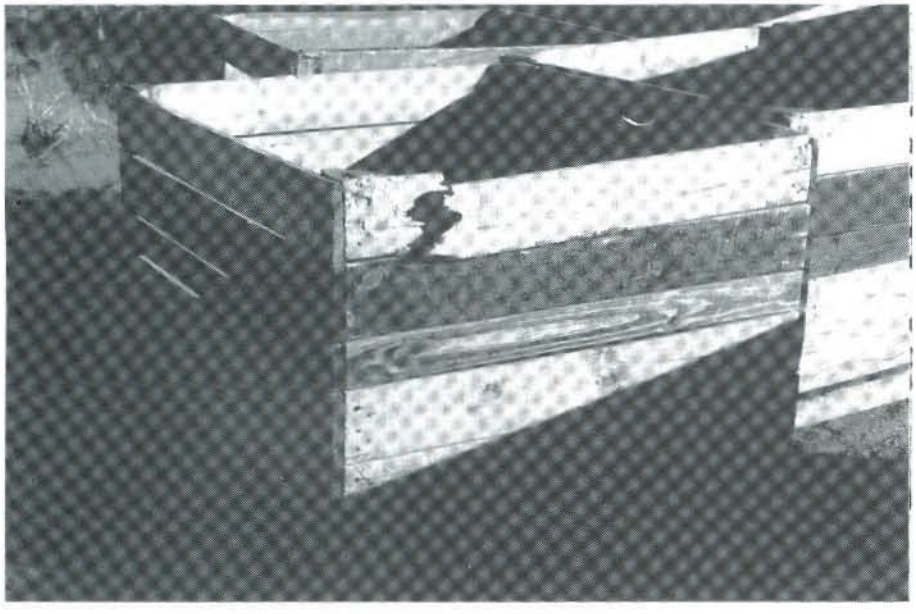
By Dr. Ghassan Al Soboh, Research Fellow and Dr. Graham Moore, Senior Lecturer, University of Melbourne

Do you have concern about field bin conditions? Would you like to know how much poor field bin condition is costing the citrus industry in Australia? Are you interested in finding ways to improve fruit handling? If so, the Agricultural Engineering Research Group at the University of Melbourne conducted a research study on field bin condition in 1995–96 funded by the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation. The purpose of the study was to evaluate field bin condition, fruit damage and ways to improve fruit handling.

There are two common types of field bins being used by citrus growers in Australia. Wooden bins with a capacity of 450 to 550 kg and wooden bins with steel frames and a capacity of 550 to 650 kg.

Field observation of wooden bins showed that bins tend to deteriorate rapidly and timber breaks too frequently because of rough field handling. Wooden bins with a steel frame withstand rough handling much better than standard bins and last longer. They have rounded timber edges and can be placed on trailers.

Wooden field bins prepositioned between the rows of orange trees.



A damaged field bin has the potential to damage the fruit.

Random samples of wooden field bins with a depth of 80 cm and a capacity of 500 to 550 kg each, from two packing companies, were evaluated to determine their internal and external factors. Internal factors included the number of broken boards, the number of protruding nails, and surface smoothness. While external variables included outside surface smoothness and bin rigidity. Poor internal condition can result in direct damage to fruit while poor bin rigidity can cause squashing of fruit if the bin twists when being handled.

The results indicated that the average number of protruding nails inside a field bin is 10 and there were at least two broken boards. Inside surface smoothness was poor and rated 4 out of 10 and outside finish was also poor as sharp and broken edges are common problems. Sharp edges around the top corners caused by inverted angle iron tend to harm pickers and picking bags and cause fruit damage. The bins' rigidity was unsatisfactory because of the rough bin handling in the field and rated 5 out of 10.

The research results on fruit damage conducted with Sunraysia Horticultural Centre in Victoria, indicated that, with manual harvesting, more than 50% of Valencia oranges were damaged at the bin bottom layer and more than 30% at bin sides as a result of direct contact between the oranges and the bin's internal surface. This represents about 30 kg of oranges (12 kg at the bin bottom and 18 kg at the bin's sides) inside every bin or about 6% of the total fruit in every bin. It is estimated that the citrus industry loses annually about 38,000 tonnes of oranges or about $9.5 million as a result of poor bin conditions.

