

season update

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Summary Edition: April 2007

RIVERLAND, MURRAY VALLEY & RIVERINA

Heat units: South Eastern districts of Australia had above average heat units for March. Cumulative heat units are still above average which may have an effect on rind maturity. South W.A. cumulative heat units are still low.

Drought update: Although average rainfall was received in the eastern section of the Murray catchment in March, inflows were still at very low levels. Allocations for the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers are 0% at the commencement of July. A significant proportion of inflows for the Murray River normally occurs between July and November and peaks in September. The volume of inflows that occur during this period will have an impact on the final allocation set for the season. A taskforce of agency and industry officers will meet early in May to compile a strategy of practical options for growers if very low allocations result. This information will be available by beginning of June in the form of fact sheets and workshops. A general NSW DPI fact sheet on managing citrus in a drought is already on the ACG web site. Other countries that have experienced similar drought conditions indicate that practices can be implemented to put the trees into a state of dormancy and the trees eventually recover to full production once water recommences.

Fruit Development: Colour break has been occurring since early April. Indicative reports are that internal fruit maturity is about two weeks earlier than normal. Some select Navelina blocks in the Sunraysia and Riverland districts have been degreening and marketed in late April. Check your internal fruit maturity (B:A ratio) and colour development before harvesting. Fruit with dark green colour may not colour well when degreened.

GA: The application of GA further away from colour break will have a reduced effect of delaying colour development. Sprays during the later stages are considered to have some benefit, but a lesser effect as compared to the early colour break stage. Discuss GA options with your packer and/or advisor and check with your state authority. Fruit colour development posters and field guides will be soon available from your local CITTgroup Coordinator.

Frost Risk: Prepare to install frost loggers in the next month on the appropriate sites in the orchard. Dry conditions increase the risk of frost.

Oleocellosis: Younger/greener fruit has a high susceptible to oleocellosis. Harvesting for degreening should be conducted with extra care. Familiarise yourself with optimum harvest practices to reduce this incidence of oleocellosis damage. Take special care with new pickers. Ensure damaged fruit is not picked. A few seconds of poor harvesting can ruin a

season of fruit growing. An induction manual/sheet (available on ACG web) can be an easy way to train growers.

Export Protocols: Ensure that no split or damaged fruit are harvested. Insects that attack damaged fruit can cause quarantine problems. Apply an autumn copper spray. Continue with snail baiting if required. Maintain tree skirts and eliminate weeds to reduce the ability of pests (Fullers rose weevil) moving into trees.

Pests: Redscale has continued to develop in some regions. Pests reports available from ACG web.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Climate

Mean daily maximum temperatures have been average with one to two days exceeding 35°C early in the month. Mean daily minimum temperatures were slightly lower than average as were evaporation rates. Slightly higher than average rainfall was recorded in most areas, boosted by heavy falls mid month. Average daily evaporation rates for the coming month (May) are: Harvey 2.7 mm, Gingin 3 mm, Carnarvon 4.9 mm and Kimberley Research Station 6.7 mm.

Phenology

A number of varieties have reached colour break. Early navels (Newhall and Navelina), Daisy, Nova and Imperial reached colour break mid month in the Gingin area. Caffin was at colour break earlier in the month. Colour break has also occurred in Bindoon and southern areas however internal maturity is behind that of Gingin.

Production

Early mandarin varieties are reaching internal maturity at West Gingin. Mid month sugar acid ratios for Imperial mandarins were 10.2:1 for trees on Troyer and 11.3:1 for trees on Volka. External colouring had started; there was some evidence of granulation/drying internally. All Clementine varieties in West Gingin are over 8:1 sugar acid ratio. Early navel varieties are also getting close to internal maturity with Newhalls in West Gingin nearing 8:1 sugar acid ratio. Fruit splitting continues to be a problem and may be exacerbated by the heavy rainfall received mid month.

Management

Apply GA to navels for the management of Albedo breakdown and to delay rind aging. Apply GA on imperials for watermark at ¾ colour and grapefruit as required. Apply 2,4-D stop drop at colour break as required. If your soil requires the addition of gypsum or lime now is the best time to apply.

Pests and Diseases

Continue monitoring and bait spraying programs for Fruit fly. Monitor scale crawlers and leaf miner applying targeted oil sprays where necessary. Ensure you have your ants under control as they will exacerbate a scale problem. Bait snails before the break of season or as soon after as possible so that adult snails and slugs are killed before they get a chance to lay their eggs.

