

season update

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Summary Edition: January 2007

RIVERLAND, MURRAY VALLEY & RIVERINA

GA Summer Spray "ESSENTIAL SPRAY"- Last Chance

Findings from the Rind Breakdown project indicate that a summer GA spray is essential to reduce the incidence of rind breakdown. It is recommended for ALL export fruit to be sprayed with GA in January. Summer GA spray has been shown to decrease albedo breakdown, chilling injury, and other types of rind breakdown that can lead to decay problems. The spray also increases rind firmness which results in a fresher looking fruit on the supermarket shelf. For blocks with a history of low albedo breakdown, 10ppm of GA is sufficient, however 20ppm is recommended for blocks with a moderate to high levels of albedo breakdown problems. 10ppm GA sprayed by mid January on Washington navel oranges has very little effect on delaying rind colour development whilst a 20ppm spray may have a slight effect on delaying rind colour development. A spray conducted in early February may have some effect on delaying colour. As time progresses, a GA application has an increasing effect on delaying colour development. Thorough coverage of the fruit is essential and follow label recommendations. Allow about four weeks to pass to spray GA after an oil spray. This spray is regarded as an important risk management tool to reduce rind breakdown and subsequent decay issues that could significantly reduce exports returns. **Drought Update** Significant rainfall was recorded in the majority of the Sunraysia and Riverland regions (30-70mm) in January, whilst light rain fall was recorded in the Riverina (6-10mm). No significant rain fell in catchment areas. In the Riverina (Murrumbidgee River) there is enough irrigation water until the end of March. Long term forecasts are predicting an above average rainfall in Autumn. **Fruit Growth** Fruit growth seems to be above average however this could be a result of the early flowering. The recent rains in the Riverland and Sunraysia would have also had a positive effect on fruit size. More detailed data will be available in the next report. **December Heat Units** Near average heat units were recorded in December. Cumulative heat units are about 5-15% above average. Gayndah has been experiencing very mild conditions with heat units about 30% below average. See ACG "Season Update" web page for your district's heat units tables and graphs. **Hand Thinning & Fruit Size Model** Assess your crop load to check the need for hand thinning. **Nutrition** Cell expansion is occurring. A high amount of potassium and nitrogen is accumulated in the fruit during cell expansion. The application of fertiliser should be reduced in February and nearly cease by the end of March. Excessive and/or late applications of nitrogen or potassium can delay colour development and induce coarser rinds. However some intensive fertigation growers have applied low maintenance levels of nutrients throughout autumn without any significant delays in colour development. High nitrogen and/or potassium levels can have an additive effect on the delay on rind development experienced from GA sprays. Phosphorus can assist in counteracting the rind colour delay effect from nitrogen. **Irrigation** The weather is warm to hot, and trees will therefore require more frequent watering. Drip irrigators should be especially wary of the need for more frequent irrigations (i.e. every day) to maintain adequate moisture levels in the main part of the root zone. Tensiometers and other types of soil moisture monitoring devices should be used to assist in scheduling irrigations.

PEST General – Now is the time to monitor for Red scale. Apply an appropriate control if threshold levels are exceeded. (Note: oil sprays from now on early maturing varieties can delay colour development)

Sunraysia

Apple Moth: Light Brown Apple Moth larvae numbers have decreased over the last month. Fruit clusters are where the majority of larvae were found. Nangiloc area had the highest populations. Still finding the odd larvae under the calyx's of grapefruit. **Red & Soft Scale:** Soft and Red Scale populations can be found in most blocks. Blocks that have had an oil spray generally have low numbers. In blocks that have not had an oil, Red scale white caps and all instars can be readily found. Look for scale, red and soft on young fruit and foliage. **Leaf minor:** Leaf minor can be found in most districts and numbers are increasing. Generally they are not a concern on larger trees, however in younger trees, they can retard growth and in most cases a control is needed. **Spined Citrus Bug:** Spined Citrus Bug eggs, juveniles and adults were found in a number of Lemon and Murcott mandarin blocks and all were located on this season's fruit. (Damaged fruit was recorded). Lemons are the main variety affected. Monitor first thing in the morning, sunny side of tree. **Kelly's Thrip:** Kelly's Thrip are still causing problems, in lemon and grapefruit blocks. Regular monitoring is still recommended, lemons need to be monitored at least once a week for at least another month. High numbers of fruit can be damaged in a very short time. Other places to look for Kelly's Thrip are between clusters of fruit. **Mealy Bug:** Mealy Bug is now being found in reasonable numbers in and around the calyx areas. Main variety affected is grapefruit. Cottony cushion scale is also being found, mainly in the centres of young trees. Most districts are affected.

