

# season update

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Summary Edition: November 2006

## RIVERLAND, MURRAY VALLEY & RIVERINA

**Drought Water allocation reductions.** Due to the drought, the south eastern citrus growing districts will have reduced water allocations for the oncoming season. Allocations are; Riverina 85%, Murray Valley NSW 52%, Murray Valley Victoria 95% and South Australia 60%. Growers facing significant reductions in water supply need to take action now. Workshops are being conducted throughout the districts and a preliminary fact sheet on water saving and budgeting strategies is available on the ACG web site. **Fruit Set.** Navels are towards the end or at the end of the main drop, however some fruit will continue to drop through December. This will be facilitated by hot weather. Preliminary visual assessments indicate that light to medium navel crops are setting. Riverina indicated a lighter set on early and late navels with an average set on Washington navels, Sunraysia indicated a light to average set for early navels, below average for Washington navels and above average for late navels. South Australia indicated a light set for early and late navels and a average set for Washington navels. **Nutrition.** Cell division will soon end (6-8 weeks after flowering). Potassium nitrate foliar sprays can assist in boosting tree K levels. Information from Israel indicates that a 5% potassium nitrate spray (before run off stage) can increase fruit size if sprayed before the end of cell division. As fruit enter into the cell enlargement phase the demand of fruit for potassium and nitrogen will significantly increase. Soil temperatures at Dareton (15cm) are about 20oC which is sufficient for good root uptake of nutrients. As soil temperatures rise the conversion of ammonia to nitrate will be more rapid (days) and nutrient uptake also increased. Trials from USA California also indicate that a 3% low biuret urea spray (before run off stage) can increase fruit size. **Irrigation.** The recent variable weather conditions have made water use significantly change from week to week. Soil moisture monitoring combined with on site assessment is the best way check if your trees are receiving adequate water. **Sun Protection for Young Trees.** The use of a kaolin clay spray to cover trees has been shown to significantly improve young tree growth during hot conditions. Current formulations are not recommended for mature trees and they can interfere with the natural processes of red scale predation and increase the probability of infestations occurring. However new formulations are being developed to be red scale predator friendly. Consider a spray for young trees, or a trial spray, on the onset of hot conditions.

**PEST – Sunraysia. LBAM.** Larvae numbers are on the rises. Larvae are being found under the calyx of fruit in most blocks. Numbers are significantly higher than last year. **Red & soft scale** population is increasing, large number of soft scales has been found in most areas. Crawlers are easily found on new shoots. Red scale crawlers and white caps are now being found. Monitor fruit and foliage. **Katydid**s are still occasionally being found but mainly in unspray blocks. Carefully monitor young/small trees. **Spined Citrus Bug** numbers are on the rise. Lemons are mainly affected. Large numbers of juveniles are now being found. Monitor the first thing in the morning on the sunny side of the tree. **Kelly's thrips** numbers have increased. Kelly's Thrip are now being found in large numbers in some districts (Nangiloc/Colignan). Monitor inside fruit clusters and under the calyx areas of young fruit. **Mealy Bug** is now being found in reasonable

numbers in and around the calyx areas. The main variety affected is grapefruit. **Riverina LBAM:** Levels have generally been low, but we are now seeing 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> instar larvae from the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation under the calyx of new fruit. Control has been warranted in some orchards, but most orchards with good levels of beneficial species have not reached threshold levels. **Katydid**s have increased in the last few weeks with considerable damage being done. Hatching of eggs should nearly be complete and orchards should be carefully monitored. Treatment should be applied right away if thresholds are reached. **Soft Scales.** Levels are generally low, except where ants, dust or pesticides have disrupted the natural enemies that normally keep them in check. Where levels are high a treatment with spray oil targeting the young stages of scale can be applied around mid December. **Red Scale.** Levels on new fruit are low at this stage, as only the odd crawler from the 1<sup>st</sup> generation has settled on fruitlets. Most of these are now at the whitecap stage. Where red scale levels are high, some control can be achieved by adding 1% spray oil to LBAM & Katydid applications, but a higher volume application may be required later in the season. **Mealybugs.** A few Mealybugs are being detected in fruit, but only at low levels. **Riverland** Available shortly.