QUEENSLAND

Production

Harvest is now well under way and includes imperials, grapefruit, navels (& navelinas) as well as lemons. The most important quality issues lies with extensive hail damage suffered earlier in the season by many orchards. There were some early cases of anthracnose (=gas burn) although the incidence has been low. Growers are reminded of the key elements with ethylene degreening: Maintain cool temperatures during degreening (19 – 22°C for mandarins). Relative humidity 95%. Ethylene concentration 1-5ppm (do not exceed 5ppm). Room air exchange every 2-3 hours. Avoid long periods of exposure to ethylene

Red scale control has been excellent this season. Very few blocks have any red scale issues at this stage.

Jassids continue to cause problems. Even relatively low numbers have been responsible for causing damage.

Oriental spider mite has continued to require treatment in many orchards. Dry dusty conditions tend to cause an increase in oriental spider mite populations.

Fruit fly pressure remains high due to ongoing warm weather. In spite of this control has been generally good. Imperials especially may require 2 to 3 applications per week until the weather cools. All other varieties should receive weekly bait treatments or as otherwise recommended by your pest management consultant. The use of thickeners to enhance bait performance is recommended while fly pressure remains high.

Emperor brown spot (EBS) and **Black spot** are both at low levels this season. The continuing dry conditions paint an extremely bleak future for the latter part of crop and certainly for that of next season.

PROCESSING

In spite of the increased news coverage over the past two weeks, there is no physical change to the drought across the citrus growing regions. However, the very real threat that irrigation systems will be turned off in all regions is still hanging over growers. The citrus areas need significant rain during the next one to two months in order to avoid this scenario.

One of the major juicers will continue to crush contracted fruit until the end of June, but is now also buying up extra supplies from the spot market at AUD260/tonne farm gate. This is marginally higher than cash prices last month and contract prices for the season of AUD230-240/tonne. Contracts for next season are pegged around the same level as this season, but processors point out that they will be "fair and reasonable" with the growers if the current drought results in damage to trees.

There is still plenty of fruit on the trees, but ratios have now begun to come down. Current ratio levels are at 12, compared with 14 last month. Brix levels, which are between eight and 10 at the moment, will continue to drop from now until the end of the season, while the acid content is predicted to remain stable.

Next season's crop is predicted to produce around 170 000 tonnes Australia wide. This is around 10 000 tonnes lower than industry estimates last month due to the persistent drought conditions. The current 2006/07 crop is pegged at around 190 000 tonnes.

Retail

Meanwhile, the retail orange juice market has been very healthy so far this year and sales have reportedly been above that of last year due to strong promotions and a range of new products from the major players. Sales on the route sector (garages, milk bars, restaurants etc.) have come down over the past month, but industry sources state that this is usual for

this time of year. This is true even in Queensland where it remains hot.

In a bid to be able to pay growers the AUD250/tonne they need for raw materials, the processors have been successful in raising the shelf price of NFC above AUD5.00/2 litres. The same practice was employed two years ago and resulted in a significant drop in demand. Some processors are confident that the higher prices this time round will not put a dent in consumption and point to the 2% growth in sales the market is enjoying at the moment. Some of the importers are less optimistic though and are expecting a fall in uptake before long. Indeed, one importer said he had already heard from one client who had seen a marked decrease in sales as a direct result of the higher pricing.

Overseas

The overseas market remains stable but firm with Brazilian juice trading for USD2500-2600/tonne 66 brix delivered Australia. There is not expected to be a change in price levels until at least October. Nevertheless, there has been a significant drop in price on the FCOJ futures market which has tumbled from USD1.95/lb to USD1.65/lb over the past few weeks.

MARKETING

Planning for the coming season is taking place now, with concern over the water supply and the impact on the marketing season. At this stage there is not point in alarming our customers over what "may happen" as we feel we will start the season full of confidence in our product. All markets are eagerly anticipating the Southern hemisphere citrus season after being short on product as a result of the California freeze. Degreening of early varieties such as Satsuma and Navelina has been taking place and market response has been excellent. The final shipment of export Valencia was completed in week 15 due to deteriorating quality

LEMONS

Domestic

Southern lemons are being harvested and de-greened with small volumes for the market selling up to A\$27/ctn. We are still waiting on more color before lemon supplies will increase and expect this to be 2-3 weeks away.

Export

Nil

VALENCIA

Domestic

Sales now are either on degreened fruit or natural color fruit in bags, mainly for juicing. This is expected to remain slow until end April, when everyone will switch to navels

Export

With some minor complaints experienced in the market, most have finished export orders for the season. Considering the season, it was a credit to everyone involved to continue this long.

RED GRAPEFRUIT

Domestic

Fruit is still available from N.T. with light supply but sales are slow. Best demand and prices for counts 48 and larger.

Export

Nil

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Weekly domestic market reports can be accessed from the Murray Valley Citrus Board website:

www.mvcitrus.org.au/publicat.html.

Further information: www.australiancitrusgrowers.com