Riverina

Red Scale: Young stages of scale are starting to move onto fruit. Most levels are low at this stage, but will likely increase over the coming weeks as more crawlers are produced. Hot weather will favour scale development relative to its primary parasitoid, Aphytis. Where levels are moderate to high application of oil and releases of Aphytis should occur in the coming months. **Mealybugs:** Numbers of mealybugs have been increasing over the last month. Hot weather in January should cause significant mortality, and parasitoid activity will further reduce populations, particularly where broad-spectrum insecticides have not been applied. **Soft Scales:** Common in many orchards, particularly where ants are prevalent and disrupting biological control. Many soft brown scale are still producing crawlers. Treatment with oil should target the young stages for best results. **LBAM:** Pressure from LBAM has decreased with only the odd larva being detected on occasion. **Spined Citrus Bug:** Occasional detections have been made with only minimal action necessary. **Fuller's Rose Weevil:** Growers considering sending their fruit to China should also be monitoring closely for the presence of Fuller's Rose Weevil.

Riverland

Thrip & LBAM: No new damage. These pests should no longer be a threat. **Red Scale & Mealy Bug:** Both of these pests have bred over the past fortnight and young stage of these pests are on fruit. Growers should be actively looking now for these pests. If there is evidence that these pests are exceeding thresholds, the next two weeks is a good time for control (i.e. oil spray). Keep a gap of about 3-4 weeks between oil and GA spray. It is not recommended to spray oil to early maturing varieties because it can delay colour development. **Soft Scales:** Low levels are detected in orchards. Growers should keep and eye on young trees. **Spined Citrus Bug:** Detections are occurring on mandarins and lemons. Growers need to be proactive to monitor this bug from now until April. Average levels are being detected with some blocks requiring control measures. **Leaf Miner:** Activity is increasing on young trees and reworked trees. Growers

should commence preventative control measures **FRW**: Low levels detected in orchards.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Climate Mean daily maximum and minimum temperatures have been slightly lower than average. Evaporation rates have also been lower than average and rainfall slightly higher than average. Average daily evaporation rates for the coming month (Feb) are: Harvey 8.6mm, Gingin 9.5mm, Carnarvon 9.8mm and Kimberley Research Station 6.3mm. **Phenology** All varieties are in fruit growth stage two 'cell expansion', most navel varieties passed golf ball stage late in the month. **Production**. Harvest of White Flesh Grapefruit. Continued through the month in the Burekup area. Valencia harvest continued in the Bindoon and Harvey areas. **Management**. This is a critical period for irrigation and water stress during this time has the greatest impact on fruit size. Correct irrigation scheduling is essential. Apply 25% of annual nitrogen and 30% of annual potassium in the January to April period, supplementing potassium with foliar applications of potassium nitrate. Hand thinning during January – February will improve fruit size, aim for 4-5 oranges in a 0.5 quadrant. Leaf nutrient analysis can be carried out anywhere between January and March – try to sample at the same time each year. **Pests & Diseases**. Monitor for Greenhouse Thrip weekly on fruit to be harvested late (Jan – March). Also monitor scale crawlers and leaf miner, applying targeted oil sprays where necessary. Ensure you have your ants under control as they can exacerbate a scale problem. Consider releasing Green Lacewings if Mealybug is a problem.

