

Future Orchard 2012 – Huon, Tasmania Orchard Walk June 2007

Facilitator – Jesse Reader, Serve-Ag P/L

Topics Covered: Pruning and Marketing to Maximise Marketable Yields
Nursery Tree Specifications & Tree Type
Varietal Strategies for Future Success

Consultant Present: Steve Spark – AgFirst, Gary Langford - APFIP

Location: ‘Legana Orchards’, Tamar Valley, Northern Tasmania.

The 5th orchard walk for the Tasmanian future orchards group was held at Legana Orchards, situated in the north of the state 15min out of Launceston. Legana Orchards are one of the Montague Group’s properties. We were greeted with a very crisp, fresh start but rewarded with a magnificent day in the orchard.

Attendance was very good with at least 25 people attending from right across the state. In addition, there were several new faces which is pleasing. The format for the day was structured around a power point session with Garry first up followed by morning tea. After the coffee break we took off where we left and proceeded to watch Steve’s presentation before heading out into the field. We spent a good couple of hours in the orchard during the orchard walk before heading back to the packing shed for lunch. After lunch everyone met inside once again and spent about 45min discussing the group and what sorts of things they would like to tackle this season. Some really good feedback came out of this brainstorming session and will no doubt develop as time goes on.

Garry Langford – APFIP

Garry’s presentation was very well received, informative and to the point. The bulk of the presentation revolved around the need to understand the process behind varietal selection, what specifications to ask for, what type of tree to plant and what a growers requirements of a nurseryman should be to ensure premium quality from day one. Take home points when selecting a good nursery tree were as follows;

- Produced from bud and graft wood that are virus tested.
- Produced from trees that are true to type.
- Budded/grafted onto the rootstock at a minimum of 100mm above the ground and not more than 200mm from the ground.
- A tree with sufficient root system to support the tree.
- Minimal damage form mechanical harvest
- Free from pest and disease

The group was provided with some good diagrams of high quality nursery trees to ensure everyone was happy with what to aim for in a one and two year old tree.

The second part of Garry's presentation revolved around varietal strategies for future success. This was an interesting discussion given the current climate/trend towards club or managed varieties. Traditionally we have been able to access whatever varieties we wanted to, but the arrival of variety management through the use of trademarks, plant breeders rights and plant patents means that the process by which growers make their variety planting decisions will drastically change.

In the very near future new varieties will become established in the market through careful planning, support and commitment. Growers will need to adapt to this new environment and understand that a collective approach will be required to facilitate their success with these varieties.

Garry touched on some points to consider when assessing whether or not to get involved with a business in order to gain access to managed systems including the following;

- The scope of their operations, local, regional, continental or global.
- The way they communicate with their growers.
- Their industry track record and their ability to develop and implement a production and marketing plan.
- What strategic alliances do they have that will add value?

Garry summarised in saying that variety management is here to stay and even though managed varieties make up a small percentage of the global market there is significant lead in time required and that it needs to be a priority today!

Steve Spark – AgFirst

Steve's session as usual was right on the money and challenged growers right from the beginning of the day, maximizing every minute spent with the group. Steve's presentation was short, sweet and to the point, discussing various aspects of tree training and pruning including rules for shoot growth, various pruning methods, how to set up bud numbers, bud counting all with the aim of achieving a calm tree.

Steve stressed the importance of understanding where you want to go with architecture, what sort of tree you wish to grow, what fruit size are you chasing and how sustainable is the system you've adopted. In addition, Steve's focus for the day was on creating a top performing orchard on a simple system. Everything must be simple in order to achieve consistency, architecture, training and pruning. The benefit of this is that all other tasks carried out can be supervised easily.

Systems which achieve this objective include 'Tall Spindle' which has been widely adopted in Italy and New Zealand and 'French Solaxe' adopted heavily in France and Chile.

The next topic for discussion was setting up bud numbers and understanding the benefits behind this system. Setting up the tree by manipulating bud numbers can be a great way to reduce the thinning job and increase fruit size. For Royal Gala the aim is to prune down to 1-1.2 spur or terminal fruit buds for each fruit they intend to carry through to harvest.

Methods for bud counting were also discussed and a simple formula was to start with your desired yield per ha, bring that back to desired yield per tree, divide this by the average number of branches per tree and you will then know roughly how many buds per branch you are after.

Rules for shoot growth were touched on again, reiterating that the steeper the angle of the shoots, the stronger the individual buds will grow, this means that they will develop less flowers and will therefore bear less fruit. We must aim for calm trees with single lined, rolling pendant wood.