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA

**Climate.** Temperatures have been warmer than average throughout the south west region in November. Evaporation rates have remained average however rainfall has been lower than the long term average. Average daily evaporation rates for December are: Harvey 7.8 mm, Gingin 9 mm, Carnarvon 9.9 mm and Kimberley Research Station 8.4 mm.

**Phenology.** All varieties reached fruit set early in the month and are now in fruit growth stage 1 - cell division. Natural fruit drop has commenced in most areas.

**Production.** Harvest of late navel varieties should wrap up towards the end of the month. Red Flesh Grapefruit were harvested in the Harvey area early in the month, harvest of White Flesh Grapefruit continued throughout the month in the Burekup area. Valencia harvest commenced in Gingin this month.

**Management.** Manage regrowth and suckers while they are still small. Monitor irrigation requirements closely and avoid water stress as this will reduce fruit size at harvest. Apply 25% of annual nitrogen and 30-50% of annual potassium, supplement potassium with foliar applications of KNO<sub>3</sub> to promote cell division. Commence foliar applications of calcium nitrate for the management of Albedo breakdown.

**Pests and Diseases.** Monitor for Kelly's Citrus weekly from petal fall to calyx closure and Greenhouse thrip weekly from fruit set. Also monitor scale crawlers, applying targeted oil sprays where necessary. Programs for the release of Aphytis for red scale control should be well under way. Ensure you have your ants under control as they can exacerbate a scale problem. Consider releasing Green lacewings if Mealybug is a problem.

## QUEENSLAND

The Central Burnett has experienced **severe hail damage** with many orchards affected. Some growers have lost their entire crop to hail. In orchards where damage is less than 50% (of fruit affected) losses due to hail can be minimised by diligent thinning. Blocks that have suffered bark and twig damage should receive a copper spray to reduce the risk of infection. The third **protectant fungicide** is due.

The interval from the last fungicide should not exceed 4 weeks. A shorter interval may be warranted if more rain is forecast or in those blocks with a history of black spot or emperor brown spot infection. Emperor brown spot has been recorded in some blocks following the storm activity. In spite of these storms there has been little or no run-off and many growers are still struggling to maintain adequate water supplies. Water quality is generally extremely poor in the worst affected orchards. **Red scale** movement onto fruit is occurring. Any treatments aimed at the crawler and first instar stages should be applied now. Any application of oil sprays should be made only to trees that have good water status and health. Avoid periods of high temperature. Aphytis releases are well under way. Assessment for levels of parasitism will commence from December. Treatments for **citrus gall wasp** are required in some blocks where the parasitism is low and gall numbers are increasing. Thorough coverage is essential for the successful treatment of citrus gall wasp. **Rust mite** populations have been generally well behaved so far with levels of citrus rust mite reported from some blocks. There have also been some early counts of **Oriental spider mite** showing. Predatory mite populations are generally low although they are present in most orchards. **Fruit fly** counts are quite high and many blocks still have residual fruit hanging. Growers are reminded to be vigilant with fruit fly. Any late hanging fruit should be removed and buried. Bait sprays should continue at this time of year to help suppress the summer population of fruit fly. The second round of MATs is now due to be placed into orchards. It is important that this continue to maintain the Area Wide Management program.

