Keeping up with technology and varieties
2010

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Hills Orchard Improvement Group

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Media Summary

The outcome of the tour was to come away with information leading to more productive ways of growing pome and stone fruit. This will be achieved by growers introducing new varieties and new methods of planting, use of netting, a greater use of mulches, new pruning methods etc.

The expected outcomes of the tour were achieved by visiting growers in South Australia and Victoria leading to information which will be used by growers on their properties in Western Australia. Results will be achieved over a period of years and not in the short term.

Results of discussions are part of the outcomes which hopefully will be achieved.

Implications for Australia horticulture

From what was observed it maybe that horticulture is being overtaken by the viticulture industry based on the large plantings seen on the tour. From discussions held it is apparent that growers from different areas are struggling to maintain economical margins. Reasons for this are the lack of export markets, the concentration of distribution through a small number of supermarkets, oversupply leading to depressed prices. With the stone fruit being allowed to be brought into WA from other states will put more pressure on the WA growers. With pressure mounting to allow fruit from New Zealand, China and America will also lead to further problems for the local Australian industry.
The new varieties of stone fruit being planted were Zee Fire nectarines, the Polar series and in apricots, the Solar series. These varieties did well in these areas, and most likely will do well in our growing region as the climate is very similar.

Our discussion with the South Australian stone fruit growers concentrated on planting new varieties and to delete old varieties that were outdated.

We observed on Kyrn Greens orchard Lappin cherries, how they were planted in double rows of one by two metres at 3.5 metre spacing for a 2500 hectare area of planting. The trees had between 15 - 20 leaders with no laterals and were hedged to keep operations at ground level. Keeping enough vigour is important in maintaining cherry size.

Soil management by introducing green manures, crops of vetch and oats and avoiding Gly phosphates (this chemical affects soil microbes) was significant in growing cherries. Our cherry growers also learnt that magnesium sulphate is used to control bacterial cancar. This practice will now be implemented by our growers as this disease is a major concern.

Pollination in cherries was addressed. Kym suggested planting up to six varieties for maximum pollination. In W.A growers only have one or two varieties.

With pome fruit, we observed Galaxy apples on double rows at 1500 trees per hectare. We learnt it is critical branches were pulled below the horizontal to induce cropping and reduce water shoots. Flat branches were eliminated as they are neither vigorous or fruit bearing. The growers highlighted that apples are not highly priced and to stay in business one must achieve high yields per hectare to be viable.

In discussion with the growers we came to the conclusion there are hard decisions that have to be made. Better technology must be implemented and unprofitable varieties must be replaced. Travel groups should be organised frequently, both interstate and overseas to view varieties and technology.
The tour group comprised of 35 growers and 5 market agents.
60% grow stone fruit for the domestic and export market
25% grow apples mainly for the domestic market
15% of growers have diversified into cherries

Objectives of the 2010 study tour was to view the latest technology available in grading and pre packing of apples and stone fruit, the latest in machinery and implements for orchards. Also, to view the latest in cultivar varieties and new high planting density systems for apples and stone fruit.

**Object of Tour**

There were 5 main focuses.

1. Visit Lenswood Research Station-
   a. To view a trial block of intensive apple production systems with planting densities of 2000-6600 apple trees per hectare
   b. Compare root stocks, especially M26 which was the preferred choice. WA is starting to use M26, however the majority of our plantings are still 109.
   c. To compare production of trees planted on a parment system versus a double row Tatura.

2. Field study on cherries. Looking at new varieties, especially Sunburst variety which is not grown in WA yet.
   a. Comparing planting systems of cherries
   b. Pre and post harvest treatment on cherries
   c. Bird mesh and associated expense. Obtained pricing of approx $20,000 per hectare
   d. Use of rain covers-imported from India at $50,000 per hectare

3. Visit stone fruit areas that are similar to our own growing conditions in the Perth Hills area. Renmark and Swan Hill were the regions that most interested our group

4. To visit EDP Australia
   a. To inspect new grading systems
   b. To view new punnet packing systems
   c. To inspect their new release of Hydro ladders that will be introduced into the WA market

5. Meeting with APAL in Shepparton with CEO Tony Russell
The Study Tour to EDP was of dual purpose-
Market agents from Canning Vale Markets were interested in the new Flow Wrapper for small fruit being sold in punnets. This is a new trend in supplying the larger chain stores. It is hoped this technology would minimize damage caused by the consumer and their unnecessary handling of stone fruit. Jenny Mercer from the Mercer Group had the first one installed in W.A. this year. They are now looking at a new model that will handle grapes.

