

season update

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Summary Edition: October 2006

RIVERLAND, MURRAY VALLEY & RIVERINA

Riversun. Fruit from the sixth & seventh vessel sold very well. Of the 3357 pallets exported in the sixth vessel, sixty pallets were re-exported due to snail detection and 320 pallets were fumigated due to caterpillar detection. Of the 3152 pallets exported in the seventh vessel, 217 pallets failed the marketing order. This was mainly because the threshold for certain defects had dropped from 3% to 0.5% for the seventh vessel. Overall prices for fruit were good, partially due to the reduced volume of fruit exported. Approximately 21,000 pallets were exported from the planned 31,000 pallets, the reduction mainly due to the frosts experienced in Sunraysia and the Riverland. Riversun wish to extend their congratulations to all growers, packers and exporters for maintaining a good quality product throughout the season. No frosted fruit issues were reported which clearly demonstrates that Australia has a good set of quality procedures and practices in place that are followed by all parts of the industry. This strengthens our reputation as a reliable quality producer.

Flowering & Crop Regulation. A good level of flowering was generally observed throughout the southern regions. Crop regulation by fruit thinning sprays normally occurs when fruit are about 12-15mm in size, occurring around mid/late November for Navels and mid December for mandarins. Monitor your crop to assess if you have an excessive crop load and to also identify the appropriate stage for crop regulation. More information about crop regulation is on the ACG Resources web page and talk to your local citrus extension officer.

Nutrition. Flowering has occurred in Sunraysia and Riverland and is at completion in the Riverina. Cell division is the next stage after flowering. All calcium uptake into the citrus rind (peel) will occur during cell division in the next 6-8 weeks. Calcium fertilisers are best targeted during this stage. Significant calcium uptake occurs through new growing roots (root flush). Root flush has commenced, and can be seen as white tips on root hairs. Soil temperatures have increased at Dareton (19-20°C @ 15cm) which is good for nutrient uptake and the conversion of ammonia to nitrate. Nitrate and phosphorous can assist to stimulate root growth. Phosphorus is also important nutrient for cell division. Some ammonia application is thought to assist root growth (10% of total N). Potassium application should be moderate. Excessive/high applications of ammonia or potassium can reduce calcium uptake. Soil N and other nutrient levels can be monitored by soil solution extraction. Potassium nitrate sprays can help to increase potassium levels but not interfere with calcium uptake at the roots. Information from Israel suggests a 5% potassium nitrate sprayed from mid November to mid December can increase fruit size. These rates have not been tried in Australia. Micronutrient foliar sprays should have already been applied.

PEST. General : The next few weeks is a critical time to monitor for Katydid, thrip and LBAM. Start monitoring now. All of these pests can have a significant impact on pack-out. Just a few Katydids can have a major impact. Varying stages of Katydid are being seen in all districts.

Sunraysia. LBAM: LBAM larvae numbers are still reasonably low, however the odd larvae rolled up in new growth and/or flower petals is being found. **Soft Scale:** Soft Brown and Citricola Scale populations are low.

Red Scale: The Red Scale population is low.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Climate. Average spring conditions have generally been experienced in most areas. Average evaporation rates for this month are: Harvey 4.4 mm/day, Gingin 5.2 mm/day, Carnarvon 8.2 mm/day and Kimberley Research Station 9.9 mm/day. This can be a taxing time of year for irrigation scheduling, monitor irrigation requirements closely using a combination of evaporation replacement and soil moisture monitoring.

Phenology. Most varieties had reached full bloom by mid October, one to two weeks earlier than last season, and are now in the petal fall stage. Some early varieties reached the end of petal fall early in the month.

Production. Harvest of late navel varieties will continue into next month. Mystique mandarins finished towards the end of the month in the Harvey area as did Ellendale and Murcott mandarins. Red Flesh Grapefruit harvest in the northern south west areas also finished towards the end of the month. Harvest of White Flesh Grapefruit will continue into next month. Albedo breakdown has been severe throughout all regions and varieties, navel and mandarin alike, causing serious problems with splitting in navels.

Pests and Diseases. Monitor for Kelly's Citrus Thrip weekly from petal fall to calyx closure. Monitor scale crawlers, release of beneficial insects to control red scale started this month and will continue into November/December. If snails are a problem, apply copper spray and bait while conditions are still moist before the summer dormancy period. Ants are on the move now and will require monitoring and control throughout summer. If controlling aphids only spray the growth flushes and keep an eye out for fruit fly in ripening fruit.

QUEENSLAND

Lack of irrigation water is the most important issue for all growers throughout the Central Burnett district. This season remains the driest on record, making the situation critical. The second application of fungicides to control **black spot** will fall due over the next week or two. Growers should check their records to ensure that the protection interval provided by the copper spray (4-6 weeks) is not exceeded. While conditions remain dry the risk from black spot infection is low. However we are in the time of year when storm rains can be expected at short notice. Extended periods of showery, overcast weather will encourage disease establishment more than brief periods of high intensity rainfall. Pruning and mulching will both help to reduce the release of black spot ascospores and provide some of the most effective ways to manage the disease. Both of these strategies will reduce the pressure on fungicide treatments as the sole means of defence.

