

season update

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Summary Edition: May 2007

RIVERLAND, MURRAY VALLEY & RIVERINA

Harvest

De-greening of Navelinas started in early/mid May. Fruit in the Sunraysia/Riverland districts have been slow to colour. Riverina is also delayed in colouring however good colour has been reported on lighter soils. Internal maturity is advanced with lower acid levels making fruit more palatable. Fruit size is large across most varieties. Lengs have commenced harvest on isolated blocks across the districts. Splitting of Leng Navel has been reported around the districts and this may have been facilitated by the recent rains and the large fruit size. More cold nights are required to further progress colouring. The first Riversun vessel is due to depart on the 8th of June and the second on the 22nd June.

Drought Update

Significant rain has been falling in the catchments; however inflows into storages are still low. Allocations are still at 0% for the start of July. Until the season progresses well into this period it is difficult to predict water allocations. However some state water authorities have made statements on best case scenarios and growers are advised to begin partially implementing strategies after harvest. If the situation becomes worse, then further strategies can be implemented when water allocations are announced in spring. Information and workshops are being prepared to cover the main on-farm strategies for very low allocations and these should be available in late June.

Frost Risk

Ensure you have frost loggers installed on the appropriate sites (i.e. export fruit) in the orchard.

Winter GA Spray

Water stress has been shown to induce heavier flowering. Research has shown that the application of GA in winter for an "on year" reduces the amount of flowering, "white" blossom, fruit numbers and increases fruit size. Crop load reduction is an important strategy if you are growing a crop on minimal water. A heavy crop load places extra burden on a tree and can reduce fruit size. The only registered formulation of GA for flower regulation on mandarins and oranges is Ralex®.

Oleocellosis

As main harvest approaches, familiarise yourself with optimum harvest practices to reduce this incidence of oleocellosis damage. Take special care with new pickers.

Fruit Injury Pests & Snails

Ensure that pickers do not harvest split or damaged fruit. There are a number of pests that attack damaged fruit. If these pests are detected at overseas ports, significant pest identification delays that can impact negatively on returns. Continue monitoring for snails and apply baits if required.

QUEENSLAND Production

The harvest of Imperial mandarins and Navel oranges is well under way. There have been further issues with suspected **Anthraxnose** leading to rind damage in the market place. High temperatures during de-greening can induce gas burn or

anthracnose. It is recommended that Imperial mandarins be de-greened at around 19-22°C. While the weather remains warm at this time of year it will be necessary to apply cooling to de-greening rooms to achieve this.

The use of gibberellic acid (GA) is recommended to minimise rind disorders such as watermark and puffing. Do not apply GA too early in the season however as this may lead to excessive de-greening requirements. If Imperials are allowed to hang too long on the tree the likelihood of biennial bearing is greatly increased. This may result in a very light crop in the following season.

Generally pest and disease pressure has been low.

Red Scale control this season has been excellent and aphytis parasitism levels have remained very high.

Some incidence of **Oriental Spider Mite** continues with occasional blocks still requiring treatment.

Predatory mite populations are relative low for this time of year with levels at around 10-30% in most orchards.

Jassids are still present but there has been little damage with little or no treatments now required.

Citrus Rust Thrips can cause damage where fruit touch adjacent fruit or leaves. Although not widespread, some blocks have required treatment for this pest.

The continuing warm weather does mean that **fruit fly** remains a major threat. Overall control has been excellent where growers have maintained baiting in conjunction with Area Wide Management practices.

Black Spot levels remain low.

Emperor Brown Spot (EBS) infection levels are increasing and growers should remain vigilant. Where susceptible varieties are exposed to extended periods of fog or dew, protectant fungicides should be applied.

There has been a higher incidence of **Stylar End Rot** in navel oranges this season. This disorder occurs as a result of alternaria infection and is usually associated with a weakened navel end which allows the organism to invade. It is more likely to occur when trees have experienced stress. There are no known effective treatments. Infected fruit should be allowed to drop naturally to ensure they are not packed for sale.

Creasing appears to be an issue again this season with early expression in Taylor-Lee variety. Some evidence of creasing is showing also in hicksons and murcotts.

QUEENSLAND Marketing

After the traditional early season fall in April, the Imperial mandarin market stabilised at a relatively good level this month. Supply appears to be somewhat lighter than expected, but there is a larger proportion of Class 2 product, and both factors are attributed to the effects of the late 2006 hail storms which devastated the Central Burnett. This reduced supply, particularly of clean fruit, has underpinned a fairly sound domestic market for Imperials.

Exports of minor varieties – Sunburst, Nova and Fremont have commenced, with the main markets being China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Singapore and the Middle East. The market was slow to pick up for Queensland Navelinas and Washington's, with the chain stores sticking with imported Navels until mid-May. This has resulted in Queensland Navels now clashing in the market with southern fruit. Nevertheless, marketing conditions for Queensland Navels have been fairly good. Lemons on the other hand are oversupplied in all markets, and

accordingly the lemon market has been fairly depressed. This is particularly so for Class 2 prices, as there is a lot of product which has been adversely affected by the hail. The situation has been exacerbated by the arrival of southern lemons onto an already fully supplied market. Drought conditions have persisted in Queensland's main growing areas. Whilst advantageous for fruit quality, the water situation is a major problem looking forward.

