

Batlow and Orange - Focus Orchard and Regional Trial Update

By Jonathan Brookes (AgFirst)

Batlow Regional Update

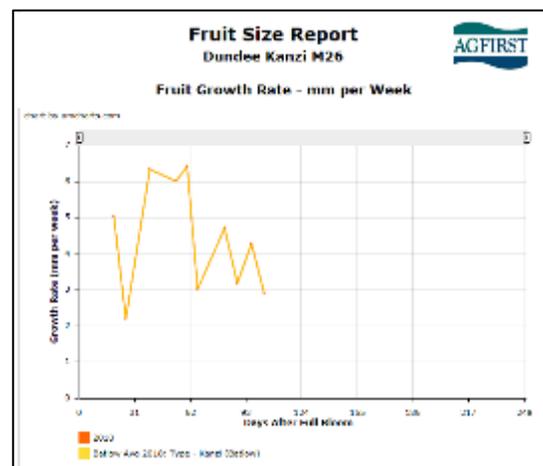
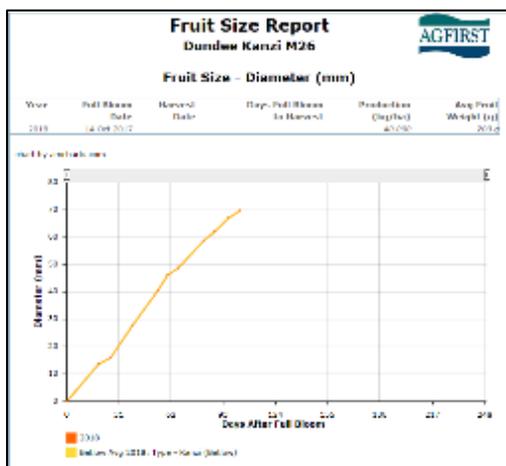
The apple crop in the area is generally looking pretty good. Some Gala a bit lighter than usual and Fuji showing to be a continued challenge for biennial bearing in many blocks, but other varieties such as Kanzi and Pinks are looking really good.

The growing conditions have seen some rain at different times throughout the season, some areas of localised hail (but most growers being well protected), early Feb have seen cooler night conditions start to eventuate and this is starting to track through to good colour development.

Focus Orchards

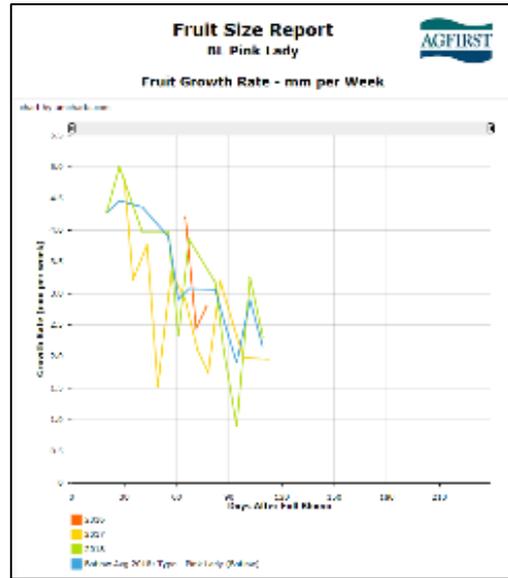
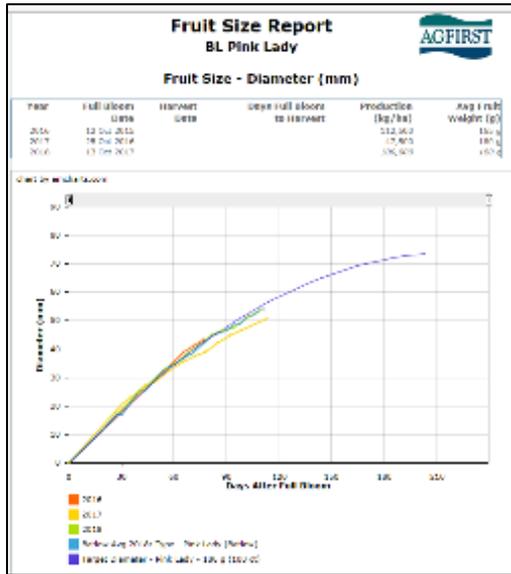
Fruit size is tracking well with monitoring on 30 January 2018 showing the following; -

