

season update

This publication has been facilitated by HAL in partnership with Australian Citrus Growers & has been funded by the national citrus R&D levy. The Australian Government provides matched funding for all HAL's R&D activities.

Summary Edition: June 2007

RIVERLAND, MURRAY VALLEY & RIVERINA

Riversun

The first vessel carried 3416 pallets and is due to discharge its fruit on the 28th of July. The first vessel carried about 300 pallets more than anticipated. The second vessel will depart on the 23rd of June and is carrying 5200 pallets, 1800 pallets more than anticipated. The vessel is due to arrive on the 11th of July. Fruit size and quality has been good. DNE are able to work with the extra volumes however prefer to see volumes return to anticipated levels for the next shipments as not to compromise marketing efforts.

Drought Update

Inflows into Murray River storages for May were lower than last year despite the average rainfall received in the catchments; however inflows into Murrumbidgee storages were better than last year. Storage levels rose in May with Dartmouth at 10.6%, Hume at 9.5%, Burrinjuck 25% and Blowering at 18% as of mid June. Enough water supplies have been accumulated in storages to meet critical town supply needs. Goulburn Murray water authority (Victoria) has announced the availability of carry over for the beginning of July whilst allocations are still at 0%. NSW Water Authorities are arranging critical supplies for citrus for next few months. NSW Sunraysia growers should contact their local water authority to apply for this water. Riverina channel system normally shuts down in July for maintenance and reopens sometime in August. South Australia has announced a 4% allocation plus some carryover. Predictions are for average rainfall and an improvement to water inflows into storages. Information on allocation probabilities is available from the following web sites (<http://www.dnr.nsw.gov.au/>, <http://www.lmw.vic.gov.au/>, <http://www.g-mwater.com.au/>). Citrus drought workshops and information will be available in mid July.

Winter GA Spray. Cold temperatures in the southern regions have helped facilitate a good/high level of flowering. Water stress promotes heavier flowering. If you are expecting an "on year", excessive flowering may occur, resulting in a high crop load of small fruit. Research has shown that the application of GA in winter for an "on year" can improve flower quality, reduce crop load and increase fruit size. Ralex® is the only product registered for winter GA application. Now is your last chance to spray. Reduce the risk of an excessive crop load of small fruit. A tree grown under restricted water practices will grow bigger fruit with a small crop load as compared to a high crop load. A high crop load will further exacerbate tree stress under a restricted water regime. Contact your district advisor for more details.

Frost. Frost has occurred throughout the South eastern growing regions of Australia. Frosts were experienced in Riverina & Sunraysia in late June with temperatures reaching -4°C, however the temperatures were not for an extended period to be a major threat and it may have only affected isolated frost prone pockets. A significant frost has been experienced in the Riverland recently over one night with minor rind damage might be expected in isolated areas. Suspension of picking has occurred in isolated packets. Information describing frost symptoms on fruit and assessment is available from the 'resources' area on the ACG website.

Harvest. Harvest has been progressing at a good pace with good weather conditions. As of late June, Washington harvest is about 50%, and the majority of Lengs have been harvested. Fruit size and internal quality is very good this season. As a result pack outs have been better than average. Blemish is the main cause of reject fruit however some albedo breakdown is starting to appear. Some issues with colour was experienced in the early part of June, however the recent cold weather has significantly improved the colouring of fruit. Late navel harvest is expected to commence in mid July.

Oleocellosis. As main harvest is occurring, familiarise yourself with optimum harvest practices to reduce this incidence of oleocellosis damage. Take care with new pickers. A few seconds of poor harvesting can ruin a season of fruit growing.

Winter Urea Spray. Work from California demonstrated that a winter (July) foliar spray of low biuret urea (1.1kg/100L, 6300L/ha) increased flower numbers and yield of Navel oranges. Fruit size was not decreased. This treatment may not be recommended if you expect an "on year" and wish to keep fruit numbers low.

Pruning. Pruning after harvest will encourage new growth that bears bigger fruit. It also assists in reducing crop load in an "on" year. Pruning guide is available from your local citrus organisation.

QUEENSLAND Production

Conditions had been unseasonably warm right through until the end of May, when good falls of rain (65-85mm) fell throughout the Central Burnett district. Following the rain the weather has turned much cooler. The rain has not contributed to storage facilities but has thoroughly wetted the soil profile. Almost all remaining Imperial mandarins were damaged by the rain with the exception of a few late maturing blocks and some that had been treated with GA. The cold weather has slowed most pest activity. Notably fruit fly pressure is now much reduced. Growers are advised to practise good orchard hygiene to reduce the opportunities for fruit fly to breed. The interval between bait applications can be extended, but any return to warmer conditions must be followed by an increase in fruit fly bait application. Harvest of mid season varieties is well under way. Some oranges and Murcotts are showing signs of creasing. Creasing injury is especially prevalent in Taylor Lee variety. Emperor Brown spot activity has increased noticeably since the start of increased rainfall and is most noticeable in blocks with a prior history of the disease. Susceptible varieties should receive protectant fungicide applications. Microscope dissections for citrus bud mite have just commenced. The decision to treat individual blocks will be determined by the outcomes of these assessments. Some lemon blocks have experienced an out-of-season flowering following the rain. There is some thrips and caterpillar activity in these blocks. Growers considering harvesting this crop should consider the application of a fungicide for black spot control.