PROCESSING

The key citrus growing regions are still in the grip of a sustained drought. While there has been some rainfall over the past two weeks in western NSW, it is not clear how much has ended up in the dams. The drought is not expected to have any major impact on the current Valencia crop, but the Navels could be in danger. This situation could be aggravated given the potentially strong demand for Navels from the US this year.

The hard freeze in California two months ago wiped out considerable quantities of Navel fruit there which would ordinarily be destined for the fresh domestic market. Nevertheless, the quality of the Australian Navel crop looks good, say processors, which will send higher volumes to the fresh packing houses and less to the crushers (Navel oranges are suitable for orange concentrate).

The 2006/07 Valencia crop is now 85% complete. The Riverland and Sunraysia have all but finished and the MIA is the only region holding any significant quantities of fruit. Growers in the latter region have increased harvesting in order to finish ahead of the 1 July deadline. Fruit sizing remains below average and ratios have continued to drop with levels now around 11-12. Brix levels are at 10. While spot prices for industrial Valencia fruit remain stable on last month at AUD260/tonne, offers for juice have climbed. Processors in the MIA are now looking for AUD0.78 per single strength litre - significantly higher than the AUD0.70/litre offered in February. End-users/bottlers see the juice market as bullish.

Next season

There is talk that the fruit-per-tree count for the 2007/08 Valencia crop could be poor, although predictions of better fruit sizing could offset this. Overall, processors are expecting tonnages to be slightly down on the current season, which is in line with forecasts last month (see *April Season Update*). However, the drought is a major variable and could reduce the number of trees under production.

Contract prices for next season are expected to be on par with this season, but processors say they are willing to offer a premium to growers if dry weather damages the supply.

Overseas

There has been a marked down turn on the US frozen concentrated orange juice (FCOJ) futures market over the past month. The trees in Florida have shown a very strong bloom for next season.

The market for Brazilian FCOJ is stable and most Australian buyers are covered until October. Offers for Brazilian juice remain high at USD2500-2600/tonne, but trading activity is thin. Industry sources expect prices to ease before October.

MARKETING

Good rainfalls over the last month have been welcomed by Riverland and Sunraysia growers, and have improved tree health and fruit quality.

De-greening has been taking place on early varieties due to lack of external colour, as both domestic and export markets are seeking new season fruit.

Natural colour packing is expected to start in week 21.

All markets are keen to get their first load of Australian Navels and mandarins and while the high Australian dollar remains a concern overall, market demand is still there.

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 colour before lemon supplies will increase and expect this to be 2-3 weeks away.

Export. Enquiries have been received from several export markets and we are now waiting for natural colour in 2-3 weeks to be able to supply.

SATSUMAS

Domestic. This variety is now finished and overall the season was a success with retailers happy with the quality.

Export. Volumes were sent to New Zealand with good response from retailers and consumers

NAVEL

Domestic. Good start to the season with solid returns for the small amount of fruit available. Selling prices ranged from A\$29-40 for cartons and bags also selling well with a top of A\$3.00 each.

Export. Asian markets have been very keen to start due to the absence of USA Valencia and this season has seen an increase in the amount of de-greened fruit being shipped. The eating quality of this fruit is suitable with maturities two weeks ahead of last season. Packing for USA will start in week 21 with the first charter vessel due to depart on 8th June.

CLEMENTINES

Domestic. First supplies into retail were well accepted with good response on taste even though fruit slightly pale. Counts 56-96 in 10kg carton were being sold between A\$24-27.00/ctn.

Export. As fruit was still being de-greened, export has been on hold, but strong enquiries have been received from several markets.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Climate. Mean daily maximum and minimum temperatures have been average with no significant frost days and no temperatures exceeding 30 °C. Much lower than average rainfall has been received with a very dry start to the month with little follow-up rain fall after the break of season in April. Average daily evaporation rates for the coming month (June) are: Harvey 2.1 mm, Gingin 2.1 mm, Carnarvon 3.7 mm and Kimberley Research Station 6.3 mm.

Phenology. Trees are heading into the floral induction stage.

Production. Harvest of early season navel varieties commenced mid month in the West Gingin area, this was followed by harvest of early mandarin varieties, Imperial and Nules Clementine, towards the end of the month. Early mandarin varieties in southern growing areas reached internal maturity mid/late month, growers are awaiting full colour development (on tree) before commencing harvest. There was some evidence of granulation/drying internally in imperial mandarins. Splitting was a problem in the Daisy mandarin variety in West Gingin. Early navels have experienced a normal amount of splitting in all areas. Early indications are that Albedo breakdown will be less prominent this season.

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 to reduce the number of leafless inflorescences, as part of your fruit size management program. Ensure your trees are skirted so that no fruit is in contact with the ground (disease risk). Apply GA to imperial mandarins at ¾ to full colour for the control of watermark. Apply GA in mid June to grapefruit to be harvested in December/January to delay rind aging. 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. Continue with snail baiting programs so that adult snails and slugs are killed before they get a chance to lay their eggs.

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