Kanzi



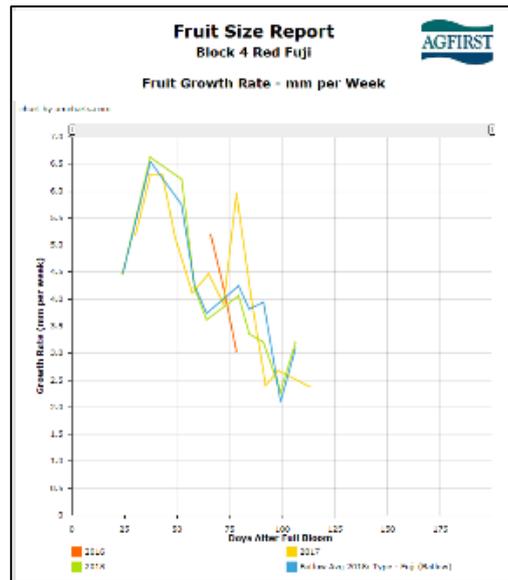
The moderate cropped Focus Kanzi block has good size with growth rates tapered off to 3mm per week.

Pink Lady



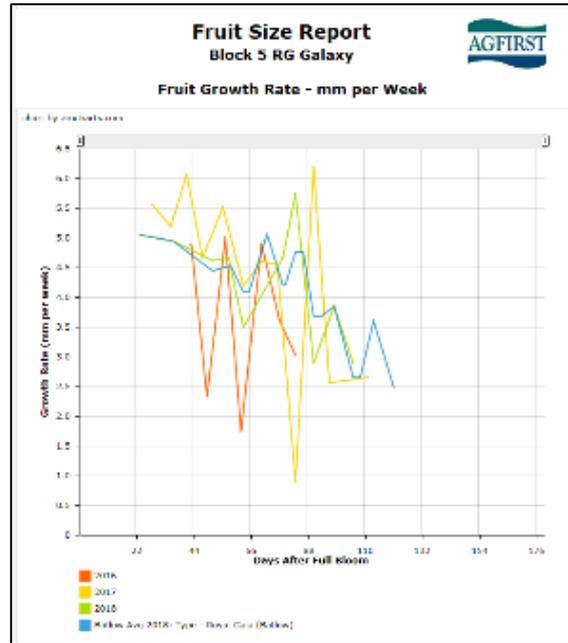
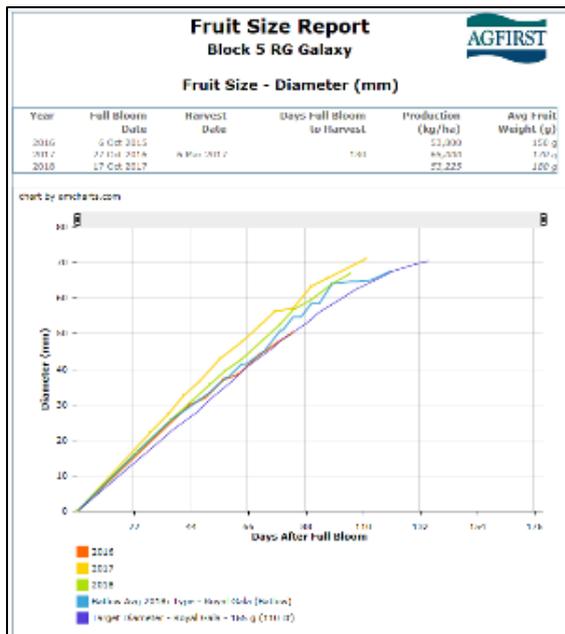
A full cropped Pink Lady block, size and growth rate is tracking ahead of 2017.

Fuji



Fuji crop load is light, as expected size is large with a high growth rate per week

Galaxy



Crop load is looking lighter than last year but this has not shown an increase in fruit size? Growth rate (mm/ week) is tracking OK.