PROCESSING

Processors and growers alike are upbeat about the healthy rains and snowfall over the past two weeks. Snowfall around the key growing regions is already much higher than last year, say industry sources. The industry is in a much better position

than last month, but there is no cause for celebration yet. The plantations still need a good deal more rain and water restrictions remain in place in all regions as a result. While it is normal for zero water allocations in the MIA area at this time, the Sunraysia and Riverland regions would usually be allowed some degree of irrigation. ABC Rural reports that South Australian citrus growers will receive a small allocation next month. The Sunraysia and Riverland growing areas have now finished picking and processing the 2006/07 Valencia crop. The MIA still has around 15% of this season's crop left to be picked, but the majority of these volumes are already contracted. The lack of available fruit means that there is practically nothing being sold on the spot market at the moment. Last month spot prices for industrial Valencia fruit were around AUD260/tonne. The juice being produced at the moment is fairly watery, which is usual for the end of the season. Ratios are now under 12 and brix levels are around 9. In terms of stocks, processors expect there to be enough Australian NFC juice on hand to supply the domestic market until the next Valencia processing season, which will begin in October. Some of the bigger processors are starting to put volumes of Navel fruit to concentrate and are paying between AUD50-70/tonne farm gate for around 12 ratio. This is a much healthier price than last year, when growers were paid as low as AUD10/tonne. Meanwhile, the retail market remains reasonably positive and processors report that sales continue to be strong in spite of recent hike in shelf price for the NFC two litre cartons.

Next season

The outlook for the 2007/08 Valencia crop is similar to last month. The sustained drought has meant that some of the growers have pulled out plantations. Moreover, the fruit per tree count is expected to be down on this season. Nevertheless, the fruit is expected to size up well and as a result tonnages are predicted to be on par with season or 10% down at worst. The bottlers/end-users are hoping to source all their NFC orange juice requirements from the domestic market next season. Importing NFC juice could prove expensive given the lower-than-usual global supply coupled with strong growth in consumption of NFC.

Overseas

There has been very little trading of Brazilian frozen concentrated orange juice (FCOJ) over the past month. Most buyers are covered until at least October. The slack trading coupled with a good forecast for Brazil's next crop has led to the first signs of weakness in the firm Brazilian FCOJ pricing. There are unofficial reports that offers from some processors have eased to USD2300-2400/tonne. The FCOJ futures market in the US has already come down significantly over the past couple of months reflecting a strong bloom in Florida. One Australian processor suggested that global demand has been damaged by the high prices over the past six months and may need to be re-stimulated next year.

MARKETING

The season is well underway with navels and mandarins being harvested and packed in earnest, together with smaller volumes of Valencia. Fruit maturity is two weeks ahead of last season and size is 2 counts up, which are 2 positives for a good season. All markets are enjoying the excellent eating quality of the fruit this season as well as the improved size available. There is still competition from California navels which are dragging on, and South Africa navels which are currently dealing with heavy rain and pest issues in certain areas.

The high exchange rate against the USD remains a major concern. While we endeavour to improve grower returns with higher market prices, this is being eroded by the stronger A\$.

LEMONS

Domestic

Grade 1 fruit is selling reasonably well, but with grade 2 difficult to move grower returns have come back down. Lemons were being de-greened until mid-June, but now are packed as natural colour.

Export

Chilean lemons are still in Japan which is not giving Australia a lot of opportunity. Small volumes are moving to several Asian markets and the Middle East in containers mixed with other citrus, but expect volume to increase next month.

NAVEL

Domestic

A greater volume of fruit on the market meant a reduced price as the month wore on.

Export

There has been a strong start to the USA program with around 8000 pallets being shipped on the first two vessels departing in June. Second grade large fruit has been sent to, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Japan and Canada. With a shortage of small fruit prices have remained firm in Malaysia as orders remained difficult to fill. Navelina and Leng varieties are virtually finished, and we now swing into Washington until end July.

CLEMENTINES

Domestic

An excellent season for this variety with solid sales through to the end of the season.

Export

At the tail end of the season there was strong demand from Hong Kong, Indonesia and Middle East for fruit, with some markets missing out on orders as the season finished early.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Climate

Most south west citrus growing areas have received very little rainfall in June, coming in well below the monthly average for what is normally one of the wettest months of the year. With less cloud cover, mean daily maximum temperatures have been slightly higher than average, and mean daily minimum temperatures lower than average. Average daily evaporation rates for the coming month (July) are: Harvey 2.1 mm and Gingin 2 mm.

Phenology

Trees are in the floral induction stage. Keep an eye out for bud swell and record the dates of bud break for each variety.

Production

Harvest of mid season Navel varieties commenced towards the end of the month in West Gingin. Harvest of early season Navel varieties and Imperial mandarins continued in southern areas. Harvest of Daisy mandarins commenced towards the end of the month in northern areas. Colour development on most varieties has been good with the cooler temperatures overnight. Most orchards have been relatively free of Albedo Breakdown thus far. Water mark on Imperial mandarins has been an issue in orchards that missed the winter GA spray.

Management

Consider foliar applications of urea during the floral induction stage to promote flowering if you expect a light flowering year. Apply Ralex during the floral induction stage or at bud break to reduce the number of leafless inflorescences as part of your fruit size management program. Commence your canopy management/pruning after harvest. Keep a close eye on water requirements, water stress during this period can have a negative impact on fruit quality and increase flowering for the next season.

Pests and Diseases

Continue monitoring and bait spraying programs for Fruit Fly. Keep an eye out for pests in the orchard whilst harvesting and record observations and estimate the amount of insect damage on fruit harvested in preparedness for next season.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Steve Falivene, NSW DPI;

Dan Papacek, Bugs for Bugs, Qld (Production),

Chris Simpson, (Qld Marketing) Qld Citrus Growers Inc.,

Helen Ramsey, WA Dept of Agriculture;

Stefan Worsley, www.juicemarket.co.uk;

Scott Searles, AHEA.

Further information: www.australiancitrusgrowers.com