### **PROCESSING**

The sustained country-wide drought is causing serious concerns within the Australian processing sector. Industry sources now state that growing areas desperately need rain within the next three weeks. The water restrictions could mean that growers will use the majority of their allocations on Navel fruit rather than the Valencia due to the higher returns they receive for table fruit. Industry bodies are reportedly putting pressure on the Government to increase the availability of water for growers. However, people and livestock will be before agriculture in the queue for higher allowances. There are no further reports of damage to the current 2006/07 Valencia crop from the freeze in June. In fact some processors state that the situation has improved and that fruit has bounced back. A recent freeze in New South Wales and Tasmania hit some of the apple and blackcurrant growing regions, but citrus groves reportedly escaped. The challenge that most growers face now is poor fruit sizing. This is reportedly due to the drought coupled with the late harvesting of 2005/06 fruit. The surplus of fruit last season meant that fruit was still being harvested right into October this year. This fruit absorbed much of the nutrients which would normally have been reserved for the new season fruit. The slow growth has delayed picking and processors state that they have taken 5% of their expected volumes of Valencia to date. Given the sluggish start to the season there is still no spot market for Valencia fruit at the moment. Contract prices are between A\$220-260/tonne delivered, similar to last season. Meanwhile, retail sales have been flat over the past three weeks, but were reportedly positive up until then. The industry expects consumption to climb in the run up to Christmas.

### **Overseas**

Due to a lower-than-expected crop forecast for Florida and a general shortage on the world market for the foreseeable future, offers for Brazilian orange concentrate have now reached over USD2500/tonne fob Brazil - the highest level in years. The industry is split as to how well covered Australian importers are. Some suggest that the larger buyers have fixed long term contracts at lower price levels

earlier in the year. However, there is also speculation that that these cheaper contracts are about to expire, which would put significant pressure on price levels right through the supply chain. In spite of the climb in world prices yet again this month, there are very limited, if any, volumes of Australian fruit being put to concentrate as an import replacement, say industry sources.

### **MARKETING**

The Valencia harvest is now in full swing with the internal maturities meeting the juice processors requirements and therefore the growers required return. Honey Murcotts, lemons and grapefruit are continuing to be harvested with Murcotts expected to finish at the end of November. Domestic markets are firm for Valencia's but struggling with Murcotts mainly due to the volume of small sizes. UK/Europe markets have finished for the season and Asian markets have slowed now that the Japan program has finished and the Northern hemisphere navels are on their way.

### **LEMONS**

**Domestic** USA and Queensland lemons are now in the market but only in short supply so prices are staying firm. Southern-grown lemons have increased in size and have only a couple of weeks to go before they finish. Grower returns are in the vicinity of A\$400-500/t, with around 60% of the fruit in the medium size range.

**Export Nil**

### **HONEY MURCOTTS**

**Domestic.** Small murcotts remain difficult to move, but the fruit is strong and eating well so it will clear over time.

Grower returns are have come back overall as fruit is much smaller now (over 60% in small counts) with most growers achieving between \$400-650 per tonne

**Export.** With Pakistan and Spanish mandarins starting the opportunity for Australian exports is almost over. Asian markets are still an opportunity, but Middle East is now ordering from the Northern suppliers.

### **NAVEL**

**Domestic.** The final sales of the small storage program will be complete by the end of the month. Volume to the market is controlled, so prices are remaining firm.

**Export.** All export fruit will have arrived and sold by the end of week 47. This is timely as Spanish fruit, which has now been harvested for 3 weeks, is now at a maturity level that meets the large retail chains and will be on the shelves from week 48 at prices much lower than Australian fruit.

### **VALENCIA**

#### **Domestic**

Sales for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade fruit continue to be steady, with large fruit bringing the highest return. 16's-18's -20's in 3kg bags are selling at between A\$1.50-2.45 ea. with the grower return of A\$200/t minimum required matching the processors juice price. The majority of growers are receiving between A\$200-250/t for their fruit.

#### **Export**

Demand from Japan and South-East Asia has been strong throughout November, with Japan shipments just finishing due to duty increase from Dec. 1<sup>st</sup>. Gassed navels from China is also starting to arrive in Asian markets, and together with the start of the wet season, has slowed consumption of Australian Valencia's

**Weekly domestic market reports** can be accessed from the Murray Valley Citrus Board website: [www.mvcitrus.org.au/publicat.html](http://www.mvcitrus.org.au/publicat.html).

**Contributors:** Steve Falivene, NSW DPI; Dan Papacek, Bugs for Bugs; Helen Ramsey, WA Dept of Ag; Stefan Worsley, [www.juicemarket.co.uk](http://www.juicemarket.co.uk); Scott Searles, AHEA

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