Batlow Trials

Burr Knot trial

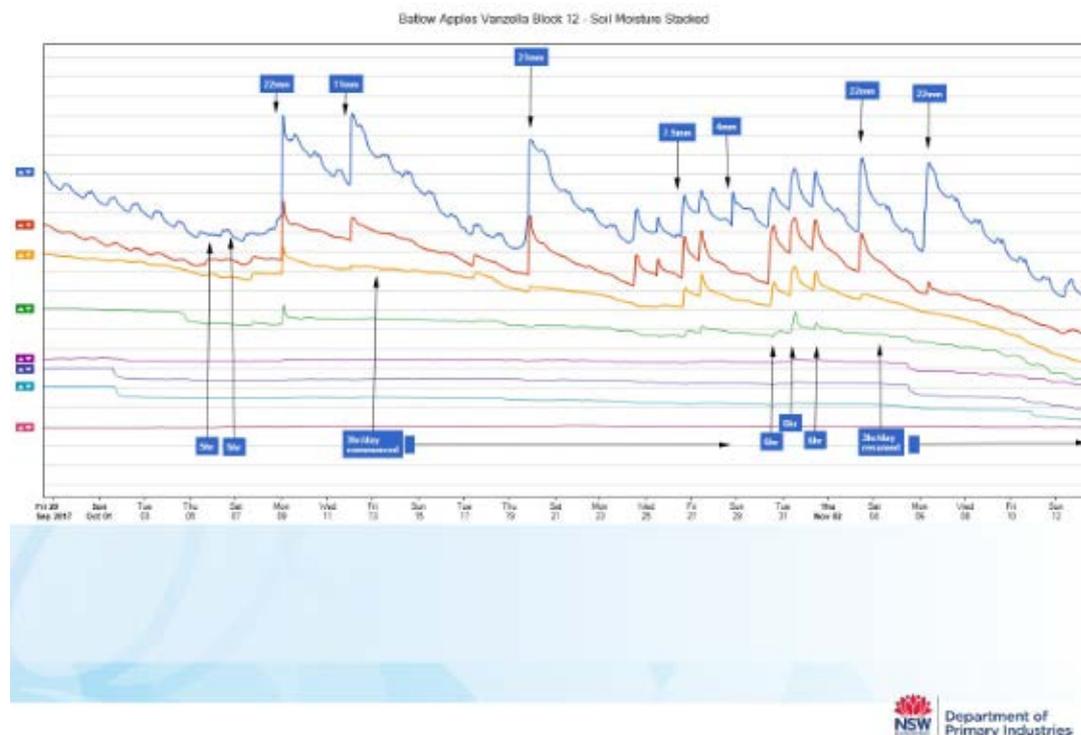
Different treatments of cutting, painting and NAA applications have been made to try to mitigate the formation of Burr Knots on young apple trees.



Findings are still not finalised but comments are that NAA did have a positive effect on reduction but a single treatment solution was not looking probable. Orchard management comments were also made about a gut feeling that while the burr Knots did not look very good they may not be having as much of a growth retardant effect as they look. Measurements are being made to try to quantify this.

Real time irrigation monitoring

Effective irrigation scheduling is well recognised as a key management decision in apple production. It is well recognised that irrigation is needed for fruit size, tree health and to help with management of sunburn. Excess soil moisture can lead to excess vigour, soft fruit, low brix, nutrient leaching, poor tree health, and waste of a valuable resource.



The findings of this demonstration trial are also not finalised. We are aiming to get feed-back from the orchard management about how useful they felt continuous soil moisture monitoring was and how, or if they would use it in the future. What were the positive impacts of using continuous monitoring? The continuous monitoring system has also been running in combination with a more intensive gypsum block monitoring system. The initial feed-back is that finetuning of irrigation use in the orchard blocks has become more focussed with significant reductions where the management team felt it was appropriate. It is yet to be confirmed which system has had the most influence in these irrigation efficiency decisions.

Orange Regional Update

Like Batlow the apple crop in Orange is generally looking pretty good. Dry weather has been the theme for most of the season with a period of hot temperatures giving some sunburn damage even under the nets. Galas are OK but can be a bit clumpy in some blocks. Pinks and Kanzi are looking good.