QUEENSLAND

Red Scale levels are increasing although generally they are still at acceptable levels and lower than in previous seasons. In orchards where multiple releases of *Aphytis* have been made, parasitism levels are around 60%. Pest mite populations have been increasing in some areas. **Spider mites** continue to be more of a problem in the Central Burnett and nearby districts. **Rust Mites** are generally well behaved except in blocks with low levels of predatory mites as a result of disruptive fungicide treatments. Poor quality irrigation water is also believed to be responsible for suppressing predatory mite populations in some blocks. In other blocks predatory mites are at good levels. **Spined Citrus Bugs** have been causing damage in some orchards and several blocks have already required treatment. **Mango Flatid** continues to be a problem pest. It warrants further research into options for improved biological control. In some blocks, especially imperial mandarins, **Scirtothrips** have been of concern. This is quite unusual although thrips seem to be more troublesome each season in recent years. **Fruit fly** baiting should be applied in lemons, grapefruit, navel and imperial blocks and in those blocks with second crop fruit hanging. **Hail damage** is evident throughout the district with very high levels in many orchards. **Wind damage** associated with the same storm events is also showing up at high levels. The dry conditions have continued. **Water quality** and availability continue to be serious issues for all growers. Many blocks are showing stress from the poor quality water. In many cases salt levels are so high that application of fertilizers is likely to cause more harm than good. Growers are reminded of the importance of **thinning** and should make it a high priority.

PROCESSING

The bush fires that have been hounding Victoria's north-east and Gippsland are reportedly not impacting the state's citrus crops. Nevertheless, water restrictions and high temperatures are causing major headaches for growers across the nation. Recent rain over the last week has provided respite in some areas, but there is no change to the water allocations and some growers have been forced to turn off the irrigation and increase harvesting volumes as a result. Valencia ratios continue to come in below average for the season and are still registering between 12-13. Industrial Valencia fruit is contracted at AUD220/tonne this season and spot prices are

currently at the same level. Meanwhile, juice prices are expensive with bottlers paying processors around AUD0.46/single strength litre. Retail sales are positive and the market continues to grow. However, the situation may need to be reviewed if predictions of imminent price increases are realised. The industry is trying to persuade retailers to increase the shelf price due to poor profit margins, which are reportedly at all time low's for processors. Moreover, the higher prices of imported juice could start to be factored into the retail market. The 2006/07 Valencia crop is expected to wind up slightly earlier than usual in all growing regions due to the lack of available water and stress on the trees. Industry sources suggest the harvest will end sometime between April and June, but add that the timing will depend upon sales and the ability to process the crop. Looking further ahead, production from the 2007/08 crop is reportedly highly dependant on rainfall and the availability of water. Processors expect a lower output than the current crop, but say that the picture will be clearer for both production and water restrictions once official forecasts are released in March.

Overseas Meanwhile, the industry is split as to how much influence the current high prices for Brazilian juice will have on the domestic Australian market. Some say that importers are covered for the moment and that higher prices will simply lead to lower imports and an increase in the use of local juice. Others, meanwhile, suggest that the price of Brazilian orange juice has impacted the juice industry internationally, including all processors in Australia and that these increases will be reflected in shelf prices in the coming months. Price levels in Florida are also high and the market looks stable to bullish. Devastating freezes in California could see citrus production there stemmed up to 80%, cutting back the local juice supply and putting a further drain on Florida's resources. A year ago, news concerning the California citrus industry would probably not have made headlines, but with the supply as tight as it is, it is a fairly significant event.

MARKETING

While water allocation remains a concern, welcoming rains fell over most Southern citrus growing regions. This will at least save a couple of irrigations for growers and add some nutrient to the fruit and trees as well. Initial estimates in general for next season crops are for a lighter harvest of better sized fruit, with slightly less blemish levels. The freeze in California appears to have a dramatic effect on the USA citrus crop and exporters have been fielding a lot of calls from USA buyers (and traders!) for fruit supply. Asian markets have been ordering fairly steadily despite the influx of Chinese navels and mandarins. The high forex with the USD is not doing us any favours either, although the shipping bunker rates have come off slightly. **LEMONS Domestic** USA lemons increased to A\$70/ctn for count 15 and A\$45/ctn for count 144. Only a small amount of Queensland fruit is on the market and Katherine fruit will start next week. Small volumes of Riverland fruit is now available for re-greening. **Export Nil VALENCIA Domestic** Sales very slow to dead and prices because of increased quantities of various stonefruits. Grower return of A\$200-250/t minimum, is still being achieved. We are now 60% through the crop. Export Sales have been maintained at the previous month's level, with stronger demand for smaller fruit (counts 150-163) in Asia. Prices have been maintained despite the higher exchange rate. Interest has resurfaced from Japan due to the USA freeze and appears orders will be forthcoming in the next few weeks.

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

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

For further info, visit: www.australiancitrusgrowers.com