

Future Orchard 2012 – Southern Victoria Orchard Walk 18 September 2006

This event was held at Ajani's Bonveiw Orchard, Brown Rd, Officer. Steve Spark was the AgFirst consultant. A head count indicated 49 participants in total, about half of which returned their questionnaires, mainly by fax. Experience from the GV event led to the placement of the questionnaire at the front of the folder with an inclusion of a fax number.

The afternoon followed on from the monitoring block proprietors meeting and APAL lunch which were both held at Montague's Orchard Narre Warren, 20 minutes away. The morning session and lunch went overtime and the afternoon session started 30 minutes late. Too much in one day!

Steve started the afternoon session with an Overview of FO2012 and then an explanation of the contents of the notes with the use of butcher's paper on a white board.

A good delivery which many participants commented would have been enhanced by a PowerPoint presentation back at the pack house. It is very slow and tedious to present information and concepts long hand out in the field. This needs to be a whole lot slicker.

3 blocks were inspected during the afternoon. They were all sufficiently different for Steve to demonstrate the importance of tree management to the group.

The following were discussed and demonstrated to the group:

- Preparation for establishing an intensive apple block
- Sourcing of planting material and what to specify.
- Grading of trees prior to planting for ease of management later on.
- Tree management of the various grades of tree during their first years
- Water, fertilizer, bud and leaf removal to encourage tree height, feathers, support, training and tying to achieve 20 tonne per ha. production in the 2nd leaf from the best stock
- How to get best return from the not so good stock.
- Management of established trees to regain production
- Simplified pruning methods for low skilled staff
- Techniques to reduce vigor
- Specific methods of tree tying
- Considerations for mulching to stop root zone dry out in low rainfall years, enhance water penetration, stop root development above the graft. Nitrogen deficiency
- Pros and cons of thinning methods.

The issues covered in the orchard walk developed tremendous interest and discussion but the supplied notes were inadequate and did not cover many of the dot points.