Picture: On left: Cherry Block Gala



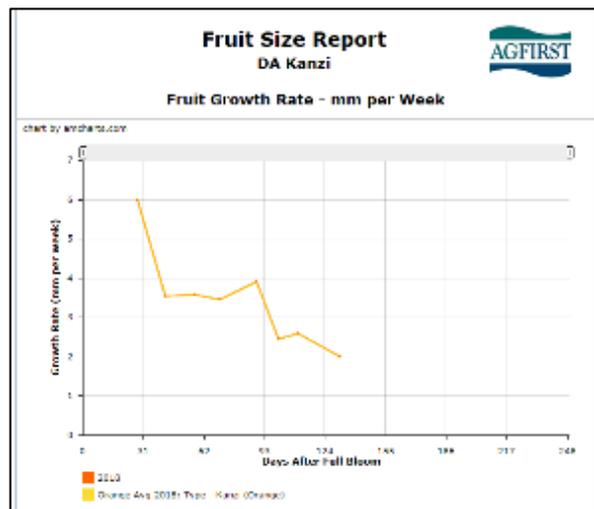
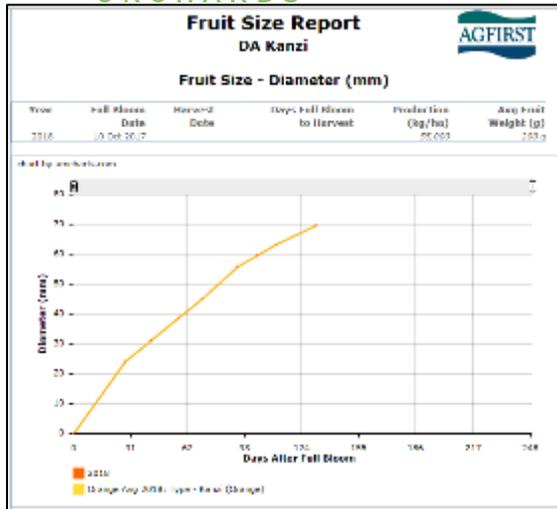
On Right: Hay Shed Gala



Picture: On left: Dam Kanzi



On Right: Hay Shed Pinks



Kanzi sizing above showing diameter and fruit growth rate

The fruit size in the Kanzi is tracking OK but not as strongly as the fruit in Batlow indicating that the hot conditions might have reined in the potential fruit growth (40 – 70 days After full bloom).

Across most of the Focus blocks the fruit counts entered into OrchardNet are not indicating a heavy crop load but the fruit growth rate is only moderate again pointing to the heat having a suppressing effect on fruit growth rate.

Even though the weather has been unseasonably dry for Orange for much of the growing season, rainfall has occurred during the summer with one event of about 80mm in one hour but not much of it has stuck and dam levels were looking low but OK in late January. Getting closer to harvest cooler more normal conditions are starting to eventuate.

A fire hit the Mt Canobolas area in mid February but the damage seems to be contained within a relatively confined area.



Photo Left and Right: Fire on Mt Canobolas during the afternoon and into the evening.

Grower Demonstration Trials in the Orange Region

Real time irrigation monitoring

One of the demonstration trials in Orange has focussed on the use of real time irrigation monitoring and what this might mean for the local growers. As with the Batlow trials the findings of the trial are not fully finalised but initial feed-back from focus orchard grower - Bernard Hall was that he felt that the total amount of water that he was applying had not really changed, but due to the real time information he had changed his application technique and was putting on smaller amounts on a more frequent time scale.

Drape netting and within canopy effects (temperature, light etc)

The other demonstration trial in Orange is focussed on looking at the variations of drape netting options currently deployed in the Orange district. The options are: drape netting sitting on trees, throw over single wire or a “bull horns” and wire combination. The trial involves a series of photos looking at architecture of the tree under the netting options and the deployment of tiny tags to monitor temperature for the different options. Local producers wished to observe how architecture may change light inception, to that of a tree under fixed structure netting.