Growers should be ready to apply **chemical thinning** sprays (ethrel) in blocks with high fruit set. Thinning sprays are best applied alone and to trees in a good state of health. If trees are not in good health the risk of damage is increased. It would be best to apply after rain if possible. Rain shortly after the application of thinning sprays may reduce the efficacy of the treatment. Young trees (less than 5-7 years) may be more prone to phytotoxic response from chemical thinning treatments. **Thrips** are increasingly difficult to manage in lemons, with low levels present in

some grapefruit and navel blocks. All susceptible blocks require close monitoring at this stage. Thrips are extremely difficult to control by chemical means alone as they are always very adept at developing resistance to pesticides. **Katydid**s are active at this time of year and can cause significant damage especially in Navel oranges. Individual blocks may require treatment soon. **Citrus gall wasps** have completed their emergence and parasites are now emerging. The gall wasp parasites are able to lay their eggs into the tiny eggs of the gall wasp. Gall wasp parasites are very sensitive to pesticides and growers should be cautious about spraying any disruptive materials during this period. Additional releases of gall wasp parasites can be made into blocks where parasitism is low. This season there has been some **heliethis** activity with damage recorded. Heliethis activity usually occurs over a very brief period. At this stage only the very early stages of **red scale** movement have been recorded. **Soft scale** counts are being conducted at present. Some blocks with high levels will require treatment. Any sprays for soft scales must be thorough. Growers are reminded to continue applying **fruit fly bait** to any blocks where second crop fruit are still hanging. Many lemon blocks have significant winter crop fruit that will be due for harvest around December. These should also receive fruit fly bait sprays as fruit begin to mature. The second round of MAT cups (yellow) will be soon due for placement in the orchard. The orange MAT cups that were placed in August should remain hanging as they will continue to be effective for up to 9 months.

PROCESSING

The first of the Valencia fruit from the 2006/07 season is beginning to arrive. In spite of a hard freeze in June and freezes in the Mildura and Sunraysia regions over the past few weeks, the supply looks healthy. Nevertheless, there are continued concerns over fruit sizing and the crop is delayed as a result. Industry sources do not expect Valencia processing to be running in earnest until late November, when the plants would usually be in full swing by the end of October. The smaller fruit is attributed to sustained dry weather coupled with a cold winter. It could also be due in part to stressed trees following bumper crops over the last two years. Valencia fruit from the 2005/06 season continues to be harvested in the MIA/Griffith region and brix/acid ratios are high at 17-18. However, the flavour of this fruit is apparently flat due to the low acid content (9.5 brix : 0.6 acid). Old season fruit is changing hands for AUD160/tonne delivered on the spot market. New season Valencia ratios are low but improving with current estimates at around 11 (11.0 brix : 1.0 acid) – ratios should be around 13 at this time of year. In spite of the poor growth, the crop is unlikely to be extended, say industry sources, who claim that once the fruit sizes up properly it will result in an increase in processing and thus higher competition for fruit amongst the processors. The bulk of the processing is expected in December/January. Contract prices for 2006/07 Valencia fruit are pegged at AUD220-240/tonne delivered, marginally higher than expectations last month – but similar to last season. There is currently no spot market for new season Valencia. Although it is early days, the industry is also considering the size of next year's crop.

Overseas. The overseas orange juice market remains volatile with asking prices rocketing in Brazil and a bearish report on Florida's 2006/07 crop. Last week, one of the big Brazilian processors announced they were offering frozen concentrated orange juice (FCOJ) at USD2500/tonne FCA duty unpaid Europe. The price of Brazilian orange NFC has also been increased. The high prices are seen as an attempt to erode demand due to the global shortage. Indeed, the USDA has just released its first estimate on the

2006/07 crop in Florida, which it pegs at 135 million boxes. Before the news, the industry had been working off a figure of around 150 million boxes. Nevertheless, trading has reportedly been very limited recently. If European buyers accept and trade at the current level then some industry sources expect higher volumes of Australian fruit to be put to concentrate as an import replacement. Although one major Australian processor suggested that the industry should simply stem imports of FCOJ and focus on processing and promoting local NFC juice. Analysts state that the cheap contracts for FCOJ deliveries into Australia are all but expired and therefore it is up to the importers to persuade the large retailers to accept higher prices.

MARKETING

Summer navels will finish this week on a reasonably high note, at least for the larger sizes. The opportunity for a storage program has not materialised due to low acids in the fruit. Valencia harvest has increased to more regular levels. The export markets are strong for counts 163 and larger, but are coming back as volume increases. The challenge this year will be for export markets to match the higher grower return expected from the juice processors, with the lighter crop this season. Honey Murcotts with good size are moving strongly but smaller fruit has a limited market. Market conditions for all fruit has remained strong as the shortage among all Southern Hemisphere citrus growing countries continues.

LEMONS

Domestic. While prices for class 1 fruit remains strong, grower packouts are low due to frost damage and higher coloured fruit. Demand for second and third grade fruit remains slow. Returns are between \$500-600/tonne.

Export. Exporting has stopped due to lack of suitable colour for the market.

HONEY MURCOTTS

Domestic. The market has been paying good money for large sizes, but limited opportunity for the smaller sized fruit. Growers are achieving between \$600-800 per tonne.

Export. Middle East has shown strong interest in composite grade of this fruit, with more orders than supply. 80% of the packable fruit is in the 'small' range (count 150 and smaller).

NAVEL

Domestic. While demand for smaller sizes is poor, the large fruit market remains strong. Less than 20% of the fruit is in the large size range (>count 80), with the majority of the fruit in the medium range (count 88-113). Grower returns range from \$200-400/tonne.

Export. The sales in USA continue to be strong with stable prices. All fruit is expected to be sold by end week 43, at least 1 week earlier than usual. Export sales have finished and fruit is still to arrive in some overseas destinations such as Japan and UK. Arrivals to date have been good and market conditions are strong.

Weekly domestic market reports can be accessed from the Murray Valley Citrus Board website:
www.mvcitrus.org.au/publicat.html.

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For the full report see www.australiancitrusgrowers.com
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