

## Future Orchards 2012 - Western Australia Orchard Walk November 2006

Balingup-Nannup Road, Nannup, Western Australia.  
Chris & Mark Scott's Orchard

### **Attendance:**

12 persons (including presenters) attended the second Future Orchards 2012 orchard walk in Western Australia.

### **Summary:**

Craig Hornblow (AGFIRST consultant) was introduced by John Sutton (DAFWA - technical officer). Craig set the scene by challenging the growers for "What do they want to get out of this project?"

The general consensus was that there were two priority areas, an increase in the yield of marketable fruit and a lower cost of production. Craig expanded further on tree architecture that commenced at the first orchard walk in September. The main emphasis on tree architecture is simplicity. If the system is simple it will be consistent and achievable. Craig also spoke about crop load. The aim is to design the tree to achieve your target yield and fruit size.

The orchard visited included 3 main blocks:

- |              |  |               |
|--------------|--|---------------|
| 1. 11th leaf | Cripps Pink on MM106 @ 5m x 3m,            | 667 trees/ha  |
| 2. 5th leaf  | Cripps Pink on MM106 @ 4m x 1.5m,          | 1667 trees/ha |
| 3. 1st leaf  | Cripps Pink & Galaxy on MM106 @ 4m x 1.2m, | 2083 trees/ha |

In the orchard Craig demonstrated how established trees that had a complex tree structure could be modified to become "simple" trees whilst at least maintaining current yields but with the distinct possibility of increasing yield. It was also designed to make the trees easier to manage and in turn result in lower production costs of improved quality fruit.

With the young trees (5th leaf) Craig highlighted the "mistakes" that had been made with the mature trees and at this stage could easily be corrected without the radical pruning that was required on the mature trees. In the block of newly planted trees there was keen interest from growers to get it right in terms of developing trees that are simple, productive and overall a good return on their high investment.

During the orchard walk the growers raised some important issues that they have to deal with when implementing intensive apple plantings, especially here in WA.

- Quality of nursery trees
- Availability of dwarf rootstocks
- Time & cost required for training of newly planted trees
- Availability of suitable labour for tree training

The last point of the availability of suitable labour was considered to be the most limiting factor. In WA, the relatively small orchard size (10 – 20 ha), orchardists don't have the permanent staff to engage to do the tree training required for an intensive planting. In most cases the orchard owner is the orchard manager and the orchard worker and his time is already stretched beyond their limits. Orchardists are unable to compete with the resource sector for suitable staff.

### **DAFWA Involvement**

The Western Australian component of the Future Orchards 2012 Project is managed by the Western Australian Fruit Growers' Association (acting as the regional facilitator) with assistance from the WA Department of Agriculture and Food (acting as an assistant facilitator). This approach was taken as it embraces the skills available through the Department staff, and allows for linkages between FO2012 and that activity that is already occurring at a local level.