Growers were keen to view the new release of the PowerWat Power Ladder with the new crab steer. This new technology will enable the driver to move closer into the tree canopy, hence making harvest time quicker and limiting harvest damage. Perth Hills grower, Roger Marchetti from Alpine Agencies is the agent for W.A. Over the last four years in excess of 25 of these machines have been sold in this state. We were also shown a range of bin tippers and a new grader for stone fruit. EDP are coming to Perth on October 9th to display their machinery at our Annual Field Day.

The Hills Orchard Improvement Group has invited all growers and industry professional that they met while on the Study Tour to visit us in Perth to compare our growing techniques, marketing and technology with theirs.

All participants and non participants of the Study Tour will receive a copy of this document as well as being advised that EDP will be at our Field Day. This document contains the contact details, names and businesses should they wish to acquire further information.
Discussion with Tony Russell CEO APAL

Tonys' speech focused on the role of bio security and the importation of fruit from other countries.

He indicated that bio security had given approval for the import of apples from New Zealand. They claim there is no threat from fire blight.

APAL do not agree with this assessment and intend to appeal the decision. This will take up to 12 months but it is inevitable that the decision will stand.

We were also advised that approaches have been made for fruit from China and America to be allowed into Australia. Tony indicated that bio security with the support of the Federal government will also allow this to occur in a short period of time, maybe 2 - 3 years.

Imports of cheap concentrate juices from China and Brazil are being blended with Australian product. Australian growers cannot compare with subsidized systems. This greatly affects their returns and survival in this industry.

How we as growers deal with the import of fruit from countries with diseases not found in Australia is not clear. We will not be given any support from State or Federal government, neither financial or representative support. It is apparent that any measures to be put in place will have to come with the support of retail outlets in supporting the local products. Hopefully approaches will be made from APAL and other bodies representing the local fruit industry in all states.
Itinerary

Tuesday July 27

Lenswood Co-op
Lenswood Research Station
Green Bros Orchard

Wednesday July 28

Riverland Sun Fresh
Apricot Grove
Montague Bilmont Orchard

Thursday July 29

Winter Orchards Tresco West
Thompsons Packhouse, Shepparton
SA & TC Varapodio
Meeting with Tony Russell, General Manager APAL

Friday July 30

EDP Australia
Pickworth Orchards, Tatura
Arrive Melbourne, end of Study Tour
Acknowledgement List

Horticulture Australia

Hills Orchard Improvement Group

Tony Russell - General Manager Apple and Pear Australia

Michael Cox General Manager Lenswood Co-op

Kym Green, grower, Chairman South Australian Pome Improvement Committee, Lenswood Research Station

Kym Green, Green Bros Orchards, Lenswood

Jim and David Sourtzis & Tolly Hanke Riverland Sunfresh, 246-256 Renmark Ave, Renmark

Charlie and Hilke Ppiros Apricot Grove Riverland

Russell Field, Manager Montague Bilmont Orchard

Val Cleary, Winter Orchards Tresco West

Stuart Hamilton, Shed Manager and Geoffrey Thompson Owner/Manager, Thompsons Packhouse, Shepparton

Rocky Varapodio, Owner/Manager SA &TC Varapodio, Shepparton

Meddles Bikirofski Technical Sales Handling. Ray Booth- sales. Chris Burke - Production Manager- EDP Australia. Mooroopna Victoria

Stuart Pickworth- Owner Pickworth Orchard, Tatura Victoria
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Recommendations

For 80% of the tour group, this was their first experience of a study tour to the East Coast to seek information that would benefit their own orchard practices.

The value of the trip was discussed at our growers meeting when we returned home, as follows –

Land in our area is valued at $80,000 per acre, as opposed to $3000 - $4000 per acre in the orchard areas of the East Coast. This makes it very difficult for us to expand due to the enormous expense. We need to follow their trend in high density planting - they plant 2500 trees per hectare while we are planting 600 trees per hectare. This would maximize our returns on a hectare basis.

We currently both have a major problem with water supplies. WA rainfall is down 50% on previous years.

We also have in common high labour costs in the thinning and harvesting of fruit. We both seem to rely on inexperienced backpackers on work visas to carry out the work.

A major advantage the East Coast has is that they are servicing 20 million people from Queensland to South Australia. West Australian growers have only 2 million. We need to be mindful of supply versus demand. Too high a supply will drastically affect our returns.

The orchards in our location average 20 acres, so it was absolutely mind blowing to see large holdings, some as big as 500 acres, devoted to fruit growing. Their managerial skills, the work involved with properties in different locations and the amount of travel involved were an eye opener.

The general grower consensus is that we should revisit these areas during harvest time to view their quality standards and also their production per hectare. Future travel to these areas would also benefit growers who have not been there before.