One way to solve this problem is to eliminate the need for field bins. Harvesting Systems Ltd, a US company, has developed a new machine called the "Pan Machine".

The Pan Machine is designed to handle production from multiple workers who pick fruit and empty their picking bags into the tray, as they walk along side of the machine. The bottom wall of the tray conveys the fruit to a pneumatic materials handling system which transfers the fruit

to a hopper for bulk storage. When the hopper is full, the fruit is emptied from the hopper to a conventional field truck or directly into the trailer for transporting the fruit to the packing or processing facility.

The Pan Machine also saves labour because bins do not have to be distributed and moved several times where yields are low and pickers don't waste time walking to distant bins or waiting for bins. The pan machine can comfortably handle production from ten pickers.

This machine has been used commercially since 1993 to harvest fruit for Fellsmers Farms and Evans Properties in Florida. The machine's manufacturer indicated that the Pan Machine is capable of increasing the picker productivity by more than 40%.

The Pan Machine is equipped with quick connect/disconnect hydraulic fitting so that the machine can be used for pruning with hydraulic saws or clippers. The manufacturer also claims the Pan Machine can be modified to handle other fresh fruit.

Another way to solve the problem is to use plastic or rubber bins with rigid frames. Plastic bins have been used for some time in the USA and proved to be better than wooden bins. Bin companies have reported improvements in fruit quality when plastic bins were used. In Australia, some plastic bins were tried in the field and the comment was that plastic bins are slippery on the forklift. Further research work is recommended in this field to test various alternatives to determine an optimum handling system.

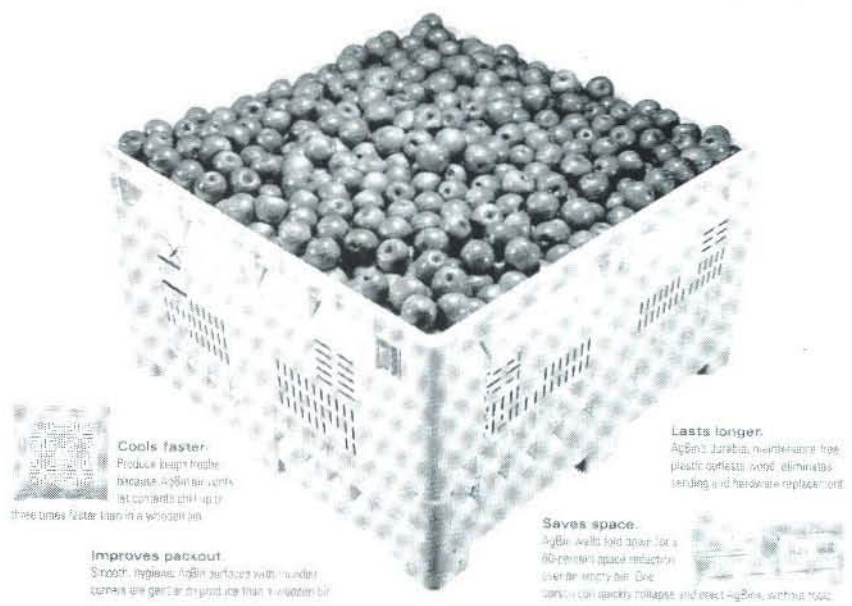
Summary

In summary, the wooden field bins are poorly maintained and causing fruit damage. Protruding nails, broken boards, rough internal and external finish, broken and sharp edges are very common problems in current field bins.

The Pan Machine eliminates the need for field bins and trucks and save labour. It can be used for pruning and modified to handle fruit for fresh market. However, the economical advantages over traditional bin's handling system needs to be proven.

Plastic bins may be the answer for better fruit handling. However, the recommendation is to conduct a further study to evaluate alternative bins. Fruit damage cost and early replacement of wooden bins may offset the initial cost of plastic bins.

Above - Two views of the Pan Machine manufactured in the USA.



Right - A plastic AgBin.

Anthony Rehbein of Bundaberg enters Block Details into the AVOMAN Recording Module

Glenys Goodman "surfs the net" to check the weather chart from the Bureau of Meteorology